A Preliminary Understanding Of Gender And Education In The Context Of Transnational Mexican Migration

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ABSTRACT: This article presents preliminary results from an ethnographic case study of gender, educational values, and formal educational outcomes within 10 transnational families in Colima, Mexico. While there is extensive literature on educational attainment of immigrant families in the U.S., less has been written about educational values and outcomes of migrant families in Mexico. Analysis of the meaning of, access to, and socialization of male and female children in relation to formal education from a gendered and transnational perspective shows both men and women in the age-cohorts of 30-44, 45-64, and 65+ experienced a variety of barriers to formal education, although gender barriers were more significant for women. The women in the families interviewed view education as a patrimony and as a means of upward mobility; and they participate in various spaces of engagement regarding their children's education. At the same time, women have a bifocal view of education as a "weapon" that permits upward social mobility in Mexico and concurrently as a mechanism that may improve border-crossing conditions and entrance into the labor and educational structures of the U.S.

Introduction

Previous fieldwork focusing on women's productive and reproductive roles in a Mexican transmigrant community in central Chihuahua (Kral 2004, 2006) led to my interest in understanding how gender structures educational aspirations and opportunities within transnational families. Gender and economic barriers that prevented higher educational achievement, despite women's strong desire to continue studying, were salient issues in the life histories of women (wives of migrants) in Chihuahua, most of whom had completed primary education (a few finished secondary school). As a North to South border crosser and feminist anthropologist working in southwestern Mexico, I recently took up my concern about how gender influences educational values and expectations in transnational families as part of an ongoing ethnographic research project in Colima, Mexico[1]. This paper explores preliminary findings of the meaning of and access to formal education, school experiences, socialization of male and female children, and parents' roles in their children's formal education based on an ethnosurvey and in-depth interviews with 10 families. The results presented here draw on three bodies of theoretical and empirical literature: gender and migration; the transnational paradigm in migration studies; and studies of educational values and attainment of immigrant children in the U.S. and children of migrant families in Mexico.

Feminist scholars have attempted to bring gender "from the periphery to the core of migration studies" (Mahler and Pessar 2006) since the 1970s, shifting from an "additive approach" to a more complex conceptualization of gender (understood as the sociocultural meaning given to sexual differentiation) "as a central category organizing the identities, social practices, and institutions influencing migration" (Donato et al. 2006: 17). In their review of feminist ethnographers' contributions to the field of migration studies, Mahler and Pessar (2006)

identify six principle areas of research: (1) how gender shapes migrant households, kinship, and social networks; (2) the gender socialization of second-generation immigrant children and transnational childhoods; (3) the social construction of immigrant and minority subjects; (4) the gendered nature of nation-states, borders, and supranational institutions; (5) the ways in which gender ideologies and norms are reinforced and/or transformed across transnational spaces; and (6) how gender structures the migrant labor market. Such research has brought gender and generational power hierarchies within migrant households/families to the center of analysis to better comprehend migrant decision-making, recruitment, settlement, return, social networks, and kinship practices. Gender, then, is an organizing principle of migration in that it structures all facets of the migration process, including the decisions about who migrates and who stays behind; the distribution of re-sources; communication processes; and women's and men's roles on both sides of the border.

In the last decade scholars have turned their attention to how gender shapes and is transformed in the process of Mexican migration (i.e., Ariza 2006; Broughton 2008; Fagetti 2006; Goldring 2001; Hirsch 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; and Kanaiaupuni 2000). Research includes an examination of female migrants' motivations for and experiences of migration; the productive and reproductive roles of wives of migrants; the influence of patrilocal residence practices on women's roles and experiences of migration; changing notions of gender and marriage; gender roles in Mexican hometown associations; and the construction of men's masculine identities and gendered practices in response to migration pressures.

A new perspective in migration studies pioneered by femi-nist anthropologists Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992; also see Basch et al. 1994) (the transnational paradigm) views migrants' lives (their daily activities and routines as well as the institutions of which they are part) as embedded in both

sending and receiving societies, encompassing those who migrate and those who stay behind (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1003). A transnational migrant social field comprises social networks and relationships and the exchange, organization, and transformation of values, ideas, practices, and resources that span geographical boundaries (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1006). The concept of "simultaneity" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2007) or "bifocality" (Rouse 1992; Vertovec 2007) describes the "simultaneous and inextricable relationship between here and there" that characterizes the everyday reality of migrants and their families (Vertovec 2007: 154).

A transnational paradigm broadens the lens on immigrant incorporation and assimilation by focusing on the ways in which migrants maintain important connections and social relations in their country of origin while at the same time integrating into the economic and social structures of the host country. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2007) propose a "transnational social field theory of society" based on a conception of society and social life as transcending nation-state boundaries. They define a social field as "a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2007: 188). A Mexican transnational social field, subsequently, includes individuals, families, migrants, nonmigrants, community and home-based associations, political and social networks in Mexico and the U.S., and the ideas, practices, and resources that flow and circulate among them.

