The Plight of Womanhood: Understanding the Undocumented Female Migrant Experience from Latin America to the United States

Eleanor Fuchs

International Affairs Program

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Lorraine Bayard De Volo

Department of Women and Gender Studies

Honors Council Representative: Dr. Robert Wyrod

International Affairs Program

Outside Reader: Dr. Natalie Mendoza Gutierrez

Department of History

University of Colorado Boulder

April 8th, 2024

**Table of Contents**

**ABSTRACT**………………………………………………………………………………………2

**CHAPTER ONE: Introduction** ……………………………...…………………………………3

Background……………………………………………………………………………………......4

Summary of Research Methods………………………………………………………...…………9

The Structure of the Thesis: The Empirical Chapters……………………………………………..9

Findings……………………………………………………………………………….…………11

Implications………………………………………………………………………………………11

**CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review and Methodology**………………………….…………12

Literature Review………………………………………………………………………...………12

Methodology……………………………………………………………………………..………19

**CHAPTER THREE: External Perspectives**…………………………………………..………21

The Manifestation of Traditional Gender Roles……..……………………………………..……21

 Life in the (Makeshift) Domestic Sphere………………………………………………..22

 Relationships with Men………………………………………………………………….24

The Inevitablity of Sexual Assault and Promiscuity…………………………………..…………25

Biologically Unfit for the Physical Journey……………………………………………………..27

**CHAPTER FOUR: Internal Perspectives**…………………………………………………….32

The Performance of Traditional Gender Roles as Survival Strategies…………………………..32

 What Can a Male Migrant Provide for a Female Migrant……………………………….32

 The Gendered Performance of Caregiving………………………………………………34

The Truth Behind Over Sexualization……………………………………………...……………35

 Enduring Sexual Assault…………………………………………………………………35

 Agency of Accepting Gendered Positions in Sex Work…………………………………38

Gendered Performances to Combat and Survive the Strenuous Journey………………………..39

 Creating Community……………………………………………………………………..39

 Strategies of Softening the Migrant Journey…………………………………………….40

Navigating Migrant Motherhood………………………………………………………………...42

**CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion of Findings and Conclusion**………………….………………47

Discussion of Findings………………………………………………………………….………..47

Conclusion……………………………………………………………………...………………..48

Implications of the Thesis and Potential Future Research ..……………………..………………50

 Female Gender Roles on the Migrant Trail and Beyond…………………….…………..50

 Humanizing the Undocumented Migrant Trail…………………………..………………51

**APPENDIX**……………………………………………………………………….……………..52

**REFERENCES**………………………………………………………………………………….54

**ABSTRACT:**

The physical migrant trek from Latin America to the United States is a foreign concept to many despite migration consistently serving as a point of political contention. While the nuances of the journey are seldom explained, one of the most obvious areas in which we lack information is in terms of a gendered analysis.

Thus, I investigate how gender norms and stereotypes constrain women on the physical migrant journey from Latin America to the United States. I examine how external perspectives coming from male actors on the migrant trail, glorify the fulfillment of female gendered responsibilities, making women subordinate to men. Whereas internal perspectives, coming from female migrants themselves, demonstrate that women accept their position within a gendered hierarchy and act with agency through gendered performances. These performances are mechanisms of survival. I conclude that gender norms always restrict women, but they maneuver and navigate the constraints placed upon them. Female gendered performances highlight that women are agentic, resilient and resourceful on the undocumented migrant trail and beyond.

**CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

Human mobility is not a modern phenomenon. However, over the past two centuries this concept has become institutionalized. An entire migration experience is condensed to whether the border crossing was completed in a documented or undocumented manner. This surface–level distinction and the associated connotations of migration leaves many of the logistical elements of undocumented process opaque.

Within migration discourse push and pull factors, which explain why individuals leave their homes in Latin America, are clearly highlighted. Ample information also tracks the integration of migrants into American society. Despite point A and point B of the undocumented migration experience clearly visible, there is a lack of knowledge on the physical trek that migrants endure to reach the United States.

The absence of comprehensive anecdotal evidence evolves from the single dimension in which the migrant trail is portrayed. Almost all of the stories of undocumented border crossings come from men. Therefore, the display of the female perspective is practically nonexistent.

Limited information on the physical migration process and the societal disregard of undocumented women has led to my research question: “To what extent do traditional gender roles constrain women on the physical journey of undocumented migration from Latin America to the United States?” To answer this question, I analyzed books, articles and documentaries from migrants who have endured the undocumented trail. I also conducted an interview with a Guatemalan woman who crossed the border in 2018.

I formulate my argument through a comparison of external perceptions of women coming from male actors on the migrant trail, with internal perspectives coming from female migrants themselves. External perspectives glorify the fulfillment of gendered responsibilities. These gendered responsibilities are the external expectations placed upon women to follow traditional gender roles. Conversely, from internal perspectives, women actively accept their place within the gender hierarchy and act with agency to instill gendered performances as mechanisms of survival. Gendered performances are learned behaviors that women act upon to satisfy traditional gender roles.

I conclude that women are always constrained to comply with gender norms on the undocumented trail. However, external perspectives assert that women comply with gender norms to appease the patriarchy, when internal perspectives make clear that women strategically utilize gendered performances associated with traditional gender roles, to ensure their safety and security on the trail. This argument differs from the existing literature on female undocumented migration, as it refutes the idea that women follow a patriarchal figure or solely exist as a victim of gender-based violence.

Sharing and analyzing how women are inherently disenfranchised on the route from Latin America to the United States will illuminate the lack of humanity throughout the entire migration process. Moreover, displaying how women overcome these barriers will solidify the universality of female resilience and uplift other migrant women to recognize and applaud the strength of their journeys.

**Background**

1. **Defining Latin America and Human Mobility**

Three distinct terms define human mobility: migration, immigration, and emigration. Migration is the process by which an individual goes from one country, region, or place to another (Salisbury). Thus, migration refers to the movement of people from Latin America to the United States. Next, immigration is the concept of entering and living in a foreign country (Salisbury). Finally, emigration is when one leaves their own country to live in another (Salisbury). Latin American migration to the United States serves as the geographical foundation of my thesis. Latin America is a broad region consisting of Central America, Mexico, and South America (Thelen, 1). Therefore, I use this term to include migrants from all of these areas.

1. **Migration from Latin America to the United States**

Migration from Latin America to the United States has been a controversial topic for years. In the 19th and 20th century migration patterns emerged from economic opportunity. Potential economic stability created circular migration, a common concept in the 1900s (Minian, 105). Migrants would come to the United States for seasonal work, send remittances back to their families and eventually return to their home countries (Minan, 104). As time passed, the United States made the circular migration process difficult (Minan, 121). Militaristic strategies were put in place to deter migrants from attempting to enter the country without proper documentation in the 1990s, and early 2000s (Moore).

 While economic opportunity motivated migration to the United States, instability within Latin America has shifted the dynamic. Mexico used to be the country with the most immigration to the United States, however social turmoil in Central America, specifically the Northern Triangle, has resulted in this region sending the most migrants to the US (Ward & Batalova, “Central American Immigrants in the United States”). Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador compose the Northern Triangle, the most violent region in the world (Avalos et al). Social instability, in addition to economic disparity has led to the rise of gang related violence (Avalos et al). Governmental and police corruption have escalated the situation in these countries (Avalos et al). From this, individuals, particularly women, are desperate to leave.

 The anguish in which individuals want to escape violence in the Northern Triangle means that oftentimes undocumented migration is the most efficient way out. Bureaucratic inefficiencies plague the migration process, especially for Latin Americans who want to immigrate to the United States (Ward & Batalova, “Refugees and Asylees in the UnitedStates”). On average, the Migration Policy Organization finds that an asylum case takes more than 4 years to be granted in a court of law (Ward & Batalova, *“*Refugees and Asylees in the United States”). Especially in the Northern Triangle, but also in other turbulent regions in Latin America, individuals do not have the luxury to wait multiple years for paperwork that justifies their movement. For example, a pregnant woman from Nicaragua faced death threats related to gang violence in her local community, and thus, had no choice but to leave with her 6 year old daughter overnight (Wardarski).

1. **Undocumented Migration Routes**

Little is known about the physical undocumented migration journey from Latin America to the United States. Partially this is because most undocumented migrants exist in the US by overstaying a VISA, rather than border apprehensions (McMinn & Klar). Nonetheless, almost all the literature on physical border crossings stems from ethnographic research that follows migrants on their route. Each route presents unique dangers, including trails that go through the Sonoran Desert in Northern Mexico and the Darien Gap; the isthmus connecting Panama to Central America in remote jungle terrain (Reuters). In 2023, 137 migrants died or went missing in the Darien Gap according to the UN International Organization for Migration (Reuters). Apart from these concrete examples, migrants travel through adverse conditions including severe heat and suffer, consequently, heat exhaustion.

To alleviate some of the dangers on the physical undocumented journey, migrants seek the help of other entities known as coyotes. Coyotes are professional smugglers or a smuggling group that assist on the undocumented trail (Donvan et al). These groups, however, are different from those who engage in human trafficking on the physical route from Latin America to the US. Migrants pay coyotes roughly $2,500 to serve as guides, whereas human trafficking is obviously non-consensual (Donvan et al). Despite the payment, migration under the supervision of coyotes does not guarantee protection (Donvan et al). For example, coyotes can treat the migrants poorly and migrant groups who travel with guides are still subject to danger on the undocumented route.

Undocumented migrants use freight trains as a method of transport, specifically in Mexico. The infamous trains, known as La Bestia (The Beast) are feared for their daunting nature. To ride La Bestia to the United States, undocumented migrants board the train and climb to sit on the top of the boxcars (Martinez, 50). The trains travel quickly, averaging 70 miles per hour, which means that they can move migrants efficiently (Martinez, 52) However, La Beastia can result in severe injury and potential death, as people fall off the boxcars. (Martinez, 52).

The presence of humanitarian shelters mitigates the hardships of the undocumented migration trek. Migrants promote shelters by word of mouth (Wardarski). For example, the Albergue Jesús Buen Pastor del Pobre y el Migrante shelter is there to treat those who have become ill or injured by the exposure to severe elements on the physical journey (Wardarski). Shelters usually are dormitory style and rooms are separated by gender (Wardarski). However, shelters such as the House of Mercy, have more occupancy for male migrants rather than female migrants (Wardarski). The increased space for male migrants demonstrates that the undocumented trail is a male undertaking. Women do not have the same resources, such as space to rest in shelters, which disadvantages their journey.

1. **Common Sentiment on Immigration**

During the Trump administration, undocumented migration was villainized to an extent never before seen. The administration dismantled many humanitarian protections for migrants throughout the physical journey, while increasing the presence of border patrol agents (Bolter et al). The United States government proclaimed that undocumented migrants would bring crime and economic instability to the United States, fortifying partisan agendas. The only imagery of the physical journey was through descriptions of migrant caravans, instigating fear within American society upon their arrival.

