TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEYS: The Impact of First-Time Motherhood on Mexican Women's Migration Experiences in the US South

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Based on interviews and participant observation, this article examines the role of pregnancy and first-time motherhood in Mexican women's "gender-transformative odyssey" from single, transnational workers to first-time mothers and partners with transnational obligations. I underscore multiple intersecting dimensions within women's transformative journeys: from being single to being a partner and mother, from full-time paid worker to full-time unpaid caretaker, from remittance sender to economic dependent, and from short-term migrant to long-term resident in the US South. Interviews reveal that the gendered caretaking role associated with motherhood begins during women's pregnancy and disrupts the transgressive path to economic autonomy that characterized women's entry to the United States as single, childless women. Negotiating their transition from full-time workers who send money to family in Mexico to at least temporarily staying home to care for their children implies prioritizing more traditional gender roles and the loss of economic autonomy and ability to send remittances. Women are keenly aware of, and negotiate, both the cultural scripts of motherhood and the realities of transnational family needs.

Key Words: *motherhood, immigration, US South, Mexican immigrant women, economic autonomy, intersectionality*

At twenty-four years old, Gloria crossed the border with plans to stay in the United States for two years, save money, and return home to her family in Veracruz. A year after she arrived in Kentucky, she moved in with a Mexican man she met through a mutual acquaintance. She became pregnant with her first child two years after arriving in the United States. Having just given birth, and desperately missing her family in Mexico, now twenty-seven-year-old Gloria lamented that she had not been able to send her family money in months because she stopped working during her pregnancy. She hoped to

return to paid work in the near future, yet during the next six months she would not work because of her full-time mothering responsibilities. Looking down at her newborn daughter as she breastfed her in a small, carefully decorated one-bedroom apartment, she quietly explained to me, "Now I would like to stay here for life, for her." While the literature on transnational motherhood underscores the emotional challenges and financial advantages of separation from children (Boehm 2012; Dreby 2006; Fresnoza-Flot 2009; Gordillo 2010; Hirsch 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila 1997; Parreñas 2005; Schmalzbauer 2004; Valdez, Valentine, and Padilla 2013; Vasquez 2011), the experiences of Gloria and other women I interviewed in Kentucky in 2010 and 2011 foreground both emotional negotiations and the financial difficulties for recently migrated Mexican women who become first-time mothers in the United States. Their experiences also point to the durability of traditional gendered norms with the onset of motherhood, as women transition from economic autonomy and sending remittances to their families in Mexico to economic dependency on partners, full-time caretaking responsibilities, and difficulty in securing paid work.

Many young single Mexican women who migrate to the United States "are entering not only another country but also a radical, gender-transformative odyssey" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 25) in which they separate from their parents, siblings, and communities for the first time. Young single women gain increased autonomy in these new spaces as they live with friends, or sometimes strangers in similar circumstances, and earn enough money both to support themselves in the United States and send remittances to their families in Mexico. In some cases, women meet a partner soon after migrating to the United States. In cases in which women become pregnant, their migration experience and plans may change. Existing research on the intersection of migration and motherhood suggests that pregnancy and motherhood

profoundly affect immigrant women's experiences of work, self-identification, beliefs, health, and socialization, as well as their relationships with a partner and family (Erel 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila 2003; Ivry 2010; Moon 2003; Sigad and Eisokovits 2009; Tummala-Narra 2004).

In this article, I examine the role of pregnancy and first-time motherhood in women's "gender-transformative odyssey" from primarily transnational workers to first-time mothers with transnational obligations. I underscore multiple intersecting dimensions within women's transformative journeys: from being single to being a partner and mother, from full-time paid workers to full-time unpaid caretakers, from remittance senders to economic dependents, and from short-term migrants to long-term residents in the US South. As women transition to motherhood, they reconsider their migration plans and economic autonomy as they extend stays in the United States for the sake of their children and give up economic autonomy to care for their children. Interviews reveal women's varied and fluid identities and difficulties in sustaining transnational family obligations and expectations as they negotiate their new positioning as first-time mothers and prioritize traditional gender roles (also see Contreras and Griffith 2012; Dreby 2006). An intersectional approach (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991; Hurtado 1996) throughout the article allows us to recognize women's experiences as they negotiate their multiple, overlapping roles as workers, partners, pregnant women, mothers, immigrants, community members, and family members during their migratory experience. This article uses pseudonyms to protect the women's identities.

To better understand Mexican immigrant women's experiences of first-time motherhood in the US South, I first provide a brief overview of the US South setting and of recent literature on Mexican immigrant women's experiences of motherhood in the United States more generally. I then analyze three themes in

Mexican women's pregnancy experiences and transition to first-time motherhood to examine the significance of their pregnancy and first-time motherhood in their gendered, migratory odyssey: women's negotiation of paid work and unpaid mothering work; changes within women's intimate relationships; and the effect of pregnancy and becoming mothers on women's plans to stay in the United States in the short vs. the long term. Rather than claim that the cases I examine are representative of all Mexican immigrant women, or of all Mexican women who become mothers in the United States, my discussion contributes to studies of migration, motherhood, and transnational parenting as it underscores the diverse trajectories and multiple subjectivities of Mexican women's intersecting experiences of immigration and motherhood.

Background: The US South as Setting for Immigrant Mexican Mothers

Migration to the US South

The United States is the most common destination for Mexican immigrants. At 16 percent of the national population, Latinos are the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States (US Census Bureau 2011). By 2050, Latinos are expected to make up one-fourth of the country's population. Mexican Americans make up over half of the Latino population. The US West and Southwest boast the greatest concentration of Latinos, yet the South has experienced a significant increase in Latino immigration over the last two decades. Today, six of the top ten growth states for Latinos are in the US South (Barcus 2007), yet few studies of Latinos in the region exist and even fewer of Latinos in Kentucky. Kentucky is home to between 15,000 and 35,000 undocumented immigrants, and a significant amount of those immigrants are of Latino descent (Nuñez 2012, 115).