The transnational scholarly literature has debated the role of the state within transnational processes. The Mexican state has been described as a "transnational state" given that since the 1990s the Mexican government has authorized dual nationality for migrants in the U.S. Also, through the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (*Programa par las Comunidades Mexicanas en el Extranjero*) the federal government, in collaboration with state governments, has sponsored what is known as the

"3x1" program, in which both levels of government contribute matching funds to resources raised by hometown clubs or associations to support efforts to improve the infrastructure of sending communities (Hollifield 2004: 81).

The Program for Mexican Communities Abroad also includes objectives to build a strong connection in the field of education. Activities include: (1) training of bilingual teachers; (2) teacher encounters; (3) acquirement of cultural educational materials; (4) inter-school contests; (5) prizes for distinguished students; (6) support for educational programs for migrants; and (7) academic exchange (Onoda and Rionda 2007: 103).

Since 1995, the U.S. Department of Education has operated in conjunction with the Mexican government, the Binational Migrant Education Program (*Programa Binacional de Educación Migrante*, PROBEM), functioning in 26 states in Mexico and 28 in the U.S. The program's objective is to "promote and assure educational attention to migrant children and young people that study in Mexico and the U.S., procuring a quality education, with equity and pertinence, and to achieve reciprocity in the cooperation between the educational communities of both countries" (interview with Coordinator of the Binational Migrant Education Program in Colima, March 2008).

My research in Colima attempts to bring a gendered and transnational perspective to existing studies on education and immigration by understanding how gender influences educational values, expectations, and attainment within Mexican transnational families. Transnational families are nuclear and extended migrant families that remain concurrently tied to places of origin and destination. Socialization and social reproduction within transnational families respond to "at least two social and cultural contexts" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2007: 196): in this case, Mexico and the U.S. Transnational families are "vehicles" for the "circulation and fusion of customs, practices, habits, forms of consumption, and expectations" (Herrera Lima 2001: 91) that are constituted in both home and

host societies. Transnational families in Colima play pertinent roles in the formulation and transmission of gender and educational values and expectations, which are constituted in a dual frame of reference comprised of aspects from both Mexican and U.S. cultures. Therefore, the long-term goal of my project is to document how educational values and expectations are constructed within transnational families; how they affect educational achievement; how they are organized by gender; and how educational values, expectations, and attainment change across generations.

Gender and Education in the Context of Mexican Transnational Migration

Mexicans are the largest foreign-born group in the U.S. with a population of almost 12 million in 2007 (56% men and 44% women) distributed throughout the entire country, but with the largest concentrations in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas (CONAPO 2008: 64-65). In Mexico, 344,241 migrants returned from the U.S. and another 951,101 were circular migrants between 1997 and 2002 (CONAPO 2008: 176). More than half of both groups resided in the traditional migration-sending region of the country (Aguascalientes, Colima, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas). Given the magnitude of Mexican immigration, it affects all social sectors and geographical regions of both countries and challenges American and Mexican public institutions, particularly schools.

Scholarly literature on immigration and education has focused mainly on educational expectations, performance, motivation, and attainment of the immigrant second generation, or children born in the U.S. to foreign-born parents (i.e., Crosnoe et al. 2004; Feliciano and Rumbaut 2005; Fuligni and Witkow 2004; Levitt and Waters 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 2005;

Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995, 2001; and Zhou 1997); immigrant parents' school-involvement or "engagement" (i.e., Carreón et al. 2005; Osterling and Garza 2004); parenting and school achievement (i.e., Okagaki and Frensch 1998; Opdenakker and Van Damme 2005); immigrant families' educational values and modes of value transmission (i.e., Delgado-Gaitan 1992, 1994, 2001; Saucedo Ramos 2003; Valencia and Black 2002); the school contexts of immigrant students (i.e., Bollin 2003; Crosnoe 2005); and students' and families' funds of knowledge (González and Moll 2002; Moll et al. 1992).

Particularly important comparative points taken from this literature for our research in Colima are found in studies that examine the link between informal and formal education within immigrant families, such as detailed descriptions of immigrant parents' roles in transmitting positive educational values (i.e., questioning the myth that Mexican families do not value education) and the myriad ways in which they actively support children's formal educational experiences. For example, Carreón et al. (2005) identify a range of "spaces of engagement" among Latino immigrant families, such as parent participation in school meetings and events; assistance with homework; teaching by example; and having daily conversations about school. What kind of educational values are being transmitted within migrant families in Colima? How do parents support children's formal education?

Other important findings from the research cited above include a more refined understanding of the process of immigrant adaptation and assimilation. Portes and Rumbaut (1996) and Zhou (1997) promote the "segmented assimilation thesis," recognizing that immigrants are "received in various segments of American society," and, therefore, have divergent paths to social mobility (Zhou 1997: 75). Rumbaut (2007) furthers this argument by defining six generational immigrant cohorts to analyze modes of acculturation among immigrant parents and their children: (1) 1.0 generation (foreign-born, over the age

of 17 at arrival in the U.S.); (2) 1.25 generation (foreign-born, between the ages of 13 and 17 at arrival in the U.S.); (3) 1.5 generation (foreign-born, between the ages of 6 and 12 at arrival in the U.S.); (4) 1.75 generation (foreign-born, between the ages of 0 and 5 at arrival in the U.S.); (5) 2.0 generation (U.S.-born, two foreign-born parents); and (6) 2.5 generation (U.S.-born, one foreign-born parent). Immigrants of Mexican origin between 25 and 39 years of age have the lowest levels of educational and occupational attainment in comparison to all immigrant nationalities in the U.S. However, when Mexican immigrant generational cohorts are compared, "by the second generation (2.0 and 2.5), Mexican adults in their late twenties and thirties had nearly tripled their college graduation rates and cut by more than a third the proportion of high school dropouts, relative to their 1.0 coethnics" (Rumbaut 2007: 371).