   Despite their position as political pawns, undocumented migrants continue to face extreme adversity at the end of the physical route from Latin America to the United States. Detention Centers near the border are known for their nefarious conditions, and a place that can separate undocumented families. The striking lack of humanitarian consolidation caught the attention of the national media.

 While this is a brief yet comprehensive analysis of background information on undocumented migration, it becomes evident that what we know emerges in a single dimension. Common discourse of undocumented migration neglects the dangers of how these people arrive in the United States, and immediately focuses on their integration into American society.

Existing information on the undocumented journey gives a one-sided gender analysis. The sparse depictions are primarily composed of male narratives, despite the differences that inherently emerge between men and women on the trail. That is where my thesis fills the gaps in existing knowledge, as I bring the female perspective to light.

**Summary of Research Methods**

Research was conducted primarily through locating sources of migrants who had crossed the border and had the ability to share their experiences of the physical trail. Focusing on the late 20th and early 21st century, I read a total of four books: *Lives in Transit, The Distance Between Us, The Land of Open Graves Living and Dying on the Undocumented Trail, and Undocumented Lives*. Within the same contemporary time frame, I also looked into a variety of news sources, academic articles and documentaries that depicted the journey. This gave a large and diverse sample of data. I used a method of coding to organize all of the ideas in these sources.

I was also able to conduct an interview with a Guatemalan woman who immigrated to the United States in 2018. The interview had a conversational manner, as I simply asked her to share her migratory journey. I understood the inherent trauma and stress of her experience, and therefore did not want to control what she could or could not say. Not only did this allow for a respectful conversation, but it also authentically relayed her story. To ensure a more genuine conversation, the interview was in Spanish, to omit the language barrier as she was not proficient in English.

 I planned for interviews to be the main source of data, but finding individuals who were willing to share their experience was difficult. Therefore, I had to remain flexible and adapt my methods.

**The Structure of the Thesis: The Empirical Chapters**

This is a comparative study, detailing how migrant women are perceived externally and how they internally perceive themselves. The first empirical chapter examines the external perspective of migrant women in the eyes of men the trail. Within the first empirical chapter I speak about the ways in which gendered responsibilities subordinate women among their male counterparts. I specifically analyze how gender responsibilities manifest through traditional gender roles. There is a profound emphasis that female migrants are caregivers and tools in the male migration process. I also highlight how external perspectives normalize the intense sexualization of female migrants. Lastly, I address how female migrants are externally perceived as weak when facing the strenuous physical terrain of the journey. It becomes obvious that each of these external perspectives of female migrants subordinates their position in comparison to men, forming a rigid gender hierarchy.

I then transition to the second empirical chapter, which details how female migrants perceive themselves on the migrant trail. I assert that women acknowledge and accept their position in the gender hierarchy on the undocumented journey and act with agency by utilizing gendered performances as survival mechanisms. Their gendered performances willingly fall in line with traditional gender roles, as they work to solidify male-female relationships and intensify their abilities as caregivers. Women also use gender performances to prevent and overcome sexual assault and act with agency if they partake in sex-work. Lastly, women have adapted their gender performances to ease the strenuous nature of the journey, through formulating relationships with other female migrants and conceptualizing the trail with religion and metaphors.

Included in the internal chapter, is an interview with a Guatemalan woman who entered the United States without documentation in 2018. I asked if she could share the most harrowing moments of her journey, thinking that she would tell stories from the trek itself. Rather, she focused on when she arrived in the United States, where she was separated from her daughter. Within this case study, I examine the ambiguity and overlap between answering gendered responsibilities of migrant motherhood, while focusing on the ways in which gendered performances were able to reunite this family.

**Findings**

 I conclude that women are always constrained by gender roles on the undocumented migrant trail. External perspectives of the undocumented female migrant experience would argue that women comply with these stereotypes to appease the patriarchy, naturally subordinating them to their male counterparts. However, internal perspectives of the undocumented female migrant experience would argue that women act with agency. Female migrants are able to maneuver the gender norms placed upon them by employing gendered performances to achieve safety and security on the trail.

Ultimately, my conclusion is applicable to the greater international community. The undocumented migrant trail is an extreme place; therefore, survival is better ensured through intensified female gendered performances. However, women around the world engage in forms of patriarchal bargaining, as a way to reclaim power in a male dominated system.

**Implications**

This investigation demonstrates the explicit and implicit influence of gender constructs not only on the migrant trail but also within the international community. This is just one of the ways in which women demonstrate resourcefulness and resilience by navigating gender constraints.

This study presents humanitarian implications. In general, undocumented migrants exist within larger political games as figures that can push specific agendas. Thus, I want to humanize these people and this process and argue that this humanization should influence all international issues.

**CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review and Methodology**

**Literature Review**

I begin my literature review dissecting the fundamental concepts of my thesis. I make clear the distinction between undocumented and illegal migration. Academic literature has long debated the use of illegality within human mobility; therefore, throughout the paper I solely use the term undocumented due to its neutral connotation. Next, I review the prospect of migration from Latin America to the United States, before highlighting the social construction of gender. Then, I transition to talk about female migration from Latin America to the United States and how female migration most commonly results from a patriarchal push or pull factor.

 Then I focus on the undocumented female migration journey. However, there is limited information underneath this topic in existing literature. For example, speculations are made that a woman’s entire migration experience is associated with her as a victim of violence. Other findings include how women employ more cautious strategies compared to their male counterparts, build robust migrant networks and are susceptible to fatigue on such a strenuous journey. While these discoveries should not be discredited, each point relates to biological and behavioral commonality among women. Thus, my thesis seeks to fill the gaps with a more nuanced understanding of how women exist on the migrant trail apart from obvious factors.

   **I.   Undocumented Migration from Latin America to the United States**

              To understand the context of female gender norms within undocumented migration routes from Latin America to the United States, we must initially conceptualize undocumented migration. Undocumented migration is the process of clandestinely crossing borders without official legal documentation (Blunt, 1). Within scholarly literature, undocumented migration is used interchangeably with the term illegal migration. However, illegal migration contains rigid moral and social connotations (Blunt, 1). For that purpose, I will exclusively refer to this form of human mobility as undocumented migration.

             A variety of contemporary scholars, such as Gwilym Blunt and Arturo Santamaria Gomez, challenge the rudimentary understanding of undocumented migration and instead they defend undocumented migrants as victims displaced by an unjust international system.

             The literature asserts that individuals from the countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala experience the most violent living situations in the world (Avalos et al). Within the three-year period of 2011-2014, over 48,947 people were murdered in the region (Avalos et al). Police corruption, drug trafficking and gang activity plague these countries. Marlou Schrover suggests that the Northern Triangle is held hostage by violence, but it also lacks individualized economic opportunity (29). With no access to labor markets, migrants, especially women, have nothing to lose and partake in undocumented migration from the Northern Triangle, through Mexico, to the United States (Schrover, 29).

1. **Understanding Gendered Constructs**

Gender is the social construct associated with the biological reality of the two sexes (Donato et al, “A Glass Half Full? Gender in Migration Studies”, 2). Thus, understanding the common paradigms of Machismo and Marianismo within Latin American discourse allows for a deeper understanding of the cultural gender framework that guides migrants. Machismo is rugged and extreme masculinity; however, our focus lies on the notion of Marianismo, which idealizes the passive and nurturing woman (Desouza et al.).

           The social construct of Marianismo identifies the perfect Latin American female as submissive, chaste and fully devoted to the well-being of her family (Pescatello, 60). This construct emerges from the rhetoric of traditional gendered responsibilities which are used to categorize, observe and make predictions about the opposite sex (Hentschel et al, 2). Feminine gendered responsibilities are the expectations that women are nurturing, empathetic and have concern for others (Stewart et al, 2). Respective gendered responsibilities foster a clear labor distinction (Hentschel et al, 2). Women occupy the domestic sphere, but when they leave, they often placed in people-oriented positions (Hentschel et al, 2).

 While gendered responsibilities represent external expectations placed on individuals, gendered performances represent a much more agentic approach to gender identity. Judith Butler notes that gender is something individuals do rather than something they are born with (Salih, 55). Particularly, Butler finds that gender performances represent a sequence of repeated acts (Salih, 58). These acts over time create the allusion of something natural (Salih, 55). Therefore, individuals actively perform tasks that align with their gendered identities.

 Gendered responsibilities and gendered performances are understood within the patriarchy. The patriarchy identifies how males dominate and control the international community (Kandiyoti, 275). However, to reclaim strength in the face of oppression, women often engage in patriarchal bargains (Kandiyoti, 274). This strategy gives women autonomy in the system through methods of active and passive resistance (Kandiyoti, 274).

 The gendered constructs of Marianismo, and the social phenomena of gendered responsibilities, gendered performances and patriarchal bargaining are detailed within academic literature. However, my thesis will examine how they come to fruition on the undocumented migrant trail, a place that is highly concealed to the general public.

**III. Gender Migration from Latin America: Push and Pull Factors**

 Focusing on women in undocumented migration presents the necessary link between a macro and micro understanding of human mobility (Pedraza, 303). However, much of the literature I encountered discussed the role of female migration in association to a patriarchal push or pull factor. To clarify, a push factor would resemble something that drives migrants out of their home country, such as inescapable gang violence. A pull factor draws individuals to a different country, such as possible economic opportunity. Katharine Donato, author of *U.S Migration from Latin America: Gendered Patterns and Shifts,* argues that patriarchal norms influence all migration (81). For young, single women it is crucial that they not only obtain their father’s permission to migrate but often they are accompanied by a brother, an uncle, or a male cousin in the migration process (Ibara, 270). For married women, particularly in Mexico, a common motivation of migration is to follow their husband, who already is working in the United States (Donato, *Migration from Latin America: Gendered Patterns and Shifts,* 81). This literature fails to address how aspects of female migration emerge apart from males’ decisions. Surely, men play a role in when and why females migrate; however, women individually make decisions to leave their home countries.

Moreover, the literature makes clear that female migration emerges according to existing family dynamics. Scholars believe that staying involved in the family unit while seeking economic opportunity, such as sending remittances back home, morally justifies female migration, as women still support their families from a distance (Donato, *Migration from Latin America: Gendered Patterns and Shifts,* 81). Once they enter the United States female migrants are believed to decrease social morality, whereas male migrants are simply viewed as disruptions in the US labor pool (Schrover, 31). My thesis will display that a woman’s migrant experience is much more nuanced than her sexual activity, and to limit it as such only perpetuates that females are nothing but promiscuous or victims of sexual violence.