In the contemporary US South, anti-immigrant legislation and attitudes negatively affect the lives of Latino immigrants of different migration status. During the first three months of 2010, forty-five states introduced 1,180 immigration bills and resolutions (Casas and Cabrera 2011). During the first three months of the following year (2011), twenty-six states introduced 1,538 immigration bills (Suarez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, and Suarez-Orozco 2011). Sixty-one percent of Latinos in the United States described discrimination against Latinos as a major problem in 2010 (Castro-Salazar and Bagley 2012). These perceptions are not without merit: in 2009, 62 percent of all reported hate crimes based on the victim's national origin or ethnicity were committed against Latinos (Castro-Salazar and Bagley 2012).

The US South passed the highest percentage of anti-immigration ordinances of any region in the country (Walker and Leitner 2011). While undocumented immigrants may, and do, come from various world regions, the terms "undocumented" and "illegal" have become increasingly popularly associated with Latinos, and more specifically Mexicans, over the last two decades. The rhetoric about undocumented immigrants promotes the erasure of a person's basic humanity through otherization (Lahman, Mendoza, Rodriguez, and Schwartz 2011) and by facilitating hostility and discrimination through the targeting of Latinos in anti-immigrant legislation.

As a result of the increasingly restrictive, anti-immigrant environment in the US South, which has traditionally seen itself as ethnically and culturally homogenous and characterized by a black-white population (Massey, Rugh, and Pren 2010), low-income Latinos "are encountering widespread hostility, discrimination and exploitation" there (Southern Poverty Law Center 2009, 4). North Carolina has been at the forefront of deportation policy aimed predominantly at Latinos. In 2006, the Mecklenburg County

Sheriff's Department became the first in the nation to implement the 287(g) program, which allows local law enforcement offices to check the immigrant status of anyone arrested and to begin the process of deportation. The Department of Homeland Security has used Mecklenburg County as a model for implementing similar programs across the country (Gill 2010). Since then, several states in the region have attempted to or are in the process of attempting to pass increasingly restrictive anti-immigrant legislation.

Arizona's Senate Bill 1070, enacted in 2010, made it a misdemeanor to be in the state without legal documentation of immigration status. It required local police to check the immigration status of anyone suspected of being in the country without appropriate documentation and allowed police officers to arrest individuals on suspicion of minor immigration charges. Researchers have found that the law's enactment has led to greater racial profiling, hate crimes, persecution, and detention and deportation of individuals suspected of being undocumented (Valdez, Padilla, and Valentine 2013). SB 1070 was challenged in federal court by several groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and the Department of Justice. Arizona's anti-immigrant legislation was also opposed by business leaders who understood that the anti-immigrant rhetoric surrounding the legislation harmed business interests as a result of the state's increasingly negative image as inhospitable to businesses—many of which depend on undocumented labor (Erfani 2013). In June 2012, the Supreme Court upheld the most controversial aspects of the law, which require local police to check the immigration status of anyone they stop or arrest if they suspect the person is in the state without appropriate immigration papers.

Copycat laws ensued, and although Arizona has received widespread attention, it is the US South that has enacted some of the most far-reaching anti-

immigrant legislation. Of the twenty-four copycat bills that followed Arizona's bill, as of December 2011 six states had passed them into law; four of the six (Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Mississippi) are in the Southeast (Wallace 2014). In 2011, for example, Alabama passed HB 56, which requires local police to check the status of anyone they suspect may be in the country illegally when they stop the person for non-immigration violations. The law also makes it a criminal offense to provide housing or transportation to an undocumented immigrant. Georgia's HB 87 also went into effect in 2011, and it similarly gives local police the power to perform immigration law enforcement functions. It also requires businesses with more than ten employees to use E-Verify to check the immigration status of employees (Luque, Bowers, Kabore, and Stewart 2013). Within this broad climate of hostility toward undocumented immigrants in the US South, in Kentucky, Senator David William introduced SB 6, also modeled after Arizona's anti-immigrant law. After widespread community organizing in Kentucky, the copycat bill was defeated in March 2011.

Between 1990 and 2000, the growth rate of Kentucky's Latino population ranked eighth in the United States (National Council of La Raza n.d.). Between 2000 and 2011, Kentucky ranked among the top five states with the largest percent growth of immigrant populations, with 75 percent growth (Pew Research Center 2012). The majority of the state's Latino population is of Mexican origin and close to 60 percent of Latinos in Kentucky are men (Shultz 2008). Although exact numbers are unknown for Kentucky, 33 percent of Mexican-born immigrants in the United States live in the South (Pew Research Center 2012). Migration to the United States may result in feelings of nostalgia towards their communities and countries of origin, yet for many Mexican immigrants the move also presents an opportunity to earn considerably more than they would be able to if they had not migrated (Reese 2001).

Women described coming to Kentucky directly from Mexico because of family or acquaintances from their communities of origin who lived in the state. For example, Gloria explained that “In Kentucky I have cousins. I came with a woman [from her community] that my family knew, and I knew I could stay with her when I arrived.” Women also came because they had heard from family and acquaintances that it was more calm and safer than other, more traditional and larger gateway states and that there were more jobs. Judith put it this way:

> We were going to go to Florida, and stay there with friends and for work. But our friends had just left and we heard there were no jobs. The situation was too difficult there. So we came [to Kentucky] with our *paisanos* who had family here, and stayed with them.

Although undocumented Mexican immigrants may find more opportunities to earn enough money to support their family in the United States than in Mexico, in Fayette County (where this study was conducted) Latinos generally earn below-poverty wages (Rich and Miranda 2005).