In addition to ethnicity and socioeconomic status, gender influences educational and occupational outcomes of second-generation immigrants, what is referred to as "gendered pathways" (Feliciano and Rumbaut 2005). In her literature review, Qin (2006: 9) notes that "boys lag behind girls in academic settings across many different ethnic groups" and there are "strong gender differences in grades, academic engagement, high school completion, and future aspirations." Gender gaps in immigrant education in the U.S. are explained by various factors, including: (1) parental expectations after migration; (2) gender socialization at home; (3) gendered relations at school; and (4) the role of gender in acculturation and ethnic identity formation (Qin 2006: 10-15).

Free basic public education in the U.S. and support programs, such as free breakfast or lunch for families with low incomes, enable immigrant parents to afford sending both daughters and sons to school, hence increasing parental expectations in girls' education (whereas in their home countries they must choose which sex to educate, and boys are traditionally given priority). At the same time, immigrant parents tend to

control and restrict girls' activities outside the home, which may positively benefit their educational outcomes by helping them stay focused on homework and school activities. Indeed, immigrant girls view school as a "liberating social space" because they are free from parental monitoring (Qin 2006: 12). In terms of gender relations at school, immigrant girls are likely to have friends that are serious about schoolwork and supportive of academics. Immigrant boys, in contrast, experience peer pressure to "engage in problem behaviors" and are not as likely to perceive social support at school (Qin 2006: 12).

Finally, Qin's (2003, 2006: 14) analysis of data from the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation Study (LISA) shows that among students from China, Mexico, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and elsewhere in Central America, after five years girls are more likely to identify with their culture of origin" while "boys seem to have more difficulty in assuming bicultural competencies and making successful bicultural adjustments." In turn, boys have lower educational aspirations and are not as engaged in school.

Scholarship that incorporates research in Mexican sending communities (a much smaller literature base) (i.e., Franco García 2005; Kandel and Kao 2000, 2001; Macias 1990; Martínez-León and Smith 2003; McKenzie and Rapoport 2006; Reese 2002) shows that, overall, international migration has a negative impact on children's educational aspirations, especially during adolescence. Children who do not receive formal education beyond secondary school are more likely to migrate to the U.S. Hanson and Woodruff (2003) examined the relationship between household migration behavior and educational attainment in Mexico and found that children in migrant households in which mothers have low educational levels (less than three years) complete significantly more years of schooling. Borraz's (2005) study of the impact of remittances on schooling shows a positive and small effect of remittances on schooling only for children living in cities with fewer than

2,500 inhabitants and with mothers with a very low level of education. Finally, Reese (2002) notes a generational change in parental educational expectations and promotional strategies for immigrant families and their relatives living in Mexico. On both sides of the border, then, parents increasingly expect their children to graduate from college; are more involved in their children's schools; and actively assist their children with homework.

While several studies cited here make reference to key gender differences in terms of formal education in migrant families, they do not explicitly address the underlying gendered home and/or school processes that lead to such disparity, a fact also noted by Donato et al. (2006: 13) in their Introduction to the special issue of International Migration Review on gender and migration. The results presented here aim to make a contribution toward filling this research gap.

Colima, Mexico: A Transnational Space

Skelton et al. (2006: 1) assert that "at this point in the twenty-first century feminists from across the world are pointing to how gender shapes educational opportunities in specific contexts." The specific context in this study is a small, rural migrant-sending community (pop. 499 in 2005), or *rancho*, in the central-western Mexican state of Colima (referred to here as "Rancho Colima"). The state of Colima is Mexico's third smallest state with a population of 567,996 (280,005 men and 287,991 men) (INEGI 2005). Colima had an estimated 4,108 circular migrants and 3,812 return migrants between 1997 and 2002 (CONAPO 2008: 176). The state has been characterized as having a "high level of migration intensity," a statistic based on the total number of households, the percentage of households that receive remittances, the percentage of households with migrants living in the U.S., and the percentage of households

with return migrants during the last five years. Roughly 7% of households in Colima received remittances in 2002 (CONAPO 2002). The pace of U.S.-bound migration from Colima has increased since 1995-1996, as reflected in the increased amount of remittances sent in 1995 ($22 million USD) versus 2006 ($179 million USD) (CONAPO 2008: 220).

The transnationalization of the Mexican state at the federal level (as discussed earlier) is a process that has been mirrored at the local level as well. The state of Colima, through its Secretary of Exterior Relations (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*) and Secretary of Social Development (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social,* or SEDESOL*)*, established in 2007 the Office of Migrant Services (*Oficina de Servicios a Migrantes*), offering various services such as assistance with passports, visas, temporary employment in the U.S. and Canada, communication with relatives, repatriation, assistance with cases of abuse by authorities abroad, and the promotion of 3x1 programs (Office of Migrant Services Brochure).