**IV. Women on the Migrant Trail from Latin America to the United States:**

Undocumented migrants lack a variety of institutionalized rights and protections on the physical journey because even though they exist, they are not equitably distributed (Ibara, 272). From this, Adriana Gonzalez Arias, and Olga Aikan Araluce analyze the varying degrees of vulnerability present within migrant groups who travel from Latin America to the United States. As a place without trustworthy law and order, vulnerabilities are amplified, especially if an individual identifies as a woman (Gonzalez Arias & Aikan Araluce, 81). However, women’s susceptibility to danger is exacerbated by their age, if they are bringing a child with them and whether they are pregnant (Gonzalez Arias & Aikan Araluce, 105).

Existing literature over speculates a female migrant’s vulnerability to sexual violence. This is not a complete analysis; however, it does portray the realities for women on the undocumented migrant trail. Amnesty International reports that six out of every ten women are raped on their journey to the United States (Amnesty International). Ethnographic research, such as that of Leigh Anne Schmidt and Stephanie Buechler, puts this disturbing statistic into perspective. Almost all the personal records of female migration, recorded by Schmidt and Buechler, detailed some degree of sexual assault or gender-based discrimination and violence. While, unfortunately, sexual assault is a common occurrence on the migrant trail and the disparaging implications cannot be overlooked, a woman’s migrant journeys should not be defined in these moments as the current literature suggests. My thesis will not hyper fixate on women as victims of sexual violence and contribute a more comprehensive approach to understanding the entirety of their border crossing.

Additionally, on the migrant journey, women are stigmatized by their male counterparts. John Doering-White conducted ethnographic research and examined the sexually charged jokes that mocked migrant women. While this banter is perceived as innocent in nature, migrants utilize humor on the trail to ease the hardships of the journey (Doering-White, 252). It becomes obvious that misogynistic social culture is ubiquitous and belittles women no matter the scenario.

Current literature finds that women are more susceptible as victims of migrant commoditization (Vogt, “Crossing Mexico: Structural Violence and the Commodification of Undocumented Central American Migrants,”771). Wendy Vogt further explains how private individuals profit off human mobility, and women and children possess the most desirable traits in terms of kidnapping (Vogt, “Crossing Mexico: Structural Violence and the Commodification of Undocumented Central American Migrants,”774). Moreover, there is an inherent power struggle between migrants, border patrol agents, and coyotes in which women suffer from sexist encounters (Ibara, 272). However, the literature, in this sense, lacks novelty, as women suffer from sexist encounters in a multitude of environments around the globe.

 From their increased vulnerable status, female migrants are more likely to employ cautious strategies on the migration route from Latin America to the United States (Gonzalez Arias, Aikan Araluce, 107). That includes seeking modes of transportation such as buses and trains to mitigate the dangers associated with traveling by foot (Gonzalez Arias & Aikan Araluce, 107). Adriana Gonzalez Arias, Olga Aikan Araluce, Leigh Anne Schimdt and Stephanie Buechler note that women migrants are more likely to be social within their respective migrant groups. Common strategies consist of seeking out the protection of men (Gonzalez Arias & Aikan Araluce 110) or forming robust migrant networks (Schimdt & Buechler, 140). Comprehensive migrant networks are a way of increasing social capital, which facilitates information access throughout the journey (Schimdt & Buechler, 143). Moreover, these connections are a vital source of comradery on the trail and evolve to be important and familiar contacts once they reach the United States (Schimdt & Buechler, 143).

While women benefit from social networks, they endure adversity in terms of the physical nature of the migrant journey. The migrant trail represents an arena of struggle (Groody, 305). Thus, De Leon recognizes that the most minute details, such as, the condition of an individual’s shoes or the weight of their water bottle, determine the success of the migrant journey (De Leon, “Undocumented Migration, Use Wear, and the Materiality of Habitual Suffering in the Sonoran Desert,” 327). A woman, biologically, is less likely to have the bodily strength to carry a two-gallon water bottle through the desert, which has an indisputable influence on the safety of their journey.

The findings of the last two paragraphs once more do not stray from the obvious. Literature asserts that women are more likely to instill caution throughout the border crossing and generate social networks. Naturally, female migrants will seek safer ways to cross the border and will operate more so within a group than male migrants. Additionally, women are biologically less physically strong than men, disadvantaging them on the arduous journey. Therefore, literature needs to extend beyond findings that lie within the realm of common sense.

In conclusion female undocumented migration is a complicated subject, however, current literature does not illuminate it as such. Literature displays women to be helpless. By only detailing female movement in relation to a patriarchal figure, and defining their entire physical journey through victimhood, the literature makes women appear feeble on the migrant trail. Thus, my thesis will transition women away from their perceived state of weakness and highlight the complexities and barriers they overcome.

**Methodology**

Data was compiled in a qualitative manner, through locating sources that told the story of undocumented migrants who had crossed the border from Latin America to the United States. I read four books: *Lives in Transit, The Distance Between Us, The Land of Open Graves Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail, and Undocumented Lives*. I also consulted news articles, academic articles and documentaries to supplement my research. Many of these sources were ethnographic, following migrants from their home countries to the United States. The only source that was not ethnographically based was the book *The Distance Between Us,* a personal memoir that followed the migration story of a young girl and her family.

Current literature rarely highlights female stories of the undocumented border experience from Latin America to the United States. Therefore, finding an abundance of sources to draw on for data collection was difficult. Even within each source that I examined there was not a heavy presence of female migrant stories, which led me to rely on some sources more than others. I also had to diligently search across multiple channels to ensure that I would have an adequate sample size to start identifying trends. The obvious lack of representation of female migrants in current discourse, demonstrates the need for this thesis to start the conversation.

 When I was examining each source, I compiled data through a coding system. I made note of different trends I recognized in the readings which later were interpreted as important themes for the external and internal perspectives on the female migrant experience. These trends included Sexual Violence, Empowerment, Family Roles, Glorified Masculinity, Religion, Reproductive Health and Community. Coding was vital to organize all of the information and was the foundation of piecing together my argument.

 This form of data collection was not what I originally wanted to do. I had planned to compile data solely from interviews with women who had personally experienced the undocumented migrant trail. However, it was difficult to find individuals who were willing to publicly share their experiences. I also had to find people who had solidified their residential status in the United States. This was done to protect migrants' legal status, but also to aid in the IRB application approval lessening the vulnerabilities of this population as human subjects. As time progressed, I was worried that I would not be able to have enough testing subjects to create a strong sample size. Therefore, I adapted my methods of data collection.

 Nonetheless, I was able to conduct one interview with a Guatemalan woman who came to the United States in 2018. I was able to locate this subject by contacting the University of Colorado Law Migration Clinic. The interview was conversationally based, and the Guatemalan woman controlled the narrative of her own story. After I listened to her experience, I supplemented our conversation through follow-up questions that were necessary to further understand her story. The interview was conducted in Spanish, because the subject did not speak English proficiently, but also, I wanted to develop the most authentic version of her experience.

**Chapter Three: External Perspectives**

In this chapter, I examine how female migrants are perceived externally on the migrant trail from Latin America to the United States. External perspectives come from male actors on the route. These outside perspectives emphasize the fulfillment of gendered responsibilities making women subordinate to men. While gendered responsibilities are the exterior expectations placed on women, these assumptions glorify traditional gender norms that not only confine the female migrant’s positions on the trail, but also portray women to be sexually immoral and weak.

I first explore how traditional gender norms manifest on the trail. Then, I transition to how external perspectives over-sexualize female migrants, alluding that sexual assault and promiscuity are inevitable. Lastly, I address the idea that women are ill-suited to withstand the daunting and strenuous setting of the undocumented migrant journey.

**The Manifestation of Traditional Gender Roles**

 Traditional gender roles emerge in this masculine dominated space with the glorification of Marianismo, the gender archetype that desires a passive and nurturing woman (DeSouza et al). Assumptions from this gender construct believe that women will sacrifice their own comfort for the well-being of others throughout the journey from Latin America to the United States. Therefore, external perceptions of female gendered responsibilities subordinate their role on the migrant journey, as their top priority is to help get *everyone else* across the border before they focus on themselves.

1. **Life in the (Makeshift) Domestic Sphere**

The physical undocumented migrant journey depicts the pressure to satisfy gendered responsibilities. External narratives highlight that women maintain a life of domesticity even with no physical home. Particularly, female migrants are tasked with both cooking and child-rearing on the trail.

The gendered responsibility of preparing food exemplifies how women are expected to operate in temporary kitchens. An example of this occurrence is through the story of Mayra, a woman who stopped to rest at a migrant shelter in Mexico on her journey from Central America to the United States (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 105). At the shelter, Mayra spends most of her time working in the kitchen and is often responsible for feeding fellow migrants. One day, Mayra is preparing caldo de pollo (chicken soup). She explains, “This will give people energy for the journey” (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 105). However, Mayra is worried that there will not be enough food for everyone (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 107). Specifically, she fears that there are not enough tortillas, a crucial part of the meal that will provide necessary carbohydrates (Vogt, *Lives in Transit,* 107). Mayra then realizes that a group of men have arrived at the shelter without having eaten in two days and gives them the rest of the tortillas to share (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 107). Another migrant, Jessenia explains her position on the migrant trail in association to the men she is traveling with. She notes, “I prepare the food, and clean people's clothes” (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 142).

Regardless of the emotional burden of tending to others, external perspectives note that women have a moral obligation to fulfill traditional gender norms despite the drastically desolate conditions of the migrant trail. These tasks forever entrap women to domestic responsibilities. When female migrants must focus on arbitrary gendered chores such as cooking for their group, the time and energy they can direct towards their own well-being is finite. The external disregard for the best interest of female migrants demonstrates that they are seen as less important than their male counterparts.

 Women remain in the domestic sphere as they are responsible for child-rearing on the migrant journey. Alejandra, a mother of two, left Toluca, Mexico, in hopes of reaching the United States (Ochoa O’Leary, 97). Alejandra explains that she could not rest until her children were comfortable throughout the trail (Ochoa O’Leary, 97). She says, “I am relieved to have gotten them showered and fed, and now I can attend to my own needs” (Ochoa O’Leary, 98). Devoting one’s life to their children is the expectation for female migrants. However, doing so on the migrant trail can be difficult in such an uncertain environment. From this, external narratives question the fulfillment of the gendered responsibility of motherhood.

  Many female migrants leave children behind when they venture to the United States. Consequently, these women face criticism. To refute this argument, Lucinda, a 24 year old Honduran woman, who left her son behind, explains, “I did not want to leave. But I had no choice. I had to leave to keep my son safe. I could not bring him with me because I have heard about the dangers of the journey…He is my son; it is my job to keep him safe.” (Schmidt & Buechler, 146). Anita, a fellow Central American migrant, had a similar experience of leaving her children behind. She says, “To leave my country was not easy. I do not know about this palace. I do not know what to do. I miss my children, but I know that leaving was the best decision” (Schmidt & Buechler 150).

External perspectives of child-rearing hold female migrants to an impossible standard. Slight deviations from the traditional fulfillment of caregiving hinders a female migrant's reputation. Women are expected to prioritize others which subordinates them to men, but if they are a “bad caregiver” they find themselves sliding further down the gendered hierarchy.