Immigrant Women's Fertility and Mothering in the US South

To date, there is little information on the experiences of immigrant women in new destination sites in the United States (Dreby and Schmalbauer 2013), and even less on women's experiences of motherhood in new destinations. Available scholarship finds that nationally Latinas have been popularly stereotyped as hypersexual and overly fertile, in the country only to have “anchor babies,” and therefore as a threat to the nation (Chavez 2003). The supposed hyperfertility of Mexican immigrant women is consistently tied to all sorts of social ills and drains on the system (Chavez 2003) and is part of a long, nativist history of scapegoating immigrant fertility rates as the

cause of the country's problems (Parrado and Flippen 2012). In emphasizing immigrant women's fertility as a problem that is due to supposedly backward cultures, nativist arguments present Latina immigrant women in particular as undeserving immigrants (Aranda, Chang, and Sabogal 2009).

The focus on out-of-control fertility of Latina women has a long history, and is based largely on power and race differentials. In Puerto Rico, American imperialism manifested itself in part in how officials blamed the island's problems on poor women's fertility, which to them justified racialized medical interventions to control women's reproduction (Briggs 2002; Gutiérrez and Fuentes 2010). Constraints imposed by colonialist systems and policies have continued to inform the reproductive agency of and constraints faced by Puerto Rican women, as Puerto Rican women "chose" to be sterilized in a context with few other choices and many constraints shaped by a colonial history (López 2008). Similarly, the popular and "scientific" racialization of Mexican women as hyper fertile also led to systemic sterilizations. In the case of Mexican-origin women in the United States, many were involuntarily sterilized at the University of Southern California-Los Angeles County Medical Center between 1971 and 1974 (Gutiérrez 2008; Gutiérrez and Fuentes 2010). There, "it was pregnant women who were already admitted to the hospital to have an emergency cesarean section delivery who were encouraged or forced by medical personnel to have the postpartum sterilization surgery" (Gutiérrez and Fuentes 2010, 91).

Based on a qualitative life history study with Latina immigrant women in North Carolina and national population survey data, Parrado and Flippen (2012) found that migration altered the timing of immigrant Mexican women's childbearing and that fertility rates are significantly lower than commonly believed. Their findings challenge common beliefs about immigrant women's unusually high fertility rates. Pointing to the relationship between

migration and childbearing, they note that fertility estimates must consider that in practice women who migrate single, as women I interviewed had done, "frequently initiate or complete their desired family size within a few years of migration, regardless of the age at which they migrate" (Parrado and Flippen 2012, 25). Because in the United States "fertility among Hispanic immigrant women peaks in the years immediately following migration, irrespective of age of arrival" (ibid., 28), estimates of Latina women's completed fertility are inflated because they do not consider timing issues as they are informed by migration. Today, the fertility rates of immigrant Latina women are below the fertility levels of their countries of origin (ibid.).

Scholarship on transnational parenting experiences among Latino immigrants, which has focused primarily on mothering (see Dreby 2006; Montes 2013; Pribilsky 2004), provides a window into the gendered dynamics among transnational families and women's mothering experiences. They point to the profound emotional pain of mothers who live and work thousands of miles away from their children to support their children and provide them better educational and employment opportunities in the future (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila 1997; Dreby 2006). Transnational mothers transgress gendered expectations to become their families' breadwinners and may experience increased opportunities to negotiate more egalitarian gender relations with partners and families (Hirsch 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).

Dreby (2006) suggests that even as we examine these increased opportunities for change in gender roles within transnational families, we also consider the durability of traditional Mexican gender roles: for transnational mothers, maintaining emotional intimacy in spite of the physical distance is central whereas financial contributions are central to the role of fathers who migrate to the United States as laborers. Boehm's research with Mexican men and women in a rural

community in San Luís Potosí and the United States similarly points to the limits of changing gender roles in transnational families. She found that migration from San Luis Potosí continues to be gendered as more men than women migrate to the United States as laborers, and women "typically migrate to reunite with family or a partner" (2012, 16). This is also generally the pattern for other parts of Mexico (Boehm 2012). In these cases, men may view their partner's arrival as an opportunity to reassert masculine power in their homes as women take on caretaking, cooking, cleaning, and other household chores (ibid.).

Women's and men's immigrant parenting experiences are taking place in an age of deportation during which Mexican immigrants are at increased risk of deportation in the United States (Boehm 2012). Transitioning to motherhood and starting a family under these circumstances may be especially difficult. Ornelas, Perreira, Beeber, and Maxwell (2009) found that Mexican immigrant women may be at increased risk for depression after becoming mothers as they cope with increased social isolation, financial obligations, and other stressors. For parents, anti-immigration policies contribute to anxiety and stress within families, who must cope with the risk of family separation. In the last decade, the United States has deported 100,000 parents of children born in the United States (Valdez, Padilla, and Valentine 2013). Currently, the United States is home to about four million citizen children whose parents are undocumented immigrants (Suarez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, and Suarez-Orozco 2011). The risk of being separated from their children is a constant and real possibility for mothers, who are often their children's primary caretakers.

Methodological Approach and Study Population

The larger exploratory study on which this article is based examines recent Latina immigrant women's beliefs about and experiences connected to reproductive health in Kentucky—one of the newer settlement states for Latinos. Data for this

paper come from participant observation at prenatal, self-help centering groups in a community clinic during six months, one focus group (eight participants), and eight individual interviews with Mexican first-time mothers in central Kentucky in 2010 and 2011. All women were also first-time migrants to the United States. Participants in the focus groups were from both rural and urban parts of Mexico, yet participants in individual interviews were only from rural areas. This article relies most heavily on data from individual interviews (see Table 1). While the majority of participants had not completed high school, one participant had attended two years of college. Most women were in their early twenties. All women were pregnant with their first child and in a heterosexual relationship. After obtaining approval for this study from the university ethics reviews board and permission from centering staff, I introduced myself to women as a researcher—an anthropologist—who works at the university and has worked on issues relevant to Latina women's lives both in the United States and in Latin America. More personally, as a mother of young children, immigrant, and native Spanish-speaker who has lived in the US South for several years, I was also able to discuss my personal experiences and interest in Latina women's issues, pregnancy, motherhood, migration, and life in the US South with women.