The office has a website (www.soycolima.com), created with the intention to improve communication between migrant sending-communities in Colima and respective immigrant communities in the U.S. (Interview with Office of Migrant Services Coordinator, February 2008).[2] The website contains lists of Colima migrant clubs with contact information and encourages migrants to form hometown associations if one has not been established in their area. According to the list of clubs on the website (last consulted May 20, 2009), there are seven migrant clubs in the U.S. (five in California and two in Nevada) and seven clubs in Canada (Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver, Edmonton, and Victoria). The Office of Migrant Services, along with researchers from the University of Colima, helped organize a migrant club celebration in Los Angeles, California, in September of 2007; representatives from both institutions attended the celebration and it was featured in one of the local newspapers (*Diario de Colima*). The opening of this office and

the website that connects sending and receiving communities in Colima and the U.S. reflects the transnational character of the state and its communities.

The *soy Colima* website does not provide information about how remittances are being invested or how funds are matched by the 3x1 programs, and I have not been able to access such information to date, although it will likely be presented in the current administration's end of (three-year) term report in December 2009.

Another interesting question that the website raises is the process of communication via the Internet that takes place between members of hometown associations in the U.S. with community members in Colima and the kinds of necessities (educational and otherwise) that are being discussed. This is a promising avenue for future research.

The Office of Migrant Services conducted a survey of migrant-sending communities in the state of Colima between October 2007 and February 2008. According to the first data analysis available, 61% of migrants are male and 38% are female with the majority ranging in age from 22 to 50. The majority of migrants from Colima reside in California (half of those in Los Angeles), followed by the states of Washington, Texas, Oregon, and Nevada. Most migrants from Colima have a grade-school education (six years) and work in the service industry, followed by agriculture and construction (Ayuntamiento de Colima, 2007).

With the assistance of two students, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for this study between January and July of 2008 (with a second phase that took place between January and August of 2009).[3] We collected ethnosurveys[4] and in-depth interviews with 10 female heads of household (wives of migrants) in Rancho Chihuahua and in-depth interviews with the Coordinators of the Office of Migrant Services in Colima, the Binational Program of Migrant Education (*Programa Binacional de Educación Migrante*, Department of Education, Colima),

the Program for Education of Migrant Children (*Programa de Educación de los Niños y Niñas Migrantes*, Department of Education, Colima), and the Program for Temporary Employment in the U.S. of the National Farmworker Committee (*Programa del Empleo en los Estados Unidos del Comité Nacional de Campesinos*, Tecomán, Colima).

Rancho Colima is located in an agricultural zone of the state, with sugar cane being the major crop, followed by corn, beans, sorghum, and sweet potato. The region is characterized as highly marginalized and is one of the state's major migrant-sending areas (INEGI 2005). Households in Rancho Colima fit the pattern that recent studies of rural households in Mexico have shown: an increasing trend toward diversification of strategies to obtain total household income, including family production (crop, livestock, non-agriculture, commerce, service, and natural resource extraction); agricultural wage labor; non-agricultural wage labor; internal migrant remittances; international migrant remittances; and public transfers (i.e., such programs as PROCAMPO and OPORTUNIDADES)[5] (Taylor et al. 2005; see also Cervantes-Godoy 2009) . The growing dominance of the service sector in Mexico's economy has displaced workers from the primary sector, who in turn migrate to work in informal services in Mexican urban areas or to the U.S, (Taylor et al. 2004, as cited in Cervantes-Godoy 2009: 10).

All the migrants in our sample are male. Information on year of migrants' first and last trip to the U.S. shows that migration began in 1994 and has continued through 2008. The migratory status on migrants' last trip to the U.S. was undocumented and most migrants used the services of a *pollero* (also known as *coyote*, or person that aids in crossing the border) on their last trip. Los Angeles and Las Vegas are the principle destinations and construction and agriculture are the top occupations in the U.S. The average age of male and female heads of household is 45 (range of 26 to 77) and their educational attainment is a grade-school education (six years). Males tend

to work in agriculture or construction when they are in Colima and females tend to be housewives (*ama de casa*), although a few are domestic workers in the city of Colima (about 10 miles from Rancho Colima). All the families we interviewed receive remittances from the U.S., which comprise between 75% and 100% of their total household income. Remittances are used to pay rent or mortage, food, utilities, doctor visits and medicine, and education (uniforms, shoes, materials, breakfast/lunch). Families maintain communication with members in the U.S. through telephone and the Internet.

Gender, Socialization, and the Meaning of Education within Transnational Families in Colima (Preliminary Results)

The local public educational structure consists of one pre-school, primary school, and Adult Education Center in Rancho Colima. Young people in the community have access to the secondary school in the neighboring *rancho* (pop. 753 in 2005). The preschool has one teacher that attends children ages 3 to 5[6], while the primary school has two teachers that attend 40 children in multi-grade classrooms (one group has students from first to third grade; the other has students from fourth to sixth grade). The Adult Education Center offers two types of services to persons 15 years of age or older: literacy classes and basic education accreditation courses (primary and secondary school diplomas). In order to attend high school, young people from Rancho Colima must travel to the city of Colima.