1. **Relationships with Men**

External narratives portray female migrants as a source of comfort for male migrants. For example, 20-year old Rueben, who is migrating from Central America to the United States, stopped to rest at a migrant shelter in Mexico (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 106). While Ruben was in the living room of the shelter, he was trying to talk to a female migrant (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 106). After attempting to flirt for several minutes and failing, he becomes serious and tells her, “I need the touch of a woman to power myself through the rest of the journey” (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 106). Reuben then asks the woman if she could help him clean a wound he obtained from a fight with fellow migrants, and the woman complies (Vogt, *Lives in Transit,* 106). Men value female gendered responsibilities because they soften the hardships of the journey. When women cook and give care, they provide normalcy and relief for male migrants. However, it becomes clear that female migrants are responsible for caring for men in particular, which subordinates their role as tools in the male migration process.

Traditional gender roles amplify the idea that women mindlessly follow men throughout the migrant journey. If a female migrant is unaccompanied by a male, she is vulnerable. A male-migrant shelter worker explained to a group of male migrants traveling with women; “Look, I am telling you this not just for your sake, but for her sake as well. You are not just responsible for yourself, but for her too…Women need a man who will at the very least defend her.” (Vogt*, Lives in Transit*, 136). As this quote suggests, if there is no man directly with a female migrant she is in danger.

While external perspectives assert that female migrants follow a male migrant, they also claim there is more strength behind a male voice than a female voice. For example, Ever and Carmen, a young married couple, arrived at a migrant shelter on their way from Central America to the United States (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 34). Carmen is pregnant, and Ever continually communicates on her behalf (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 34). He explains, “We know that the policy is that people can only stay here for three days, but my woman, she is pregnant, and we are hoping we can stay longer” (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 34). External perspectives, such as this one, suggest that women on the migrant journey are unable to advocate for themselves. However, this occurrence emerges as a byproduct of gendered responsibilities. Women are not expected to be loud and forceful, rather that is the responsibility of a man.

The story of Jessenia and Abel exemplifies the feeble weight behind a woman’s voice. While on the trail, a male forced Jessenia to engage in sexual activities (Vogt, *Lives in Transit,* 142). Despite her refusing, only when Abel stepped in to defend her, did the situation de-escalate (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 142). It is important to note that Jessenia did not further elaborate on this story, which illustrates the need of male migrants to stand up for a female migrant. This occurrence subordinates women on the gender hierarchy of the physical undocumented journey as their voices and actions are not supposed to be assertive.

**The Inevitablity of Sexual Assault and Promiscuity**

Female migrants face sexual assault at shocking rates on the undocumented migrant journey, and the normalization of this occurrence defines the entire migrant experience for women. Actors on the trail use sexual assault to control and instill fear in those who cross the border, but external narratives state that women are the unfortunate victims of this occurrence.

Outside perspectives on sexual assault find nothing can keep women safe throughout the migrant journey. Multiple stories highlight that the possibilities of sexual violence are imminent. For example, even with male traveling partners, there are countless accounts of female migrants enduring sexual assault (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 13). Within large groups, such as a migrant caravan crossing the Darien Gap, women were raped while their male counterparts were unharmed (CNN part 4, 4:10-4:30). Sandra, a young woman who was traveling with a group of male migrants from Central America to the United States, suffered an atrocious outcome (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 12). Four armed men stopped Sandra’s traveling group, and made her take off all of her clothes, but asked the men she was traveling with to only take off their belts and shoes (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 12). As they checked Sandra's clothes, a machete was held to her neck” (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 12). Even in the presence of men, or large groups, women are not safe from assault.

In such an unregulated environment, perpetrators act aggressively towards women and seldom face repercussions for their actions. The frequency with which sexual assault occurs, and the lack of accountability for those who prey upon female migrants, portrays women to be defenseless throughout the journey from Latin America to the United States. Victimization taints the migrant experience. While sexual assault impacts almost every female migrant, overarching stereotypes allude that women are at fault for what has happened to them. Specifically, female migrants are not fulfilling their gendered responsibility of chastity, which is heavily emphasized under the realm of Marianismo. As a consequence, women are identified as sexually immoral.

There is a stereotype that Central American women are either prostitutes or sex workers along the undocumented trail. Maya suffered from this generalization (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 12). While migrating from Honduras to the United States, she stopped in Mexico to find work in order to fund the remainder of her journey (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 12). However, she had an extremely challenging time finding a job (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 12). Hardships arose when potential employers feared she was a prostitute and refused her work (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 12). These stereotypes hinder the image of migrant women on the undocumented journey and add excess difficulty to logistical aspects of the trail, such as securing resources and solidifying a migrant network. Through this external objectification, female migrants have no control over their bodies. Such limited autonomy over their gendered responsibility of chastity subordinates them to men.

**Biologically Unfit for the Physical Journey**

External perspectives note that women are not strong enough to endure the physically daunting undocumented journey from Latin America to the United States. The connotation of the migrant trail is a masculine space. There is movement: “through jungle and desert landscapes, running from criminals, staying awake on moving trains and being in tight spaces” (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 108). From this, actors on the migrant trail find women to be disadvantaged in comparison to their male counterparts. Female migrants do not possess gendered responsibilities that would prepare them for the trek.

 Female migrants are seen as liabilities, which is ironic given the care they are expected to provide. However, actors on the migrant trail, recognize the strenuous terrain and believe that women will struggle in this environment. For example, a male migrant describes one of the most physically strenuous parts of his migration journey. He explains, “In Sonoyta, I met a guy from Puebla who was with his wife. From there we tried to cross in a group of about ten people with a guide. We walked a long way and got really close to the pickup spot before we were caught. We tried to cross again and immediately I knew that my friend’s wife could not do it…” (De Leon, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*, 99). A similar story emerges from a man who pleaded that his sister-in-law avoids the journey due to its physical nature. He says, “I told them many times that it was difficult. I did not want Mari to come. I knew about the things that occur during the crossing when you are in the desert…” (De Leon, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*, 222). Such narratives demonstrate the limited confidence that actors on the undocumented migrant trail have in successful female border crossings, subordinating women among men.

Women are likely to stop and rest on the migrant trail, which presents a danger in slowing down a larger group. For example, Gabriela needed to take a break after walking for three days straight in the desert (Ochoa O’Leary, 95). Gabriela explains, “The last day was the most difficult. There came a moment in which I felt desperation because I saw our group lag farther and farther behind. We were at that moment inside the United States, but we had to go a bit farther. I thought ‘No, in reality I am putting at risk the lives of eighteen others, and I did not think that was right” (Ochoa O’Leary, 96). Coyotes often become frustrated when female migrants cannot keep up with the group and in turn leave them (Ochoa O’Leary, 98). This was the case for Marcela, a woman crossing the border at age 56 (Ochoa O’Leary, 99). On the trail, she estimated that they had been walking for 8 hours and well into the night (Ochoa O’Leary, 100). With limited visibility, she fell several feet off of a cliff and injured her leg (Ochoa O’Leary, 100). Marcela struggled to get up, and was left behind (Ochoa O’Leary, 100). A male coyote that was leading her group made the decision, as he found that helping Marcela would slow down everyone else (Ochoa O’Leary, 100). Marcela explained, “When they left me, I lost my faith in humanity” (Ochoa O’Leary, 100). Not only are women seen as too weak to exist on the migrant trail, but they also receive little assistance. External perspectives approach female physical hardships with no sympathy. Women are harshly treated despite the expectation they should selflessly care for those around them. If a migrant woman needs help, she is ignored which further subordinates their status on the trail.

Misrepresentations of the physical terrain on the journey disadvantage women, especially those who are responsible for transporting family members across the border. A CNN exclusive report followed migrants while crossing the Darien Gap. One of the central stories was that of Natalia and Ana, a single-mother and daughter duo from Central America (CNN, part 2). However, Ana, was disabled, and could not walk across the muddy and steep terrain (CNN, part 2, 1:10-3:30). Natalia explains, “I was told by a guide that the terrain was easy to navigate, and that Ana would be able to walk. They told me the descent would take 2 hours'' (CNN, part 2, 6:55-7:20) To alleviate this situation, Natalia had to elicit the help of male migrants to carry Ana on their back across the Darien Gap. As a mother, Ana had to rely on the strength of a man to care for her daughter, which diminishes the fulfillment of her gendered responsibility of caregiving.

La Bestia especially puts female migrants’ strength to the test. Migrants must get on the train by, “running alongside … with both speed and strength to jump on. You need a firm grasp and do not hesitate. Jump up with one uninterrupted motion. If you are not aggressive and strong, the train will suck you underneath” (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 67). Jumping on a moving train is not only intimidating, but also requires athleticism and agility. Female gendered responsibilities do not idealize these traits, and many women are not used to partaking in such physical endeavors. Moreover, women are biologically less strong and fast, lessening their ability to board the train.

Danger with La Bestia does not stop once migrants are aboard, rather, many individuals face life-altering injuries and tragic accidents. Irma, a Central American migrant, decided to ride the train across Mexico (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 110). While on top of La Bestia, Irma did not have the strength to hold onto the train after it made a sudden jerking motion (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 110). She lost her balance and fell down the side of the rail car which crushed both of her legs (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 110). Irma had both legs amputated before continuing to the United States (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 110). A similar story follows another female migrant, a single mother of three children. (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 106) While riding on La Bestia, a man in her migration party made an inappropriate comment (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 106). A fellow migrant jumped to her defense, but the instigator of the situation became upset, and kicked the female migrant in the jaw (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 106). From the impact, the female migrant lost her balance and fell underneath the moving train which completely crushed her foot (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 106). These stories highlight that women are also susceptible to situations of harassment, distracting them from balancing on top of La Bestia.

La Bestia illustrates the difficulty of the female migrant experience metaphorically. Women juggle so much to stay balanced on top of the train, which encapsulates how they juggle their gendered responsibilities to maintain balance throughout the migrant journey. Women cannot simply focus on getting themselves across the border, rather they must be attentive to a variety of factors that have the ability to derail their journey to the United States.

In conclusion, external perspectives on the undocumented journey glorify traditional gender responsibilities. While these perspectives come from other actors on the migrant trail, women are expected to fulfill their gendered responsibilities in an entirely liminal space. In a makeshift domestic sphere women must prioritize the needs of others through care-taking endeavors, which is burdensome. As tools in the male migration process, women are further subordinated on the trail. Additionally, external perspectives assert that women are only are safe when in the presence of a male. But, even with a male companion, external perspectives make clear that female migrants are sexually immoral and are to blame for their experiences with sexual assault and sex work. Lastly, external perspectives emphasize that women are weak, and pale in comparison to the strenuous nature of the migrant journey. Female migrants are constantly portrayed in an inferior position to men throughout the journey which constitutes a rigid gender hierarchy. Nonetheless, it is vital to understand how women perceive themselves and act in this space, which is examined in the following chapter.