Individual Interview Participant Profiles

NAME	AGE	TIME IN THE U.S. (KY)
Marta	24	4 years
Roselia	24	5 years
Carla	25	3 years
Rosa	22	1.5 years
Gloria	27	3 years
Isabel	23	3 years
Judith	22	2 years
Mariana	22	3 years

Centering groups provided a safe space for women to access prenatal and postnatal health services regardless of women's immigration status. The purpose of the centering groups is to promote self-care, well-being, and parenting skills as a way to improve maternal and fetal health and promote the use of community resources. They are facilitated by an experienced ob/gyn nurse and a translator with several years of experience in the field of reproductive health. The groups are free and voluntary and are set up to promote a facilitative leadership style so that all participants' input is equally valued. Women who are pregnant with their first child have the opportunity to meet other women in similar situations and learn about prenatal care through centering groups, which meet every other week. Women are invited to join and placed with women whose due dates are approximately around the same time.

Both the focus group and the individual interviews were conducted in Spanish, and recordings and transcriptions from both were securely stored in the researcher's office, according to university ethics review board guidelines and approval prior to the study. The focus group took place immediately after a centering session, in a space provided by the clinic and lasted approximately one and a half hours. The focus group discussion was facilitated, recorded, and transcribed by the researcher and centered on women's general experiences of migration and pregnancy. Preliminary analysis of the focus group discussion was used to identify themes to focus on in individual interviews.

Six individual interviews took place in individual women's apartments, and two individual interviews took place in a community space provided by the clinic. The location, day, and time of each interview was coordinated with each participant to facilitate finding the most convenient time and space for participants. Having been a participant-observer at many of the centering sessions in which individual women participated during their pregnancy, I

found individual interviews also provided an opportunity to meet women's newborn babies in their homes. Interviews lasted between one and three hours, and were often interrupted by childcare needs (diaper changes, breastfeeding, attempts at consoling a crying infant). Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Interviews were semistructured and covered topics related to women's original migration plans and any changes in migration plans; everyday life in their new communities; how they met their intimate partner; household dynamics; work experience and plans before and after the pregnancy; and, most significantly, views about and experiences of pregnancy and motherhood as these intersected with work, family, partners, and personal plans. Transcriptions, and notes from interviews, were analyzed for prevalent themes both as a whole and by question.

Because the women I interviewed are undocumented, the types of jobs they have access to were largely limited to those in the service industries, and within that mainly to those that they found through kin and friend networks. These types of jobs (in restaurants, hotels, and private homes) were also largely unstable. For example, two of the women discussed how during the summer months they could earn up to $300 each week but how their weekly income decreased significantly during the winter months, when it was not unusual to bring home $75 or less per week. Both women worked in a hotel where they received $3.50 for each room they cleaned; in the winter, few guests stayed at the hotel. However, women—as was the case for other women who came to the United States to work and save money—felt that, as one focus group participant put it, "$100 here is worth $1,000 there," so they continued to work there in spite of below-minimum-wage earnings. As elsewhere in the country, in Kentucky, most undocumented Latinas "have no insurance, no job security, no legal recourse in case of job discrimination or exploitation, little chance of accessing social services available to United States citizens, and

no chance of someday recapturing their contributions to the Social Security system" (Rich and Miranda 2005, 202). Fear of deportation may also prevent undocumented Latinos from accessing needed health care services (Belliveau 2011; Cartwright 2011; Ransford, Carrillo, and Rivera 2010).

Economic Disempowerment? Negotiating Paid Work and Mothering Work

Twenty-three-year-old Isabel had lived in Kentucky for three years when we met. She proudly showed me the baby clothes she had bought when I visited her at her apartment for the interview. Like the apartments of some of the other women I visited, Isabel's apartment is in a large, run-down apartment complex. Her small one-bedroom apartment is brightly decorated, spotless, and meticulously organized. It is close to Christmas when I visit her and she has a large fake tree decorated with multicolored bows and ribbons in the middle of the living room, an almost equally large-framed portrait of Jesus beside it, and a little table with a plastic tablecloth to the side. It took her a year to pay off the $2,000 she borrowed to cross the border, and she worked long hours in physically strenuous jobs at restaurants and in house-cleaning to save and pay back the loan, send money to her family, and support herself.

The challenges of crossing the border and the long work hours in Kentucky, she tells me, did not prepare her for the challenges associated with her pregnancy. At five months pregnant, she quit her job. Isabel explained:

> I stopped working at five months. Because I didn't feel well, I felt tired. I was working too slowly. I was embarrassed [to work slowly]. On top of that, he wanted me to stop working, because it wasn't good for the baby because I didn't eat well when I worked, because I worked from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Isabel's pregnancy directly affected her role as a worker because she felt she could no longer withstand the physical exertion her job required. Although she had not yet given birth, her role as a mother and her partner's wishes as father of the baby also significantly influenced Isabel's decision to stop working and take on more traditional mother roles that prioritized caretaking and relegated financial obligations to her male partner. Quitting her job gave her time to think about the baby and to prepare the apartment for the baby's arrival, yet it also prevented her from sending her mother money. For the past three years, Isabel sent her mother money regularly so that she and Isabel's eighty-year-old father could buy needed medicine and food.