The educational services available in Rancho Colima are representative of a series of initiatives over the last two de-cades by the Mexican Secretary of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública,* or SEP) such as Education for All (part of UNESCO's World Declaration in 1990), Educational Modern-ization Program (1989-1994), Educational Development Plan (1995-2000), and National Education Plan (2001-2006) aimed

at combating educational inequality, in particular the gaps between urban and rural populations, indigenous and non-indigenous populations, and girls and boys. Such programs emphasize curricular reform and the creation of new text books; teacher training; compulsory preschool and secondary education; access to and equity in basic education; improved quality of education; and better coordination and management of public school systems and programs (Mier and Terán Rocha and Rabell Ramos 2003).

Some of the persistent problems with schools in rural communities consist of the reception of fewer federal funds due to small enrollment numbers; inadequate infrastructure and equipment; and poorly trained teachers (better prepared teachers prefer working in urban areas) (Mier and Terán Rocha and Rabell Ramos 2003: 437). We found such issues to be pertinent in Rancho Colima, where several of the women interviewed mentioned the constant struggle to stop the SEP-Colima from closing the primary school (because of undersized enrollment). They also talked about the need for more, improved classrooms and additional teachers for single-grade instead of multi-grade classes. Chronic teacher absence was another problem brought up by the women.

Access to primary and secondary education in Rancho Colima, therefore, is currently not as much of a dilemma as is the quality of education. Besides the presence of schools in the community or in nearby localities, many families also receive support through government programs that help offset educational costs. For example, six of the ten women we interviewed participate in the federal program OPORTUNIDADES, in which they receive monetary support for their children who are enrolled in school; therefore, in addition to remittances, they receive a monthly stipend to help with educational needs (uniforms, shoes, school supplies, etc.).

The contemporary educational prospects and government assistance available to families in Rancho Colima drastically dif-

fer with the opportunities and experiences of the generational age-cohorts of 30-44, 45-64, and 65+ for the sample of women interviewed.[7] To understand generational and gender variation in access to and permanence in formal education, we talked with women about their own personal educational trajectories as well as the expectations they have of their children's educational pathways.

We identify five types of barriers to formal education in the narratives of the women's personal trajectories: (1) lack of community and educational infrastructure and means of transportation; (2) lack of economic resources and discrimination based on social class; (3) school violence; (4) gender barriers; and (5) intra-family dynamics and crisis.

The first barrier relates to the small number of schools and paucity of available public transportation during the women's childhood and adolescence. This difficulty is especially present in the narratives of women in the age cohorts of 45-64 and 65+. Hortencia (60 years old) expresses these difficulties well:

> One of the things that influenced was finding a way to go to school. . . . Well, there only existed one bus that took me to where the school was, and well, truthfully, I woke up very early. . . . and it took about two hours to get there. . . . That's to say that I got there almost at the time we had to enter (Interview, June 2008).

All three cohorts (30-44, 45-64, and 65+) cited lack of economic resources to pay for uniforms and school supplies as a constant problem throughout their school experiences and was considered to be one of the primary obstacles to formal education. Associated with this issue is class discrimination, which was a dominant theme in women's narratives. On two occasions women cried as they relayed specific instances of being ridiculed or bullied because they had old, worn shoes and clothes, and were prohibited by teachers from participat-

ing in school ceremonies because they could not afford the costumes.

According to the women, the spaces of engagement on the part of their parents were nonexistent: parents did not participate in the school or with homework, and there were very few resources (books or desks, for example) in the home to aid children in completing homework assignments.

Violence in school (on the part of teachers and classmates) is another prevalent theme present in women's narratives about their educational trajectories across all three cohorts. Women characterized their grade school teachers as "very strict." As one woman notes, "I remember that the teachers hit us a lot with the eraser when we didn't understand something. . . . Well, the truth is the teachers were very strict" (Interview, March 2008). Another woman recalls, "I liked school, but they mistreated me a lot. . . not so much the teachers, but my classmates; since I can't see well, they always threw things at me until I would get mad and we would start to fight" (Interview, June 2008).

Reference to gender barriers as a key factor in detriment to women's access to and permanence in school is constant in all three cohorts. The analysis of women's narratives leads to the detection of diverse hierarchies within the school (between male teachers and female students; and between boys and girls) and the family (between parents and children; men and women; and older vs. younger siblings).

The following narrative exemplifies gender hierarchies in school as experienced by the women in our sample:

> Here in the rancho where I started school there was a strong preference for the boys and the teacher always said to the girls that we were less intelligent; and then he made us do hard work, to sweep, dust and clean the desks because since we were girls….and the boys played marbles while us girls cleaned everything. Of course ever since I was a young girl I was rebellious because I would say to

the teacher, 'You are just sitting there, why don't you tell
the boys to each clean their own desk' and. . . Sometimes
he punished me and he would tell me that I was very rebel-
lious. Look, it wasn't rebelliousness, it was the truth and
during that time it was a crime to speak the truth (Isabel,
45 years old, Interview, June 2008).

María Eugenia (38 years old) describes the relationship
between parents and children in her generation (30-44 age
cohort): "Before parents were very heavy-handed, very rude,
very scolding; and I believe that we didn't have respect for
them, it was fear that we had of them. . . .And for that reason,
I told myself ´when I have children I am going to be all to the
contrary´'" (Interview, June 2008).