**Chapter Four: Internal Perspectives**

In this chapter, I examine how female migrants perceive themselves on the migrant trail from Latin America to the United States. Internal narratives make clear the agentic nature of female migrants, as they recognize and accept their position within a gendered hierarchy and implement gendered performances as survival strategies on the undocumented journey. A gendered performance is the way in which women actively behave to fulfill gender roles.

First, I analyze how women consciously assume traditional female gender roles as mechanisms of survival. Then, I explain how female migrants explain their encounters with sexual assault or sex work as atrocities they have to endure to reach the United States. Next, I address how women combat the strenuous physical nature of the trek, before analyzing the hardships of migrant motherhood from an interview with a Guatemalan woman who crossed the border in 2018.

**The Performance of Traditional Gender Roles as Survival Strategies**

* 1. **What Can a Male-Migrant Provide for a Female Migrant?**

 External perspectives subordinate women through traditional gender roles that assist in the male migration process; however, internal perspectives highlight that male-female migrant relationships are complementary. Accepting their vulnerable position on the migrant trail, women utilize gendered performances in accordance with traditional gender roles to attract the support of men. Female migrants know that men will provide a sense of safety and security on the trail, just as much as men know women will provide comfort and care.

 In these emotionally bare and uncertain environments, traditional gender norms emerge because migrants are stripped down to their most basic identities. With limited material possession or outside influence, men and women employ elements of their gender identity to survive. As a result, individuals, who have only known each other for a few days, will present as spouses, and migrate as a married couple. This is an incredibly common crossing strategy (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 146). In these pairings, men will navigate the geographical difficulties of the trail, while women will do the cooking and cleaning (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 146). These relationships emerge through the stereotypical division of labor, but it is important to examine the agentic nature with which women seek out these partnerships.

 On the surface level, these relationships are a quid-pro-quo. However, internal narratives demonstrate that women are aware of the weight involved in these gendered exchanges. Female migrants understand the significance of a direct male companion, who can lessen the threat of danger on the trail. This was the situation for Jessenia and Abel, two Central American migrants who met in Mexico (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 141). Before knowing one another, a man kidnapped Jessenia and held her captive, raping and drugging her for over a month (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 141). Although Jessenia was able to escape from this situation, she discovered that she was pregnant (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 141). Not knowing what else to do, Jessenia felt that she needed a man to help her successfully reach the United States (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 141). Abel, who was also traveling to the United States, had heard of what happened and sought to help her (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 141). Abel proposed that they migrate together, and they continued to the United States as a “married couple” (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 141). Jessenia became weary of their relationship as time passed and Abel grew more distant (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 142). She says that she was not afraid of losing him from an emotional connection, but rather explains, “He is my help now and with him I have a better chance of arriving” (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 143). Women willing perform to assume the traditional and desired gender qualities that will solidify the companionship of a man.

1. **The Gendered Performance of Caregiving**

Female migrants use their position as caregivers to ensure successful border crossings by traveling with children. External perspectives assert that traveling with children is burdensome as children slow down the speed with which migrants can move on the trail (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 152). However, stories from female migrants demonstrate that carrying children along the journey is an effective way to extract empathy and support from fellow actors on the trail. These internal perspectives display how women can manipulate their gendered performances to achieve success.

 For example, Karen, a Central American woman who had given birth just 8 days before embarking to the United States, cared for her children on the migrant trail (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 152). Juan, the father of the children, traveled in the same group, but rarely interacted with them (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 150). This made Karen a single mother (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 150). However, Karen accepted her position in the gendered hierarchy as the sole caregiver for her young children, and strategically left them looking unkempt to facilitate support along the journey from fellow migrants and those working at shelters (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 152). It becomes clear that Karen had agency to dramatize her gendered performance of being a poor, single mother as a mechanism of survival.

Internal narratives illustrate the crucial role of older sisters on the undocumented migrant journey. The eldest sister is often tasked with the gendered performance of being a central caregiver. When examining the dynamic of the family traveling to cross the border in the memoir, *The Distance Between Us,* the oldest sister, Margo, continually steps up to fulfill a maternal role when looking after her younger siblings, despite the fact that she is still a child. Because they are immigrating to the United States without their mother, Margo takes care of her siblings on the trail, both physically and emotionally. For example, when the children see a dead man’s body, the younger sister asks Margo, ‘“Is he dead?” (Grande, 154). Knowing that the man is not alive, but also not wanting to scare her siblings, Margo responds, “He’s sleeping” (Grande, 154). Margo’s statement keeps her younger siblings calm, and they are able to continue on the trail. Older sisters recognize their position in the gender hierarchy and employ a caregiving gendered performance to protect their family units.

 Gendered performances associated with being an older sister demonstrate that women in this position are willing to actively sacrifice so much of themselves for the well-being of their families. Moreover, they enact these performances without hesitation. For example, Mari, a Central American woman, decided to stay in her village in El Salvador while her younger sister ventured to the United States (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 34). Mari, however, had received a message that her sister was pregnant (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 35). Worried for her wellbeing, Mari decided to leave El Salvador alone and meet up with her sister in Mexico (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 35). Mari acted with agency and boldly made the decision to migrate alone to help her sister.

**The Truth Behind the Over-Sexualization**

* 1. **Enduring Sexual Assault**

External perspectives oversexualize female migrants; however, this notion imprisons women to a stereotype they cannot control. Insight by women who have encountered sexual assault provides the necessary background, context, reasoning, and emotional ramifications of the situation. However, women’s gendered performances come to fruition both before and after sexual assault occurs. Female gendered performances shape how individuals prepare themselves for the possibility of sexual assault and how women respond to these atrocities on the trail.

Women know the frequency with which rape occurs on the undocumented journey. Not only are female migrants more vulnerable to sexual assault, which comes with a multitude of emotional effects, but they must also consider the consequences of getting pregnant. To avoid this outcome, many women; “receive birth control injections or have IUDS inserted to prevent pregnancy in the event they are raped. These contraceptive measures may also free women from their menstrual cycles while in transit” (Vogt*, Lives in Transit*, 116). Proactive measures against sexual assault demonstrate that women view and accept their position in the gendered hierarchy and enact a gendered performance to obtain birth control.

Female migrants are also highly aware of the effects of obtaining a sexually immoral stereotype. For example, Jessenia explains her encounter with sexual assault (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 139). Jessenia left her home in Honduras with the hopes of reaching the United States (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 139). She planned to work in the US, and send remittances back to her family (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 139). However, Jessenia stopped in Mexico with a need to raise more money for the remainder of her journey (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 140). Jessenia was adamant about partaking in trabajo innocente (innocent work), to avoid the sexually immoral stereotype many Central American women obtain (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 141). Jessenia found a job packing mangoes, but one night after a shift, her boss, Gordo convinced Jessenia that he would drive her home (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 140). Gordo took Jessenia to the back of a bodega, where she was held captive and raped for over a month (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 141). This story reveals that women do not always have the autonomy to utilize a gendered performance for survival. Even as Jessenia vowed to avoid a promiscuous stereotype, she could not prevent sexual assault from happening to her.

After sexual assault occurs, female migrants feel ashamed for what has happened to them. Nonetheless, many internal stories demonstrate that women do not let this hardship define their journey. Rather, the strength and versatility of female gendered performances becomes obvious in how female migrants overcome instances of sexual assault. For example, Lupita, a 19 year old Central American migrant on the trail to the United States, stopped in Tapachula Mexico to rest (Schmidt & Buechler, 148). Here she was robbed of all of her belongings (Schmidt & Buechler, 148). Left with nothing, a young man deceivingly offered to help Lupita, but in reality, he kidnapped her (Schmidt & Buechler, 148). Lupita was trapped for four days, and was repeatedly raped (Schmidt & Buechler, 148). After a successful escape, Lupita was able to arrive at a shelter in Ixtepec (Schmidt & Buechler, 148). At the shelter, Lupita did not speak for multiple days before she finally confessed, “When I got here, I was scared, mostly because of what had happened. The first few days I had a knot in my throat where all my tears were held…I would not cry so that I could have the strength to keep going… I feel shame because of what happened to me. But I need to keep moving forward” (Schmidt & Buechler, 148). External perspectives perpetuate self-loathing on female migrants. However, internal perspectives, for example in the story of Lupita, exemplify the resiliency in female gendered performances. Women endure unspeakable things on the journey but continue to push forward to survive.

* 1. **The Agency of Accepting Gendered Positions in Sex-Work**

The notion that female migrants’ gendered performances are agentic transfers to the practice of sex-work on the migrant trail. With more independent female crossings, women must compile the money to pay for the journey on their own. Migrants pay thousands of dollars to reach the United States (Arnold). Many elements of the journey, such as eliciting a guide, are expensive and made difficult to finance when there is a limit of high-paying jobs. Consequently, women may become involved in sex-work and internal perspectives assert that sex-work is a “last-resort” to fund the journey.

For example, Maria, a 43 year old woman from Guatemala, was traveling to the United States (Schmidt & Buechler, 150). Maria saw an opportunity to generate cash at a brothel nearby (Schmidt & Buechler, 151). She explains, “These women told me I could make $300 USD a week. Other job options would give me at most $50 a week. I figured I could save up the money I needed for a guide to get back to Houston. The first night I was with a man I cried the entire time. But then while I was working, I got used to it. I became numb. But then when I was alone at night I cried. The thought of my family finding out what I was doing made me sick. But I just kept thinking it was what I had to do to get back to the United States” (Schmidt & Buechler, 150). When women become sex-workers consensually, they are accepting their gendered position within the migrant journey. Moral biases aside, female migrants acknowledge that their bodies are desired, and act with agency to employ a gendered performance which provides them with money to reach the United States.

**Gendered Performances to Combat and Survive the Strenuous Journey**

1. **Creating Community**

Women utilize gender performances to protect and cooperate with each other, which mitigates the difficulties of the undocumented migrant experience. A sisterhood can emerge among female migrants. For example, I turn to the story of Elena and her partner Miguel (Vogt, *Lives in Transit,* 14). A young solo traveler befriended the couple (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 14). The young traveler had persuaded Elena and Miguel to take La Bestia earlier than they had anticipated (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 14). However, they heard the young man describing the features of two other female migrants who were about to board La Bestia (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 14). Elena immediately knew that something was wrong, and she faked severe stomach pains to avoid getting on the train (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 15). She and Miguel traveled back to the previous shelter they were staying at, but Elena knew she had to warn the two women (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 15). After successfully sending a signal, Elena was relieved to find the next day that the two women had made it back to the shelter (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 15). In this situation, Elena instilled a gendered performance to actively protect the sisterhood that so many female migrants rely on throughout the journey. As social beings, humans feel a need to help one another, however, this occurrence demonstrates that female migrants do things to particularly assist those who identify with their same gender.