Twenty-four-year-old Marta had lived in Kentucky for four years; her baby was three weeks old when we met at her apartment for the interview. She stopped working during her third trimester because she and her partner moved to an apartment very far from her workplace and because, as she added, "he no longer wanted me to work" so that she could dedicate herself to the baby. From the time she began to work in the United States until the baby's birth, Marta routinely sent money to her family in Chiapas. As she made clear, she was proud that she "sent them $150 every fifteen days. I always felt that need to provide support for my parents." Since the baby's birth, however, she had been unable to send money because she had stopped working. Soon after her baby was born, her partner lost his job. At the time of the interview, she, her partner, and the baby shared a room in another couple's cramped apartment. They hoped to move out once her partner found work again.

Tired, sleepless, and in a shared apartment with little space, Marta commented on the joy looking at her baby brought. She also worried about her baby and hoped neither she nor the baby would get sick, because they did not have health insurance. Marta explained that she prayed that her partner would find

another job, and she felt increasingly worried and guilty because her family in Chiapas depended on her remittances. As a new mother, she felt taking care of the baby was the most important thing she could do. Marta also explained that her partner also wanted her to stay home with the baby: "I don't know when I'll go back to work, when she is older. He prefers that I care for the baby." Marta negotiated both her partner's expectations of her ("he prefers that I care for the baby") and her own as she transitioned to her role as a mother. Significantly, this transition occurred during the pregnancy and before she gave birth and resulted in lessened economic power within a setting that already provided her few rights. She understood that taking care of her baby prevented her from earning money to send to her family in Chiapas and felt conflicted and sad about her inability to fulfill her transnational responsibilities, yet her and her partner's commitment to the traditional caretaking responsibilities associated with motherhood prevented her from seeking to balance work and childcare with her partner, at least initially.

Twenty-seven-year-old Gloria knew first-hand that "parenthood also requires extra financial resources and results in loss of work time and lack of mobility" (Castañeda 2008, 346), and that ensuring financial security for herself and her now growing transnational family as an undocumented immigrant presented new challenges. She had spent three years in Kentucky, working in hotel housekeeping. Although her income varied by week and season, she felt proud that she routinely sent half of her income home to her parents in Veracruz. According to Gloria, she stopped working during her first trimester, one month into her pregnancy, "because that work is too difficult. I didn't want anything to happen to the baby. Because of the chemicals [used for cleaning] and all that." Like Isabel, Gloria began negotiating how to fulfill her role as a mother during her pregnancy, and this had significant effects on her economic power and ability to fulfill her transnational economic responsibilities. When I asked

Gloria, "How has your life changed with the pregnancy, and now with the baby?" she quickly responded, "It changed because I no longer send my family money. Since I no longer worked, I didn't send them money. From what I earned, I would send them half." As she awaited the birth of the baby, Gloria worried that she could no longer send money to her parents and that even if she returned to work after her baby was born she may not be able to make enough money to care for her baby and her parents. Her partner, she explained, already had his family in Mexico to send remittances to and could not afford to support her family as well.

The women I interviewed had not planned to become pregnant, and they worried about how they would be able to meet the economic demands associated with the unexpected addition to the family. Indeed, pregnancy was also not something their family in Mexico necessarily counted on. Mariana explained:

> My mother was a little angry. She didn't expect that of me. She saw me as her daughter who was the strongest one, the fighter. She always thought I would last a little longer than my sisters [as a single woman].

As in other women's cases, news of Mariana's pregnancy likely signified to her family in Mexico that remittances would decrease or end altogether. In this sense, the taking on of more traditional gender roles as a mother was clearly in conflict with the economic role women had played in their transnational family structure.

Women felt excited and nervous about motherhood, worried about their impending loss of income and lack of childcare, and conflicted about if, and when, to go back to work (sometimes against their partner's wishes) after the birth of their children. They also acknowledged that balancing work and

childcare would present new challenges. Rosa explained, "I have seen a lot of people suffer because of that. It's that they don't have daycare and they don't have anyone to care for the baby and they can't work." Rosa's case exemplifies the obstacles and various roles women must negotiate—physically and emotionally—as they transition to motherhood. Rosa, too, worked cleaning hotel rooms until she felt she could no longer perform her job because of physical discomfort and exhaustion. She worked until just two weeks before she gave birth. She worried about being unable to send money to her parents while she was out of work. With family of his own in Mexico, her partner divided his income between the needs of their growing family in Kentucky (which required more of his income now that Rosa stopped working) and his family in Mexico. He did not have money for her to send to her family. Rosa felt anxious to return to work as soon as possible after the birth of her baby. The manager at the hotel where she worked promised to save her job for her, but only if she returned to work within two months. Her husband opposed her return to work during the baby's first year. When we spoke, Rosa was unsure of what she could do to meet the conflicting needs of baby, partner, and transnational family.

Negotiating Gender Roles and Motherhood in Intimate Relationships

Once in the United States, women relied on their partners for much of the emotional intimacy they missed from family and friends in Mexico. In her work on transnational Mexican families, Hirsch (1999) identifies two types of marriages: the more hierarchical *respeto* (respect) model associated with older generations and the more egalitarian *confianza* (trust) model of marriage associated with younger generations. Women in this study subscribed to the companionate marriage built on confianza, yet, as Hirsch underscores, "[this] has more to say about the emotional intimacy couples can achieve through talking than it does about who gets the last word" (Hirsch 1999, 1340) or, I

would add, having egalitarian practices within the marriage, as also noted by Dreby (2006). Twenty-two-year-old Rosa explained that she felt very close to her partner and felt very fortunate to be with him. As she spoke about their relationship, it also became clear that the relationship was based both on respeto and confianza, and that this caused her distress and anxiety.