Intra-family gender hierarchies placed women, as wives/
mothers and female siblings, in a secondary position in relation
to fathers and male siblings. Eldest daughters/sisters especially
were expected to help with the care of their younger siblings
and with domestic chores in the home. Such responsibilities
frequently were given priority over their studies. The case
of María Eugenia (38 years old) again is illustrative of these
dynamics:

> Ha! Ha! Ha! It is so long ago that I don't think that I
> remember going to school! No, no, don't you believe that;
> one never forgets. It's that each one of us let's say is like a
> book, a history that day by day is in the making. Me, for
> example, I really liked school, but, well, unfortunately, at
> that time school was not the most important thing for our
> parents; it was more important that we work, work, and
> I in my house…there were six men and I was the only fe-
> male (sister). So my mother didn't send me to school early
> in the morning, not until I finished helping her with the
> household chores. I always left at 10 a.m. to go to school,
> do you believe it? I remember that I cried a lot because then
> the teacher would pull my ears for arriving late and I felt
> so sad because I didn't get to school on time not because I
> didn't want to go, but because they made me do household
> chores first. I finally told my mother that it was best for me

> not to go to school. In the end I didn't finish grade school as
> a young girl, because, well, as I have told you, my mother
> had a lot of children and I had to help her make tortillas
> everyday in the morning before leaving. I had to help her
> finish making tortillas by hand and clean up the kitchen.
> For her, going to school was not something of importance,
> do you believe it? And I, yes, I really liked going to school,
> but I couldn't (Interview, June 2008).

In several cases, including María Eugenia's, as women entered adolescence they escaped from their families and found refuge with relatives (usually aunts/uncles) in the city of Colima, where they began to work as maids and study at the same time.

It is important to point out that women also noted that their male siblings were expected to work with their fathers in the agricultural fields, which took priority over their studies as well, but this work tended to be more seasonal and from the women's perceptions, less restrictive on the males' ability to study.

Women associate economic problems and gender barriers with situations of family crisis, such as alcoholic and emotionally/physically abusive fathers, who did not work steadily or support their children's education, and separation/divorce. While in some cases, women referred to their mothers' role in restricting their ability to study, as revealed by María Eugenia above, in others women give credit to their mothers for "doing everything they could" (selling food and tortillas, ironing and sewing for pay) to sustain their children's schooling.

The comparison of educational attainment between generational age cohorts for men and women, taking into account the sample of women interviewed, their children, and all members of their household (N=42), highlights the influence of the diverse barriers discussed above, especially for the age cohort 65+. For both women and men in that cohort, there is no formal educational achievement (without formal instruction); whereas

in the 45-64 age-cohort both men and women accomplished a grade-school education. Women in the 30-44 age-cohort reached a grade-school education, while in the same cohort the attainment for men is equally divided between grade school and junior high. Finally, in the 15-29 age-cohort both women and men have achieved a junior-high education.

The disparity between the 65+ (without formal instruction) and 15-29 (junior high or 9 years of instruction) age cohorts is most notable, while there is little difference between the two age cohorts in the middle (30-44 and 45-64; grade-school education), the exception is in the group of men in the 30-44 age-cohort that were able to receive a junior-high education. These results highlight the fact that both women and men have experienced obstacles to formal education, although perhaps gender barriers have been more prominent for women; also, barriers have diminished to some degree from generation to generation. However, there remains a limit to educational attainment because the youngest cohort has not exceeded a junior-high education.

The perception of generational changes in gender and education among the women interviewed is obviously influenced by the experiences of their own educational trajectories as discussed, but also by the context of international migration. The perception and significance of formal education for women in relation to the socialization of their children is discussed next, followed by an exploration of bifocality in relation to educational values and expectations.

Overall, women feel that formal education is a patrimony that improves quality of life. They associate higher levels of income with higher levels of education. The ideal level of formal education for their male and female children is an undergraduate degree, which is associated with a professional career (*carrera professional*), as indicated by one mother: "Yes (education is important), so they can have a profession and count on the

opportunity to develop themselves in a better job and have a better level of life" (Interview, July 2008).

In discussing access and gender equity in formal education, when asked if there are "feminine" or "masculine" careers most women said no: "we are all equal now" (*ya somos iguales*). Gender equality is associated with equal rights, as one interviewee mentions: "We all have to be equal, right? The thing is we all have the same rights and capabilities" (Interview, June 2008).

In terms of their view of generational changes regarding gender equity and education, women overwhelming note a positive change: "we are in another stage of life" (*estamos en otra etapa de la vida*). Their perception is that there are more educational opportunities for women within the Mexican education system (and more schools); increased support on the part of families, who now encourage both men and women to study; and a change in women themselves, who no longer accept discrimination, and have an interest in excelling personally and professionally. Government support for public education through scholarships was also cited as an important change and factor that helps young people study today. According to Ana (55 years old):

> Well. . . . Now there are more opportunities to study, if people don't study these days it's because they don't want to; there are many ways to continue studying. Well, yes . . . Today there is more participation in everything, wherever you want to look there is government help; before no; and if there was, one couldn't even apply for it. And now, one can quickly investigate and all the kids have support, scholarship, everything. Before no. . . nowadays it is much better because they get breakfast too. . . . Before, the government didn't support us so much (Interview, June 2008).