Female companionship uplifts women along the undocumented journey. These specific gendered performances provide comfort and reassurance in such an unforgiving environment. For example, Isabel, a Central American woman stopped to rest at a migrant shelter (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 107). While helping to clean up from the group meal she became emotional as other women left the shelter (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 107). Isabel gives each of the women a long embrace (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 107). Female gendered performances arise from shared experiences on the undocumented journey. Women actively behave to console one another throughout the strenuous trek.

1. **Strategies of Softening the Migrant Journey**

External perspectives highlight that women are ill-suited, biologically, to survive the daunting nature of the undocumented migrant journey. Some women have internalized this sentiment and believe that they are not strong enough for the trek. Jessenia portrays this phenomenon. When speaking about her unborn baby, she explains, “I think it is a boy. Girls are beautiful and all, but a girl would never have survived on that journey. Boys are much stronger…” (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 138). This statement is emblematic of just how difficult the journey can be for women. However, female migrants have adapted their gendered performances for the physically harrowing environment.

Female migrants confide in religion to support them through the most strenuous sections of the journey. Women look to a higher being for protection and often pray together (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 15). Religion is ubiquitous for female migrants regardless of age. Margo, an older sister traveling with her family from Mexico to the United States, explained, “... I kept thinking when we were walking, please God give us wings!” (Grande, 153). Additionally, a woman from Nicaragua recalls the physical difficulties of the migrant journey while walking with her husband (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 14). She identifies actors on the trail either as angels or devils (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 14). The devils were the bandits who had robbed them and the man that held her family at gunpoint (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 14). Whereas the man who bought them a bottle of coke and the woman who let them sleep on the floor of her house were angels (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 14). Migrants regardless of gender engage with spirituality on the migrant trail. However, women’s relationship with religion stems from caregiving gendered performances. Women actively prioritize other needs, which taken on individually can be overwhelming, thus, they seek that a higher-power aids in protecting those they are with.

Apart from religion, women use metaphors to conceptualize physical elements of the migrant journey. Recollections of the trail in various instances depict animals. A girl explains the moment border patrol nearly caught her family (Grande, 157). She remembers, “A coyote yelled ‘Get down!’ Papi immediately dropped to the ground, and we became lizards rubbing our bellies against the cold, damp earth, trying to find a place to hide. (Grande, 157). Additionally, a female migrant, who was kidnapped, personified the boxes in the room she was kept (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 141). She notes that the boxes kept her company during this unimaginable time (Vogt, *Lives in Transit*, 141). For some women, crossing the border seems like a superhuman feat. Therefore, gendered performances repeatedly tell their stories using non-human elements. Recognizing the animalistic nature of the trail is a mechanism of survival that gives women confidence to exist in such an intense space.

Women also focus on the physical beauty of the migrant trail, to alleviate suffering of the journey more than men. Carlota, a 60 year old woman from Venezuela explains, “What I really liked about the jungle was the vegetation, the nature, the pure air, among all the dangers. There are lots of stumbling blocks, but there are also many beautiful things that can be appreciated on the way. I noticed the blue butterflies…” (Doctors Without Borders). Femininity is often associated with beauty. Therefore, the gendered performance of acknowledging and admiring the feminine aspects of the trail softens the journey and helps women keep going.

**Navigating the Gap: Migrant Motherhood**

I was able to conduct an interview with a Guatemalan woman, named Maria, who crossed the border to the United States without documentation. During the interview, I asked her to relay her migrant experience. I thought that she would talk about the physical journey from Guatemala to the US; however, she did not mention a single element of the undocumented trail. She focused on how she was separated from her daughter once she reached the United States. While the most harrowing moments of the journey cannot be generalized for every migrant who travels to the US, this anecdote gives important insight into the complexities of migrant motherhood.

From this case study, I assert that migrant motherhood represents a unique intersection between fulfilling gendered responsibilities through gendered performances. But what makes migrant motherhood different from other gendered responsibilities is that it extends beyond a surface-level desire to satisfy the patriarchy. The yearning to be a good mother is something that many women have internalized as natural. Therefore, Maria’s internal response to locating her daughter was experienced as innate, and she tirelessly used gendered performances and behaviors to reunite with her daughter.

From any angle, Maria lived a nightmare scenario. Nonetheless, external perspectives scrutinized her failure as a mother, which is emphasized as the central pillar of gendered responsibility. While she was not to blame for this occurrence, she was judged for the loss of her child and criticized for subjecting her to the dangers of crossing the border. Maria explains the initial trauma of losing her daughter; “I was brought to a room that was dangerously cold and full of people lying on the floor. They gave me a blanket that was made out of aluminum foil. It did not cover anything. I was kept there for 20 days, and there was no word of where my baby was.” Women are judged by unattainable standards within the realm of migrant motherhood. Gender responsibilities claim that women should devote their lives to their children's wellbeing, but this story highlights that under the Trump administration, children could be taken at any moment. This contradiction sets women up for failure.

Moreover, what these external perspectives fail to recognize is that being a good mother extends beyond a gendered responsibility. While women are expected to abide by the daily tasks of child-rearing, motherhood for Maria is a feat of human nature. Maria explains the horrible conditions of the migrant shelter but says she could only focus on finding her daughter. She notes, “We were only fed some cookies and bread for days at a time. We were transported all around Texas. No one would tell us where we were, or where we were going. Each of the migrant shelters kept getting worse. I thank God that I only had to stay at some of these places for a couple of days, but still no one would tell me where my daughter was.” In this situation, Maria recognized that to find her daughter she was going to have to take matters into her own hands, and she must ingeniously find ways to receive support.

Maria’s agency to find her daughter demonstrates the overlap between acknowledging the gendered responsibilities of motherhood and utilizing gendered performances. The first gendered performance in Maria’s story comes from her actions to connection with fellow detained migrants. Maria explains that there was another woman who had overheard conversations at the detention center. The fellow migrant told Maria that lawyers were coming to the detention facility. Maria explains, “I knew that they could potentially help me find my daughter.” Women work to assist each other in the feminine endeavors of motherhood as comradery emerges through shared experiences.

 With the help of this fellow migrant, Maria knew she had to flag the attention of a lawyer who could assist in her situation. Maria explains that she would lie on the floor of her holding space, watching people walk past. When she saw people walk past in “sophisticated clothing,” she knew that they were people who could help. Maria notes, “When I saw the lawyers walking past, I faked a stomach cramp. People started to look at me. The border agents who oversaw the facility asked if I was ok, and I said I needed to go to the bathroom. However, once they walked away, I told the lawyers who were still standing by me the truth. I explained that I needed help. I said that I was from Guatemala, and I needed help finding my daughter.” Maria’s active gendered performance extracted empathy from the lawyers who were at the detention facility.

This was a successful strategy as one of the lawyers who heard her plea for help assisted in the situation. Maria explained that there were no words to explain the relief she felt when reunited with her child. After the mother-daughter pair was together again, a Catholic organization supported them. Eventually, they were able to reallocate in Colorado, and reached asylum in 2018.

This is obviously a tragic story. At multiple points during the interview, Maria began to cry. She struggled to explain the trauma behind the separation from her child, and thanks God every day that they were able to reunite. However, it is important to focus on the ways in which this story demonstrates that Maria is a good mother. Maria was the most distraught when explaining that she did all of this to provide a better life for her daughter. She said, “I do not want my daughter to endure the same difficulties that I had to.” Thus, while external narratives may think that she temporarily failed her most important gendered responsibility, her internal response was that she did what she had to do to take care of her child. Therefore, she fulfilled the gendered responsibility to the best of her ability given her circumstances.

In this case study, we see how migrants balance motherhood, by observing the internal responses and gendered performances that are associated with the social phenomenon. These gendered performances and behaviors were able to reunite her family, demonstrating Maria’s resourcefulness and agency. The interconnectedness between fulfilling gendered responsibilities and enacting gendered performances allows women to achieve desired outcomes on the migrant trail.

In conclusion, internal perspectives, which come from migrant women themselves, highlight that there is much more to their stories than what is initially portrayed. Migrant women accept and understand their position in the rigid gendered hierarchy, and act with agency to survive the trail. Survival mechanisms come from gendered performances, the ways in which women act to attain their gender identities. For example, agentic gender performances are instrumental in acquiring male travel companions, as these complementary relationships provide protection for women. However, the gendered performance of caregiving extends beyond watching over men. Women play up both maternal and familial care-giving performances to instill safety. Women also speak about their experiences with sexual assault, and the ways in which they utilize gendered performances to both prevent and overcome the tragic consequences. Agency is also prevalent in female migrant sex-work, as they are recognizing the ways in which they can make money to fund their journeys, based on desired qualities. Female migrants find comfort on the trail, through gendered performances conceptualizing the journey through community, religion, and metaphors. I end this chapter with an interview conducted with a Guatemalan woman, who came to the US in 2018. She speaks of the separation with her daughter, and the ways in which she navigated both gendered responsibilities and gender performances to reunite her family. This case study displays that there is an inherent overlap between adhering to gendered responsibilities and gendered performances, and how the relationship between both concepts allows for successful border crossings.

**Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings and Conclusion**

**Discussion of Findings**

The comparison between the external and internal perspectives of female migrants demonstrates that women comply with gender norms on the undocumented trail. External perspective notes that female migrants comply with their gendered responsibilities to appease the patriarchy, as women are subordinate to men. Conversely, internal perspectives assert that women comply with gender stereotypes by employing gendered performances which function as survival mechanisms. Therefore, actively executing gendered performances represents a strategic decision to ensure safety throughout the journey.

The utilization of gendered performances illustrates that even though women are forced to comply with gender norms on the undocumented trail, they maneuver the constraints placed upon them. Navigating the constraints is emblematic of the agency that female migrants possess. Recognizing the agency within female migrants refutes the current notion that women are weak on the undocumented journey from Latin America to the United States. Rather, women are resourceful and ingeniously use the gendered qualities and traits applicable to them, to aid in their migrant experience.

 The undocumented migrant journey is a space of extremity; therefore, patriarchal bargaining is intensified, but this finding can expand to the greater international community. Women possess agency in all factors of life as they navigate and maneuver the ways in which they are restricted by their gender, to achieve whatever it is they need.

**Conclusion**

Immigration from Latin America to the United States lies at the forefront of the American political system. However, current immigration discourse highlights the beginning and end of the experience. Copious research explains why migrants leave their homes and intense political debate focuses on how migrants incorporate into American society. The realities of the physical undocumented journey from Latin America to the United States are not publicized. Limited knowledge generalizes stories from the migrant trail, and subsequently ostracizes the female migrant experience. Therefore, I sought to provide the female vantage point, explaining how gender roles constrain women. This is examined through the ways women are perceived externally, from male migrants, and how they internally perceive themselves throughout the journey.