Rosa had been in Kentucky just a little over a year and a half when we met. She was thirty-seven weeks pregnant. She missed her family terribly, especially her parents, and she looked forward to speaking with her mom on the phone once every week. When I asked her about her friends and acquaintances in Kentucky, she explained that "no soy muy amiguera" [I do not make friends easily/I do not have a lot of friends] and that she did not have a support network of friends. Both Rosa and her partner cooked and although she did most of the house cleaning, she felt lucky that he would also help. Rosa may be considered nontraditional in her economic contributions: she worked full-time and planned to continue to work until her due date, contributed equally to rent payments, and helped support her parents by sending them money regularly.

For Rosa, as for other women, her work does not end when she arrives home: Rosa's work-day includes keeping her own desires under control to keep her partner happy. As she noted, it "took me a while to realize I'm with him" because she had grown accustomed to being independent since she arrived in Kentucky as a single woman. Rosa wants to go out whenever she feels the desire to do so, yet her partner has other ideas about how she should behave. Rosa explains:

> He says that "it bothers me that you go out and don't tell me [when you're going out]"…he likes for me to 'always tell me where you're going. And with whom.' Sometimes I forget. He treats me very well

> and has a lot of patience, but I forget sometimes and he reminds me. He is patient with me."

Rosa feels uncomfortable with the rules he sets but wants to follow them, because she believes that is how being in a relationship should be. In her case, as in others, the transition to first-time motherhood involves drawing on traditional gender roles she had transgressed in migrating to the United States Twenty-two-year-old Mariana described the division of household chores in her relationship, stating, "I, since I stopped working [because of the pregnancy], take care of everything by myself. But sometimes when I clean he helps me. But that we divide up household chores, no." For both Mariana and Rosa, as for other women, being pregnant and in a relationship also led to the women taking on additional caretaking and household responsibilities that contrasted to their earlier experiences as single women, and, significantly, in their pre-pregnant condition.

Women repeatedly suggested that although their pregnancies had not been part of their planned migratory journey, being a mother was something they were now willing to accept as part of the journey. The following is an excerpt from my interview with twenty-two–year-old Mariana, whose reaction to the pregnancy reveals her surprise about the pregnancy:

> Researcher: Can you tell me about when you found out you were pregnant?
> Mariana: Uy, it was something very ugly.
> Researcher: Yes?
> Mariana: It's that, well, I did not want to be a mother. It's not that I didn't want to, but it's that I had plans of having my first baby at twenty-five. I never thought I was pregnant.… [describes symptoms

> she felt that led to her discovering she was pregnant]…I made a doctor's appointment and they told me: one month and one day [sighs].
> Researcher: Had you used contraceptives?
> Mariana: No. In reality, we never thought about it. But we also didn't think of having a baby.

Although Mariana had not planned or expected the pregnancy, she felt certain she wanted to continue the pregnancy and that once the baby arrived she would dedicate herself to the baby full-time. Gloria's response to whether or not her pregnancy was planned similarly underscored simultaneous surprise and acceptance: "It was not planned, but I wanted it." Foster, Biggs, Arons, and Brindis's (2008) research suggests that life circumstances, such as relationship status, may influence women's views of a pregnancy as wanted, regardless of whether or not it was planned. In a recent study of Mexican pregnant women, Quelopana, Champion, and Salazar (2009) reported that more than half of the women described their pregnancy as unintended. These findings are consistent with patterns of contraceptive use in Mexico, where 51 percent of women participate in the decision regarding the use of contraceptives (INEGI 2006) and women typically have a child within their first year of marriage (Maternowska, Estrada, Campero, Herrera, Brindis, and Miller Vostrejs 2010).

Women's views of motherhood and attitudes in confronting unplanned pregnancies may also be understood as being partly informed by traditional cultural ideals of family and womanhood, which encourage women to embrace motherhood and to define themselves in relation to, and in service of, others. Dominant cultural Catholic-based ideals of self-sacrificing femininity and familism promote the prioritization of family needs over a woman's interests.

More specifically, familism refers to the centrality of and loyalty to the family and encourages women to prioritize their family's needs over their own needs (Garcia 2002; Ingoldsby 1991). Although, as Zavella (1997) emphasizes in relation to Mexicana sexuality and gender roles, these ideologies are cultural templates rather than mandates, marriage and motherhood continue to be popularly recognized as an important, expected part of womanhood.

Earlier work by Chicana feminist scholars focused on identifying and eradicating multiple forms of oppression and inequality by employing intersectional lenses to underscore the significance of race, class, and gender in power dynamics both at work and at home (Pesquera and Segura 1993; Ruiz 1997; Zavella 1987). Within the home, Chicana feminist scholarship in particular pointed to the role of families in promoting patriarchal privilege and women's subordination and sacrifice "for the good of the family" (Segura and Pierce 1993, 79–81), and to women's service to family members from an early age (Moraga 1986). Yet, as Villenas underscores in her work on Latina mothers in the US Southeast, Latina mothers may also embrace the home as a "complexly agentic" space in which women have the power to shape their children's cultural and moral education as well as life skills for living in a hostile and racist world (2001, 19). As the narratives of women I interviewed make clear, embracing their gendered role in the home as first-time mothers does not lessen women's concerns about their (in) ability to continue to provide needed funds for their families in Mexico through paid work. Thus, women are keenly aware and negotiate both the cultural scripts of motherhood and the realities of transnational family needs.

Motherhood and Changing Migration Plans

In attempting to meet the potentially competing needs of their newborn babies, partner, and transnational families, women felt increasingly worried about their ability to emotionally and economically guarantee the well-being of everyone

for whom they cared. Women felt torn between their sense of obligation to their baby, their partner, and their families of origin and attempted to find ways to avoid failing any of their responsibilities. Gloria and Mariana discussed how as the pregnancy progressed, and particularly after the birth of the baby, their migration plans began to change to accommodate their new role and obligations. The following excerpt comes from my interview with Gloria:

> At first when my husband couldn't find work, I thought, I'm leaving, what am I doing here? But no, I am not leaving. My plans are like this now, until she is older. Now I would like to stay here for life, for her. It's better here because of nutrition, education is better I think. For her. And because of health [resources]. As long as there is work here, here we will stay. I no longer only think of myself.