Women also pointed out a generational change in the ways that they, as parents, motivate and support their children in their studies. That is, they value formal education, for both girls and boys, and have distinct parenting strategies in comparison

to their parents' generation in order to encourage their children to study. Ana's (55 years old) words express the value placed on formal education:

> It is very pleasant to know, to know how to read and write, and know about everything. Before, one was ignorant of all these studies. . . . It is such a pleasant thing to learn, to know how to read and learn more and more because that is something that never ends (Interview, June 2008).

A few of the tactics parents use are helping with homework (to the degree possible or finding a tutor if necessary) and procuring space and time within the household for children to do homework. None of the families we interviewed have computers in their home, but all mentioned that they manage their budgets to be able to pay for the children to use a public computer and Internet service (known as *Cybercafes*).

Women also stated that they discuss the importance of formal education with their children, emphasizing that studying is an "obligation" and the school is "one's second home":

> Well, as they say, school is one's second home. . . Well, they teach you what is indispensable to know: how to relate with society. . . like language and writing; well, you know, at home you are only taught what is basic, that's to say they name you, but they don't teach you words (Nora, 42 years old, Interview June 2008).

The ideas that Nora convey suggest that school is a second home in terms of socialization and becoming a full person or citizen. Her emphasis on language points to the potential of formal education to empower.

Finally, we tried to understand the meaning of formal education in the context of migration to the U.S. Migration is viewed as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it is seen as a possibility or alternative for their children to work and have

a "good level of life" or "comfortable lifestyle," which is associated with a good salary, eating well, and the possibility of buying furniture, clothes, etc.

On the other hand, there is recognition that migrants' legal status affects the potential opportunities available to migrants in the U.S. The suggestion that life in the U.S. is "not as it is painted" and that a positive and fruitful experience depends on an individual's behavior and personal responsibility (work hard and save money) was common among the women we interviewed.

When we asked women if they preferred that their children migrate to the U.S. or study in Colima, the majority said they would prefer their children "study and get a passport" instead of entering the U.S. illegally. They explained this preference in terms of the association of formal education with upward social mobility, in which education is considered to be an inheritance:

> I told my children to take advantage and study because it is the only thing that I could leave them; I can't leave them inheritances; I don't have money. I want to leave them with a weapon in the hand so that they can defend themselves in life, just that. Unfortunately they didn't go as far as I would have liked, but at least they can defend themselves (Martha, 38 years old, Interview June 2008).

In this case we can see bifocality in the women's perception of formal education: education is seen as a weapon that improves and broadens their children's occupational choices in Mexico while at the same time it may help them secure legal entrance for future work or study in the U.S. Gender differences are important though. Women seem to emphasize formal education for their daughters as a means of self-reliance and security in Mexico and they are not expected to migrate; while education in Mexico can help improve their sons' migratory status and conditions upon entering the U.S.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The central focus of this study is to understand how gender influences educational values, expectations, and achievement in different generational age-cohorts within transnational families in Colima, Mexico. The key findings thus far (albeit preliminary), based on the analysis of questionnaire and interview data with 10 wives of migrants, reveal several aspects that contribute to the academic literature on gender and education in the context of transnational Mexico-U.S migration.

First is the notion of generational cohorts within transnational migrant families in Mexico.[8] At this stage of analysis we have adopted a generational distinction based on age, but it would be interesting to identify cohorts based on age *and* differential relationships to migration, as Rumbaut (2007) does for immigrant cohorts in the U.S. For example, cohorts could be defined in terms of age and migrant parents' length of stay in the U.S., age and number of household members in the U.S., or age and educational experience in the U.S.

Second, a better understanding of the types of barriers to formal education that migrants experience in their home countries broadens our knowledge of transnational migrant families and their relationship to formal education on both sides of the border. In the sample of 10 women studied here, five types of barriers were identified for generational age-cohorts 30-44, 45-64 y 65+: (1) lack of community and educational infrastructure and means of transportation; (2) lack of economic resources and discrimination based on social class; (3) school violence; (4) gender barriers; and (5) intra-family dynamics and crisis. According to the women's narratives, both men (in reference to their siblings) and women experienced obstacles to education, although gender barriers are more striking for women.

The comparison of educational attainment between age-cohorts, taking into consideration the women interviewed and the information they provided about their spouses, children, and

all household members, shows a marked difference between the 65+ cohort (without instruction) and the 15-29 cohort (9 years), as expected. There is an important variation in the educational achievement between the 30-44 and 15-29 age-cohorts: grade school vs. junior high. The only gender difference in the cohorts represented in this sample occurs in the 30-44 group, where some men (but not all) reached nine years of formal education, versus six for women. The maximum achievement of nine years (junior high) for the 15-29 age-cohort leads us to question what barriers is this generation experiencing (perhaps new ones)? This question is especially pertinent because the women interviewed make reference to the fact that young people are not taking advantage of the educational opportunities and government assistance available today.