Data was collected qualitatively, as I searched for migrant’s accounts of the undocumented border crossing experience. I read multiple books and searched the internet for any source that portrayed the migrant experience. I was also able to conduct an interview with a Guatemalan woman who crossed into the United States in 2018. She explained the trauma and hardship associated with the separation of her daughter once she reached the United States.

I begin the empirical work of my thesis examining how female migrants appear from an external perspective. I assert that outside perspectives glorify female gendered responsibilities. These gendered responsibilities are the things that are expected of women by greater society and guided by gendered social constructs. For women, gendered responsibilities perpetuate a subordinate position on the trail in comparison to their male counterparts.

For example, gendered responsibilities entrap women to the domestic sphere of life on the migrant trail. Women assume the role of primary caregivers gendered responsibilities make women the necessary tool to support *everyone else's* border crossing experience. Moreover, gendered expectations emphasize female chastity. External perspectives shame women for their experiences with sexual assault, and label them as sexually immoral. Finally, women are biologically inferior to endure the undocumented journey. Their gendered responsibilities make them ill-prepared to withstand the strenuous terrain of the trail.

Internal perspectives from female migrants demonstrate that women acknowledge and accept their inferior position within the gender hierarchy, and subsequently utilize gendered performances as survival mechanisms. Their gender performances often play into traditional gender stereotypes. For example, women willingly work in the domestic sphere on the trail to solidify male-female relationships as strategic mechanisms of survival. Women intensify their performance as caregivers, for both their male companions and the children they travel with. Moreover, women explain how they utilize gendered performances to combat and overcome sexual assault, while also describing why they engage in sex-work. Lastly, although women biologically struggle to thrive in such a physically demanding space, they have adapted their gendered performances to survive the journey. This is done through formulating strong connections with other female migrants, in addition to navigating the harsh realities of the journey through religion and metaphors.

The end of the second empirical chapter includes an interview with a Guatemalan woman who migrated to the United States in 2018. I explained the complicated relationship between adhering to gendered responsibilities and utilizing gendered performances within the realm of migrant motherhood. I note that the woman utilized both of these social phenomena to reunite her family.

Through a discussion of my findings, I conclude that gender norms always constrain women on the migrant trail. However, a nuanced approach to understanding the female migrant experience makes clear that women are able to act with agency on the trek, by navigating the gender constraints placed upon them. This form of patriarchal bargaining is extremely present in the isolated undocumented migrant journey, but also within the greater international community as women conform to various gender constructs to achieve what they want.

**Implications of the Thesis and Potential Future Research**

 The implications of this investigation expand into two critical areas: a contemporary analysis on the perception of female gender roles, and a nuanced investigation of the migration experience from Latin America to the United States.

1. **Female Gender Roles on the Migrant Trail and Beyond**

Women act in accordance with gender norms to ensure their safety and protection on the undocumented migrant trail. However, fulfilling gender norms and utilizing gendered performances extends beyond the undocumented migrant experience. The social construct of gender influences every aspect of life, both consciously and subconsciously. Gender transcends other social phenomena such as race, class or ethnicity, as female roles are more or less the same across distinct cultures. Therefore, it is critical to examine how women navigate the universal gender constraints placed upon and demonstrate how they have agency and power in a patriarchal society.

Further research should investigate the future of traditional gender roles in the 21st century. While they are still prevalent within society, modern assumptions note that traditional gender stereotypes are losing their strength. For example, women are encouraged to enter the workforce, receive an education, and remain in the public sphere rather than the domestic sphere like never before. However, they are constrained to fulfill their domestic roles, such as cooking, cleaning, and childbearing on top of their other non-gendered responsibilities. We must analyze the burdensome effects of this phenomenon and find alternative ways if we want to deconstruct traditional gendered roles than just increasing the female workload.

If I could conduct further research, I would rely more so on interviews with migrant women. While this is what I originally wanted to do, I was restricted by the timeline of my undergraduate status. If I could conduct this research over more than a year, I would have more time and resources to find women who could share their stories.

1. **Humanizing the Undocumented Migrant Trail**

The undocumented migrant trail is one of the most interesting liminal spaces of the modern world. Internally, individuals are so desperate to escape the violence and terror in their home countries and externally, the receiving country is so worried about the incorporation of migrants into society, that people skip over the physical portion of the migration experience.

Humanizing the migration process, however, adds another layer of complexity to this political phenomenon in the United States. Within the interview I conducted, a repeated theme was how the Guatemalan woman, and her daughter were separated due to the Trump Administration. At the mercy of the United States Department of Homeland Security, it is easy to dehumanize migrants. This thesis demonstrates the power in recognizing the stories behind the faces of migrants. Acknowledging their hardships dilutes their position as political pawns.

Future research should emphasize the wide-ranging factors that are embedded in humanity. All subjects should be humanized in the world's most contentious debates. From hearing stories of enemies on the Congress floor, to listening to the experiences of others at the UN. Security Council meetings, empathizing with the opponent will foster the necessary understanding the international system lacks.

**Appendix**

Transcript of Interview with Guatemalan Woman:

“Cuando me agarró migración en Mcallen Texas, fue cuando me agarró la policía junto a mi nena.

Me llevaron a una perrera o hielera que le llama a un lugar peligroso porque te meten a un como cuarto congelado prácticamente. Demasiado hielo.

Si las personas están tiradas en el piso. Me tuvieron con una aproximación de unas 8 a 10 horas. Y de ahí, fue, me separaron de la nena. Y no supe de ella.

Y ahí me mandaron a otra detención que le llaman perrera es un sobrenombre, creo que. Ya te llevan como un tipo de jaulas. Me tienen igualados por unas cantidades de 5 a 6 personas por las jaulas. Desde ahí, yo ya no supe nada de la nena durante como 20 días

Esa perrera de igual manera te tienes durmiendo en el suelo solo con un pedazo. Pedazo de cómo está el aluminio más o menos. Para que el disquete te cubra del frío, pero no te cubre nada. Ah, porque está durmiendo en el puro piso. Estuvimos cuatro días en ese lugar.

(en el mismo lugar) Me tenían como tipo engañada porque yo les preguntaba por la nena, y todo y no me daban información. Y bueno, gracias a dios, aunque sea te he dado un juguito, unas galletitas y pan con jamón.

De ahí me sacaron con un delincuente o lo peor que un delincuente tal vez. Te pone en graves cadenas de los pies, la cintura y las manos. Quiero hablar con un juez. Para que el juez no diera el perdón, y todo el rollo de ahí me dijeron no. Saliendo del no solo me había dicho Violeta que esté saliendo con el juez que ella me iba a encontrar con mi hija.

Y que ella iba a quedar libre o depende lo que quiera migración va, pero todo fue una mentira porque ya de ahí me sacaron de ahí nos tenían a todos. Me subieron a unas camionetas como con rejas. También, pero nos engañó el oficial porque dijo que iban a reunirnos con nuestros hijos. Pero, era una mentira y la distancia bien retirada.

Llegamos a un mal área donde, y en todo ese el proceso del camino íbamos con el pánico todas porque encima nadie sabía a dónde nos llevaban, o sea, decíamos nosotros. Hasta matarnos no podían llevar porque no sabía. Ni el policía nos decía. Empezamos a gritar que a donde nos llevaba, y dijo no van a llegar pero que si al llegarnos a ese lugar. Pero la cárcel en McAllen Texas se llama Santi Isabela.

En esa cárcel fue lo peor también porque había personas peligrosas. Pues yo lo único delito que cometí fue entrar ilegal al país, cruzar el río. Era mi único delito que, según yo, ya le había pedido perdón al juez. Pero no porque como haz de cuento que en esa época fue cuando estaba gobernado por Trump. El le daba la autorización; donde separan a las madres de sus hijos. Creo que todavía hay muchos casos donde hay madres, incluso guatemaltecos, que ya no encontraron a sus hijos

En esa cárcel, ya por los menos teníamos una colchoneta para dormir y una sábana. Pues por lo menos, ya le daban comida a 1 aunque sea sus 3 tiempos. Pero no tenía derechos a nada. Entonces, fue un trauma hasta la fecha. Este escalofrío se me da porque saber que tu hija no estaba contigo. A ver que no sabía ni el motivo ni donde la tenían. Gracias a Dios como 15 días tenía que estar en esa cárcel.

Quedaron como unos en embajadores, y una muchacha mexicana salió hacia las oficinas de abogados. Ella fue la que escuchó el rumor de que sus embajadores. Les piden ayuda porque si no aquí no las van a sacar nunca de verdad. Se lo que hacían cuando llegaban así embajadores ayudando a las personas, así como nosotros que nuestros hijos separados.

Ella nos acaba al patio y como que escondiéndonos para que ellos. Mirarán las cárceles vacías. Entonces cuando la visita pasaba a los embajadores y todo o sea que están pasitos. No tienen aquí a nadie.

Ella ya no saldría del vertido nos sacaron hacia abajo hacia afuera de la cárcel. Estaba todo como tapado la malla tenían. Pero hasta si tu te acostabas así en el piso. Lograbas ver aunque sea los pies de las personas que venían por el vacío. Me acosté al piso, vi que venían todos los y me imaginé que era. Tan así gente elegante, pues de gobierno, bonito verdad.

Y les dije ahí viene la vista le dije yo como hacían las porque estaba la pueda. La policía está en la entrada de la habitación. Yo les dije que fui al baño que me dolía el estómago, y legalmente fue mentira pues fue mi única manera para poder pedir ayuda. Y me dijo que no podía y le dije, pues me hago acá, le dije yo no aguanto y me digo okay, dijo y otra también. Dije que yo de Guatemala, la indígena ella también me dijo que yo no tengo hijos, pero te voy a apoyar.  Cabal por el vidrio había un vidrio así cuando se miraba pasar la visita, y yo solo quise que entrara al baño, pero con la misma salí y donde ellos iban pasando yo les empecé a hacer las manos, así como que ayuda, pero todos donde me vieron porque daban grabaciones. La policía quería castigar porque yo había hecho eso, pero entonces ya no tuve otra opción. Después de tiempo y muchas entrevistas con embajadores, gracias a dios ellos lograron contactar donde estaba mi nena. Ella estaba en un albergue, y ella estaba estudiando. Y por medio del albergue ellos.

Yo tuve la oportunidad de llamar a mi nena, y me dijo. “Hola mami, estoy bien”

Fue por medio de los embajadores cuando empezaron a enjuiciar a Trump. Aunque si no nos liberaba no iban. Los embajadores tienen mucha responsabilidad.

En este país que tiene muchos ángeles que lo ayudan. Me estaba esperando afuera de una iglesia católica que ellos le habían ido a traer al albergue. Recibí mucha ayuda de la iglesia católica, aplicó llame a varón a un hotel me tuvieron ya hasta que se podían contactar con las personas que me iban ayudar. A ayudar acá a recibirme.