Mariana shared a similar experience:

> I had planned on leaving this February, or this December, and now that can't be. My plans have changed a lot. Now I don't know if they are going to change more later, but for now what I have in mind is one year or one and a half, for my daughter, to go back. Because I want my daughter to be older. I want her to grow up with her father.

Similar to Gloria and Mariana, Marta spoke of changes in her plans, telling me that "before I used to think of staying maybe two years, now I think first and foremost of having the baby and after that, I don't know [how long]." Similarly, Isabel told me that she would like her son to stay in the country "until he is old enough to know English, so he speaks English" and Rosa felt that it would be best for "my baby to grow up in the United States his whole life. For him," even if staying kept her far from her closest family.

Although the women had planned to only temporarily live in the United States while they worked, the birth of their children encouraged them to rethink their plans for returning to Mexico as they prioritized caretaking responsibilities associated with their new identities as mothers. Arriving in the United States as young, single women, the goal had been to stay for one to three years to save money and send home remittances to help their families. Women found little time to focus on anything outside of work. However, after meeting a partner they felt comfortable with and committed to, women began to consider the possibility of living with their partner and forming a family while still in the United States. As women became mothers, their goals transformed from being focused on economic well-being of their families to also thinking of the future of their children, even when it meant sacrificing their own plans for economic contributions to their family in Mexico.

In thinking of their children's future, women discussed their belief that it was in their children's best interest to know English and have access to the educational system in the United States. Women believed English language skills and a solid education would provide their children with skills to succeed in the future, and avoid being in the precarious economic situation in which the women found themselves. Gloria explained that since giving birth to her daughter, "I no longer only think of myself." Similarly, Rosa wants her son "to grow up in the United States his whole life" although she longs to be with her family in Mexico. Isabel tells me she now plans to stay in the country until her newborn son "is old enough to know English," although she too would prefer to instead be with her family in Mexico.

Carla had been in Kentucky a little over three years and felt extremely homesick even before her pregnancy. The imminent birth of her daughter resulted in shifting her plans from the original three years to work and

save in the United States to "at least until my daughter is two." In her case, her partner's refusal to return to Mexico and desire to stay in the country indefinitely further complicated her plans. When I spoke with her, she had not decided what she would do after her daughter turned two. As Marta and I continued to speak about her migration experience, she explained that although both she and her partner wanted to return to Mexico, after she became pregnant they decided they should stay in the United States at least until the baby turned six months and then decide what would be best. Roselia and her partner had similarly discussed extending their time in the United States by at least two years to accommodate, and see what would be best for the family after the birth of the baby.

On the one hand, women spoke of difficulty of everyday life in their host communities as directly connected to their undocumented status: not being able to drive since they could not get a driver's license, discrimination, and the distance from their families in Mexico. On the other hand, in spite of the difficulties they faced in the United States, women decided to extend their stay in the country after giving birth to provide the best possible resources and future for their child. At the same time, women worried about how impending anti-immigration laws might affect them: Gloria worried that her baby "maybe won't be able to get a United States passport" and Rosa told me she felt anxious because of the possibility that the police "will kick us out" at any point. Around the time I spoke with both women, Kentucky's proposed anti-immigration law (SB-6), discussed earlier, was receiving significant news coverage and community activists were busy organizing protests against the proposed law.

Discussion

The experiences of Isabel, Rosa, Marta, Carla, Gloria, and other women are similar to those of many undocumented Latina women in the United States

and the US South. In capitalist societies, women make up approximately half the workforce (Rahim 2013). In the United States, Latina women make up almost half of all working-age Latinos and two-fifths of those in the labor force (Elliott 2005). Working immigrant Latinas contribute significantly to the economic well-being of their families in the United States and communities of origin. In 2003, Latino families in which the wife also worked outside the home had median incomes that were 85 percent higher than those in which only the husband worked (Elliott 2005). Remittances from men and women "are not insignificant; globally they are estimated at over US $70 billion" (Mahler and Pessar 2006, 44). Nonetheless, women's economic contributions continue to be overlooked. In particular, remittances remain "a transnational space in which gender matters but has not been so thoroughly explored" (Mahler and Pessar 2006, 44; Wong 2006).

Interviews with recent Mexican immigrant women highlight the complicated nature of the transformative odyssey women embark on as it accommodates a transition to parenthood. On the one hand, the common finding that migration provides women with opportunities to transgress gender boundaries (Dreby and Scmalzbauer 2013; Hirsch 2003; Parreñas 2005) applies to women in this study who became financially independent before having a child and through their remittances took on roles as economic providers for their transnational families. On the other hand, it is also the case, as Contreras and Griffith suggest, that women "reaffirm and reinforce traditional gender roles related to child rearing and parenting" (2012, 61) in being the primary caretakers of children once they became mothers. Women simultaneously transgress and reinforce traditional roles to meet their own, their partner's, and their family's expectations as they transition from being primarily single, full-time workers to being intimate partners and mothers.

In North Carolina, Mexican immigrants find that traditional gender roles conflict with the demands brought on by higher living expenses and family needs that cannot be sufficiently met if only the husband works outside the home (Grzywacz et al., 2009). For women in this study, the sudden end of paid work outside the home had the potential to disempower them as they increasingly relied on men's economic contributions and lost the power they held as paid workers and remittance senders.