Third, the results presented here add to our comprehension of gender roles and socialization in relation to formal education within generational cohorts of transnational migrant families in the central-western region of Mexico. The gender and class hierarchies (in the school and the family) experienced in the educational trajectories of wives/mothers in the 30-44, 45-64, and 65+ age-cohorts have created a sensibility and consciousness in how they approach the socialization of their children. As evidenced in the quote by 38-year-old María Eugenia, women want to socialize their female and male children distinctly ("to the contrary") in comparison to their parents. They share a common view that both males and females should study "as far as they can." Remittances are used to sustain education for both male and female children and the women are involved in various spaces of engagement aimed at supporting their children's education.

The idea that "we are all equal" is a prevalent theme in the women's narratives and is connected to the notion of equality based on rights and equivalent capabilities between the sexes. In this sense, it is important to consider the achievements of the national and local feminist movements in Mexico and Colima

over the last three decades as well as the influence of international human rights initiatives aimed at the democratization of Mexican society in general.

Some important references in this regard include: Mexico's adoption of the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1998; and the establishment of the General Law for Equality between Women and Men (*Ley General para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres*) in 2006, General Law for Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence (*Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a Una Vida Libre de Violencia)* in 2007; and the Program for Equality Between Women and Men (*Programa para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres*, *PROIGUALDAD*) in 2009. These precedents to establish equality between Mexican women and men under the law and the protection of women's labor and educational rights echoes women's discourse about sex equality (in our sample).

The most recent legal initiatives to promote gender equity in Mexico are partly due to the work of the National Women's Institute (*Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, Inmujeres*), established in 2001 based on the premise that the exercise of women's rights as citizens is imperative for the democratization of the country (Tarres 2006: 294). The majority of Mexican states, including Colima (in 1998), had set up women's institutes several years before the creation of the national institute (Tarres 2006: 296). Some of the objectives of the women's institutes are to raise awareness within the population about gender equality (through radio and television campaigns, seminars, etc.) in addition to working with public institutions in order to incorporate a gender perspective in their policies and practices. (See Tarres 2006 for a critical discussion of Mexico's women's institutes.)

In the specific context of Colima, the efforts by the Center for Attention to Women (*Centro de Atención a la Mujer*, or CAM), established in 1983 as a shelter for battered women, have been

crucial in educating local communities about women's rights and equality. Such national and local efforts, then, help explain women's emphasis on legal equal rights.

However, there remain vital contradictions to women's equality discourse. Traditional cultural prescriptions of gender roles are still widespread. For example, we observed ongoing gendered division of labor within households (women as responsible for childrearing and household work, even if they are educated and work outside the home) and schools (for example, the election of beauty queens and the poor representation of women in student politics). The state of Colima has one of the highest indices of violence against women in the country, and school violence (on the part of teachers and between classmates) is chronic throughout the state (Cervantes Gutiérrez 2007). Given this milieu, more research needs to be done to understand the constitution of gender roles and identities within transnational families in Colima. What are the contemporary gender hierarchies within transnational families and the Mexican educational system?

The final contribution that this study makes to the literature on transnational Mexican migration, gender, and education is the identification of how formal education is perceived bifocally as a "weapon" that permits upward social mobility in Mexico and at the same time can possibly improve border-crossing conditions and entrance into the labor and educational structures of the U.S.

As analysis of 2008 and 2009 data continues, we hope to explore home and school gender hierarchies and spaces of engagement across generational cohorts, especially in the 15-29 age-cohort. Equally significant is the definition of generational cohorts based on migration criteria as discussed above.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1   The project is entitled "Gender, Generation, and Education in Transnational Families in Colima, Mexico," and is funded by the Mexican federal government's Program for the Improvement of New Full-Time Professors (*Programa para el Mejoramiento de Nuevos Profesores de Tiempo Completo*).

2   In the course of the interview the Coordinator mentioned the Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) "hidden agenda" of procuring voters as a reason for establishing the office and connecting with migrants in the U.S.

3   Julia E. Acosta Urtado and Rosa M. Blanco Govea, undergraduate seniors in the University of Colima, Department of Education (*Facultad de Pedagogía*), participated in data collection and preliminary analysis.

4   We modeled our questionnaire on Massey et al.'s (1987) ethnosurvey used in the Mexican Migration Project. The ethnosurvey is an in-depth questionnaire covering family and migration history. We also included questions about education and gender.

5   PROCAMPO is a federal program created in 1992-1993 aimed at improving the income level of rural families, principally those that are subsistence-farmers, through the transfer of subsidies (www.presidencia.gob.mx/programas; Consulted September 14, 2009). OPORTUNIDADES is an inter-institutional federal program of the Secretary of Social Development, Secretary of Public Education, Health Secretary, Mexican Social Security Institute, and state and county governments that gives educational, health, nutrition, and income support to families in extreme poverty. According to the program's website, 17,442 families in the state of Colima participated in OPORTUNIDADES in 2008 (www.oportunidades.gob.

mx). One of the program's priorities is to "fortify the position of women in the family and the community." For that reason, mothers are the direct recipients of monetary benefits.

6   Under the administration of Vicente Fox three years of preschool education became mandatory beginning in the 2004-2005 school cycle.

7   We adopted the age-cohort scheme used by the Mexican Population Council (*Consejo Nacional de Población*, or CONAPO) (www.conapo.gob.mx).

8   I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing out this contribution.

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