La verdad porque yo legalmente no, no venía ni con familia. Es dura, porque se sufre mucho en el camino y como le dije cuándo va a la corte a la juez. Cantar de por qué me había arriesgado tanto y le dije

Si en realidad, mi vida no hubiera corrido en Guatemala le dije tú crees que

Hubiera preferido venir acá y dejar a mis demás hijos solos (crying starts here). Es duro tener su familia unida de tanto tiempo de verdad y de la noche a la mañana separarse. No es nada fácil.

Hay muchos motivos para venir, pero mi motivo es guardar mi vida. Y que la nena, no fuera a correr el mismo riesgo que yo corrí en mi país, verdad, entonces. Es duro.

Gracias a Dios por la iglesia católica en este viaje. La iglesia conecta personas detenidas en cárceles con muchos recursos, como teléfonos, hoteles, abogados”.

**References**

Amnesty International. “Most Dangerous Journey: What Central American Migrants Face When They Try to Cross the Border.” *Amnesty International USA*, 20 Feb. 2014, https://www.amnestyusa.org/updates/most-dangerous-journey-what-central-american-migrants-face-when-they-try-to-cross-the-border/. Accessed 26 Oct 2023

Arnold, Jeff. “Migrants' journey to US-Mexico border is costly one.” *NewsNation*, 11 March 2024, https://www.newsnationnow.com/us-news/immigration/border-coverage/cost-of-crossing-the-border/. Accessed 30 March 2024.

Avalos, Suchit Chavez, Jessica. “The Northern Triangle: The Countries That Don’t Cry for Their Dead.” *Insight Crime*, 27 Mar. 2017, http://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/the-northern-triangle-the-countries-that-dont-cry-for-their-dead/. Accessed 23 October 2023

  Blunt, Gwilym David. *Illegal Immigration as Resistance to Global Poverty Raisons* Politiques, 2018, *Cairn. Info*, www.cairn.info/revue-raisons-politiques-2018-1-page-83.htm. Accessed 27 Sep 2023

Bolter, Jessica et al. “Four Years of Profound Change: Immigration Policy during the Trump Presidency.” *Migrationpolicy.Org*, 25 Jan. 2022, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/four-years-change-immigration-trump. Accessed 9 Dec 2023.

CNN. *(Part 2) The Trek: A Migrant Trail to America | The Whole Story with Anderson Cooper*. CNN, 2023. *Youtube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bajAnuQvFBk&t=425s. Accessed 8 March 2024.

CNN. *(Part 4) The Trek: A Migrant Trail to America | The Whole Story with Anderson Cooper*. CNN, 2023. *Youtube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bajAnuQvFBk&t=425s. Accessed 8 March 2024.

De, Leon, Jason. *The Land of Open Graves : Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*, University of California Press, 2015. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucb/detail.action?docID=2025610. Accessed 8 Feb 2024.

De León, Jason. “Undocumented Migration, Use Wear, and the Materiality of Habitual Suffering in the Sonoran Desert.” *Journal of Material Culture*, vol. 18, no. 4, Dec. 2013, pp. 321–45. *SAGE Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183513496489, Accessed 2 Oct 2023

DeSouza, Eros R., et al. “A Latin American Perspective on the Study of Gender.” *Praeger Guide to the Psychology of Gender*, Praeger Publishers/Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004, pp. 41–67. Accessed 3 Oct 2023

Doctors Without Borders. “Drawing the journey: Migrants share stories from the road through Central America.” *Doctors Without Borders*, 22 December 2022, https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/drawing-journey-migrants-share-stories-road-through-central-america. Accessed 30 March 2024.

Doering-White, John. “*Que Mamada! (What a Joke!): Humor, Hostility and Hospitality along the Central American Migrant Trail*.” *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 2021, anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jlca.12546. Accessed 26 Sep 2023

Donato, Katharine M., et al. “A Glass Half Full? Gender in Migration Studies.” *The International Migration Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2006, pp. 3–26. Accessed 24 Oct 23.

Donato, Katharine M. “U.S. Migration from Latin America: Gendered Patterns and Shifts.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 630, no. 1, July 2010, pp. 78–92. *SAGE Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716210368104 Accessed 24 Oct 2023

Donvan, John et al. “Inside the Hidden World of Immigrant Smuggling.” *NPR*, 19 Apr. 2012. *NPR*, 19 April 2012 https://www.npr.org/2012/04/19/150973748/inside-the-hidden-world-of-immigrant-smuggling. Accessed 9 Dec 2023

Gomez Santamaria, Arturo. *Politics Without Borders or Postmodern Nationality: Mexican Immigration to the United States* Sage Journals, March 2003 https://journals-sagepub-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/doi/epdf/10.1177/0094582X02250628 Accessed on 24 Oct 2023

González, Arias, Adriana, Olga, Aikin Araluce. “Migración de tránsito por la ruta del occidente de México: actores, riesgos y perfiles de vulnerabilidad.” *Migración y desarrollo*, vol. 13, no. 24, 2015, pp. 81–115. Accessed 24 Oct 2023

Grande, Reyna. *The Distance Between Us*. New York, Washington Square Press, 2012. Accessed 29 Sept, 2024

Groody, Daniel G. “Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant: A Spiritual Geography of a Crucified People.” *Theological Studies*, vol. 70, no. 2, May 2009, pp. 298–316. *SAGE Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390907000204. Accessed 16 Oct 2023

Hagan, Jacqueline. “Making Theological Sense of the Migration Journey from Latin America: Catholic, Protestant, and Interfaith Perspectives.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 49, no. 11, July 2006, pp. 1554–73. *SAGE Journals*, [https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764206289361. Accessed 26 Sep 2023](https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764206289361.%20Accessed%2026%20Sep%202023)

Hentschel, Tanja, et al. “The Multiple Dimensions of Gender Stereotypes: A current Look at Men's and Women's Characterization of Others and Themselves.” *Frontiers Psychology*, vol. 10, 2019. *frontiersin.org*, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00011. Accessed 30 March 2024.

Ibarra María de la Luz. “Buscando La Vida: Mexican Immigrant Women’s Memories of Home, Yearning, and Border Crossings.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2/3, 2003, pp. 261–81. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3347362. Accessed 27 Sep 2023.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. “Bargaining with Patriarchy.” *Gender and Society*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1988, pp. 274–90. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/190357. Accessed 31 Mar. 2024.

Llácer, Alicia, et al. “The Contribution of a Gender Perspective to the Understanding of Migrants’ Health.” *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Dec. 2007, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2465778/. Accessed 27 Sep. 2023

Martinez, Oscar. *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail* 2023 https://canvas.colorado.edu/courses/96402/pages/week-14-readings?module\_item\_id=4728332 Accessed 27 Nov 2023.

McMinn, Sean and Klahr, Renee “Where Does Illegal Immigration Mostly Occur? Here’s What the Data Tell Us.” *NPR*, 10 Jan. 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/01/10/683662691/where-does-illegal-immigration-mostly-occur-heres-what-the-data-tell-us. Accessed 9 Dec 2023.

Minian, Ana Raquel. *Undocumented Lives: The Untold Story of Mexican Migration*. https://eds-p-ebscohost-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/eds/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=2d444371-0d65-45f9-bbb0-e509bd796d65%40redis&vid=0&format=EB. Accessed 12 Dec. 2023.

Moore, John, et al. *Undocumented: Immigration and the Militarization of the United States-Mexico Border*. First edition. powerHouse Books, 2018. Accessed 19 Sep. 2023.

Ochoa O'Leary, Ana. “In the Footsteps of Spirits: Migrant Women's Testimonies in a Time of Heightened Border Enforcement.” *Human Rights Along the US Mexico Border: Gender Violence and Insecurity*, The University of Arizona Press, 2009, pp. 85-104. *JSTOR*, https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.2307/j.ctv2vt02s6. Accessed 22 Feb 2024.

Pedraza, Silvia. “Women and Migration: The Social Consequences of Gender.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 17, 1991, pp. 303–25. Accessed on 2 Oct 2023

Pescatello, Ann. *Female and Male in Latin America: Essays*. Feffer and Simons.

Reuters. *The Darién Gap, a Deadly Place for Migrants, Appeals to Tourists*. 24 July 2023 https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/darien-gap-dangerous-migrants-tourists-rcna95925. Accessed 12 Dec. 2023.

Salih, Sara. “On Judith Butler and Performativity.” *Judith Butler*, Routledge, 2002, pp. 55-68. *citeseerx.ist.psu.edu*, https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=a3e78728e9292baa6289c258a8667e0452c82f68. Accessed 30 March 2024.

Salisbury, Shari. *LibGuides: Emigration, Immigration & Migration: Getting Started*. https://libguides.utsa.edu/c.php?g=515536&p=3524194. Accessed 12 Dec. 2023.

Schmidt, Leigh Anne, and Stephanie Buechler. *“‘I Risk Everything Because I Have Already Lost Everything’: Central American Female Migrants Speak out on the Migrant Trail in Oaxaca, Mexico.”* Journal of Latin American Geography, University of Texas Press, 4 Apr. 2017, muse.jhu.edu/article/653101. Accessed on Sep. 26, 2023

Schrover, Marlou, et al., editors. *Illegal Migration and Gender in a Global and Historical Perspective*. Amsterdam University Press, 2008. *JSTOR*, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46mwss. Accessed 27 Sep. 2023](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46mwss.%20Accessed%2027%20Sep.%202023).

Stewart, Rebecca, et al. “Gendered stereotypes and norms: A systematic review of interventions designed to shift attitudes and behaviour.” *National Library of Medicine*, 2021. *NIH*, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8066375/. Accessed 30 March 2024.

Thelen, David. “Mexico, the Latin North American Nation: A Conversation with Carlos Rico Ferrat.” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 86, no. 2, 1999, pp. 467–80. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2567041. Accessed 13 Dec. 2023.

Vogt, Wendy A. “Crossing Mexico: Structural Violence and the Commodification of Undocumented Central American Migrants.” *American Ethnologist*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2013, pp. 764–80. *Wiley Online Library*, [https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12053 Accessed 24 Oct 2023](https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12053%20Accessed%2024%20Oct%202023)

Vogt, Wendy A. *Lives in Transit: Violence and Intimacy on the Migrant Journey*. University of California Press, 2018,<https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520298545.001.0001>. Accessed 28 Jan 2024

Ward, Nicole and Batalova Jeanne. “Central American Immigrants in the United States.” *Migrationpolicy.Org*, 9 May 2023, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states-2021. Accessed 8 Dec. 2023.

 Ward, Nicole and Batalova Jeanne. “Refugees and Asylees in the United States.” *Migrationpolicy.Org*, 13 June 2023, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states. Accessed 8 Dec. 2023.

Wardarski, Jessie. *Along the Route North, Shelter Operators Heed Calling to Aid Migrants | Chiapas: State of Revolution*. 25 Sep. 2014 https://cronkite.asu.edu/projects/buffett/chiapas/on-long-journey-to-the-states-migrants-find-brief-solace-in-shelter/. Accessed 12 Dec. 2023.