For immigrant women who came to the United States primarily to work because of the poverty they and their families faced in their community of origin, feelings of guilt are compounded by the intersection of various roles the women are expected to fulfill. Because their family depends on them economically, being unable to work has significant consequences for their family in Mexico and may result in significant distress and guilt among women. In asking Mexican-American first-time parents about their main concerns during their child's first six months of life, Niska, Lia-Hoagberg, and Snyder (1997) found that two of the top three concerns were economic: having adequate resources to meet the material needs of the baby and the threat of job loss (the third concern was illness). Similarly, women I interviewed were increasingly concerned about how to meet the economic needs of their expanding family in the United States and Mexico in a precarious employment context in which anti-immigration bills were becoming increasingly popular. Significantly, in several cases it was not the women themselves who decided when to stop working: women worked until either their partner asked them to stop working because of the pregnancy or because the women felt unable to do the physical work required of them toward the end of the third trimester. Once they stopped working, the role that had significantly shaped their life in the United States, that of a worker who worked as often and as much as she could to support her family, could no longer be satisfied.

Women also decided to stay longer in the United States, even as the threat of deportation increased as anti-immigration legislation became a common topic of public discussion, not because they believed it was the best thing for them as individuals but for the sake of their child's well-being. They did not arrive in the US South planning to have a child, yet once they became mothers women believed staying in their new communities would give their children the opportunity to learn English and have access to a better education. Reese (2001) similarly found that learning English was one of the most important things for Mexican parents in discussions of what they wanted their children to acquire from living the United States. She also found that education was a priority for Mexican immigrant parents, noting that parents "want for their children as much educational and occupational success as possible" (Reese 2001, 465). Similarly, Mexicanas in Iowa recognized "the quality of education in the United States as compared to that in Mexico…as by far the most important improvement in the lives of their children" (Baker 2004, 399) and Campbell (2008) identified education as a priority for undocumented Mexican women in South Carolina in discussing their hopes for their children.

As women reconsidered the amount of time they had planned on staying in the United States, they identified especially with their new role as mother to justify their extended stays. This justification, however, did not lessen the emotional pain of being away from their families and worrying about their inability to send remittances. Yet, in thinking of returning to Mexico as a family after having come to the United States as single working women, the question for some women was not only when to return but also where in Mexico to return to—their partner's or their own community of origin in cases in which partners came from a different part of Mexico. Staying in Kentucky for an extended period was not a simple decision, and it resulted in high personal

costs that included continuous anxiety about the risk of deportation and family separation, as well as distance from support networks.

Conclusions

Immigrant families have increasingly become the focus of scholarly attention, yet motherhood within immigrant families receives less scholarly attention (Sigad and Eisokovits 2009) and pregnancy is glossed over (Ivry 2010). Motherhood has been more commonly discussed in terms of transnational motherhood, through which women leave their children in their home country and work and send money to support their children. This article underscores the value of also critically examining the role of pregnancy and first-time motherhood in women's "gender-transformative odyssey" from primarily single, childless transnational workers to primarily first-time mothers with transnational obligations. As women experience pregnancy and motherhood, they may reconceptualize their economic autonomy and migration plans by prioritizing their role as mothers. The gendered caretaking role associated with motherhood begins during women's pregnancy and disrupts the transgressive path to economic autonomy that characterized women's entry to the United States as single, childless women. Negotiating their transition from being full-time workers who send money to family in Mexico to at least temporarily staying home to care for their children implies prioritizing more traditional gender roles. The durability of gender roles associated with parenting persists (see also Dreby 2006; Contreras and Griffiths 2012), as women renegotiate their everyday lives to meet the gendered expectations of parenting, in which the mother provides physical care and affect and the father provides financial resources.

For Latinas and other women in capitalist societies, "an overwhelming majority of them experience motherhood during their working lives" (Rahim

2014, 178). In Sweden, women tend to return to paid work fifteen months after giving birth while in the United States it is common for women to return to paid work three months after the birth (Rahim 2014). In the Netherlands, parents are able to shift between part-time and full-time work to accommodate changing family needs (Warren, Pascall, and Fox 2010). In developed nations, wealthy women have access to poor, minority immigrant women's labor to cover domestic and child care chores if and when they re-enter the paid workforce after having a baby (Barker and Feiner 2009). Yet, even with existing policies, a "motherhood penalty" ensures that mothers who return to the workforce earn less than men and childless women in many industrialized nations (Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012, 165). There are many books and articles on the conflicts women confront between paid work and careers on the one hand and unpaid housework and child care on the other hand, yet these tend to focus on women who have legal access to government assistance and parental leave (i.e., Evans, Grant, and Peskowitz 2008; Hanigsberg and Ruddick 1999; Warren, Pascall, and Fox 2010).

The women I interviewed did not have access to protected time or sufficient economic resources to spend on family care needs because of their undocumented immigrant status and poverty, and they could not claim access to parental leave policies in the United States, where caring labor is commonly marginalized (Barker and Feiner 2009). They experienced economic disempowerment as the beginning of motherhood coincided with their transition from providers to dependents. After they stopped working and became mothers, women relied on their partners economically in a way they had not done before. Women's remittances to their families in their home communities stopped, as they became economically dependent on their partner. The young Mexican women I interviewed who become first-time mothers while in the United States must negotiate diverse identities as

undocumented workers, daughters, intimate partners, and mothers with few economic and social resources. That women make the difficult decision to stay longer in the United States as a result of becoming mothers speaks to the need to further examine the months and physical, economic, and emotional changes associated with both pregnancy and motherhood as important sites for the transformation of migration plans and social identities for immigrant women who enter the United States primarily as workers.

Notes

[1] The women I interviewed are not alone in their limited employment options: "the vast majority of Mexicanas living in the United States are in poorly paid jobs in the secondary labor market where many experience bad working conditions and discrimination" (Baker 2004, 403).

[2] Whether or not the leave is paid or unpaid, how long it is, or how generally sufficient or insufficient it is, are important matters but are not the topic of this study.

[3] Women's partners typically also sent remittances to their own families of origin.

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