

Mexican Women and the Other Side of Immigration: Engendering Transnational Ties. By Luz María Gordillo. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010. Pp. x+211. \$55.00

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Luz María Gordillo gives voice to the transnational community of Mexicana/os based in San Ignacio Cerro Gordo, Jalisco and Detroit, Michigan in this stunning monograph about the “immigrant experience,” which she sees as encompassing both the community of origin and the receiving community. Underlining the importance of gender in the transnational networks established by these migrants, she appends the body of work from Chicana historians who have focused primarily on the Southwestern United States by focusing on the Midwest. This book provides a comprehensive narrative (and pictorial representation) of the social, cultural, political and economic aspects of life across borders and a daunting challenge to Euro-American perspectives that have tended to underplay or elide the importance of women in transnational circuits.

In a very lively opening to the first chapter, the reader is transported to Mexico for the *La Fiesta De Los Ausentes*, which celebrates the municipality’s patron saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe and the “absent” sons and daughters who have become transnational subjects. One is then whisked back in time to the Bracero Program, when thousands of Mexican men entered the United States to work in agriculture and on the railroads. The rich historical detail in this section (which even dates back to the “absent men” conscripted for military service in the nineteenth century) lays the foundation for women’s entry into the migration circuit and their importance in fostering transnational networks between Detroit and San Ignacio beginning in the 1970s. Gordillo uses the changing nature of the festival to highlight moments of presence and absence and the “third space” in between “that provides Mexican immigrants with an imagined and participatory transnational citizenship” (p. 21).

One of the most innovative aspects of this study is the introduction of the concept of “transnational sexualities” in Chapter 2. These are the “oppositional and confrontational experiences that Mexican transnational subjects accumulate while constructing sexual identities through their participation in transnational circuits” (p. 61). For example, San Ignacian women visiting from Detroit often played with dress codes, not only to transgress patriarchal ideas about “appropriate” womanhood, but also to signal their upward mobility in the United States. At the same time, the non-migrant women (and men) experienced shifts in practices and ideologies concerning courtship, sex, marriage and gender-appropriate behavior in response to the changes in everyday life in both settings.

Gordillo also does migration studies a favor by complicating the debate about whether Mexican (and other) immigrant women magically experience emancipation from patriarchal roles. She found that while the Mexicanas in her study do challenge traditional gender relations, for example, by entering the paid workforce, it is in increments, “often falling short of overt resistance to patriarchal norms” (p. 118).

In other words, the immigration experience has been both liberating and repressive. But this is not a book strictly about women's experiences. The most exciting aspects of Gordillo's work elucidate the ways in which women's reproductive and productive work has been central in developing, sustaining and maintaining San Ignacians' transnational social networks. She connects declining birthrates among the young women in Detroit to their roles as surrogate mothers, daughters, and sisters to newly arriving blood relatives and kin alike, keeping them busy with housing, feeding and nurturing their many needs. In fact, it is these two elements that provide the defining characteristics of transnational sexualities, "a crucial feature in our understanding of transnational communities" (p. 156).

After demonstrating how the immigrant experience and transnational sexualities have transformed both the sending and receiving communities, Gordillo elaborates San Ignacians' transnational identities and forms of belonging. She considers the cultural, political and economic aspects of citizenship and provides a thoughtful discussion about their often-contradictory positions as "deportable aliens" as well as "hometown heroes." At the same time that they are lauded as honorable benefactors in Mexico, they experience discrimination and stereotyping in Detroit. The conclusion underscores Gordillo's assertion that "the migratory process is gender specific: it is in fact women who continue to supplement and support the migratory flows that sustain Mexican immigration to the United States" (p. 14).

What is remarkable about this monograph is Gordillo's consistent engagement with the existing literature on transnational studies and Mexicans in the United States, even after a thorough review in the introduction. This is rare in a deeply ethnographic work such as this one. She refers to a wide range of studies in each chapter, from early 20th century historiographies to contemporary work by sociologists, gender scholars and historians.

Criticism is difficult with regard to a book as well crafted and as enjoyable to read as this one. I would have appreciated knowing (even) more about the methods Gordillo employed. Were there any difficulties in the interviewing process or were all respondents as forthcoming as they seemed to be throughout the book? In addition, I wanted more structured information on the men interviewed for this study, as in the comprehensive table for the women (pp. 62-65). Finally, one of the greatest strengths of the book—its historical span from the 1940s through the 2000s—sometimes made it confusing to move back and forth in time with the author.

This extraordinary monograph, replete with rich ethnographic, archival and oral history data, represents a valuable addition to the library of any scholar of migration, gender or transnational studies. It would be suitable for graduate students or advanced undergraduates in topical seminars in sociology, history or area studies. In sum, because it takes gender seriously with regard to the lives of both men and women, it is a welcome addition to a field of inquiry where the concept is often as segregated as the sexes themselves.