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# Migrant Youth in Mexico's Agroindustry: An Ethnography of Aspirations, Social Reproduction, and Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Andrea Suh

2018

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# ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

## Migrant Youth in Mexico's Agroindustry: An Ethnography of Aspirations, Social Reproduction, and Education

by

Andrea Suh

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Edith S. Omwami, Co-Chair

Professor Teresa L. McCarty, Co-Chair

The rapid evolution of globalization and neoliberal economic policies has resulted in U.S. agro-corporations exporting their operations south of the border to Mexico in order to benefit from cheaper land and labor. While working families previously cyclically migrated during harvest seasons, many have been able to permanently settle in the San Quintín Valley due to the year-round demand of labor in the region over the past two decades (Zlolniski, 2011). Consequently, migrant youth have increasingly had the opportunity to attend formal schools in the San Quintín Valley without repeated disruptions in their school attendance (Evaristo, 2006). However, despite increased school opportunities, many migrant youth continue to work in the fields alongside their parents. While migrant families widely acknowledge that formal education is crucial to accessing higher paying jobs and improved living standards, a critical question arises: Why do migrant youth continue to work despite increased educational opportunities?

Accordingly, this study examines the schooling and working experiences of migrant youth to illuminate how neoliberal economic policies and globalization processes have shaped their lived realities; particularly their educational experiences and perceptions of life trajectories.

My study explored shifting aspirations in school and work settings among migrant youth working for agro-corporations in the San Quintín Valley by employing ethnographic methods. While this study is based on six months of fieldwork, I also draw upon previous interactions with the community built upon sixteen years of close relationships and active involvement in a local elementary school. Through participant observations, in-depth interviews and semi-structured activities, I focused on the narratives of local youth describing their working and schooling experiences in the community. My fieldwork was guided by three research questions: 1) How does the labor market in the community affect study youth's schooling experiences? 2) How do youth's relationships within their social networks shape their aspirations? 3) What is the relationship between youth's aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories?

The findings of my study reveal the ways in which the restricted labor market, close proximity to the United States and presence of gangs in the community shaped the perceptions of life trajectories, particularly aspirations, amongst migrant youth in San Telmo. While most youth acknowledged that formal schooling is a critical means to accessing higher wages and living standards, the restricted labor market in the community provided little motivation for them to continue their schooling beyond primary school. Consequently, the aspirations of youth in this study varied from moving to the United States for higher wages to gaining respect in the community through involvement in local gangs. Despite my study participants' attempts to resist their structural constraints through differing aspirations, the limits of such resistance is evident as many of them ended up working for agro-corporations only a year after my study.

The dissertation of Andrea Suh is approved.

Philippe Bourgois

Carola Suárez-Orozco

Edith S. Omwami, Committee Co-Chair

Teresa L. McCarty, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

# DEDICATION PAGE

This dissertation is dedicated to the children and youth in the beautiful community of San Telmo. May your stories and voices be heard. Your courage to live, dream and love has given me the strength to have hope for changes that will come to this community in the years to come.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION ........ ii

DEDICATION PAGE ........ v

LIST OF FIGURES ........ ix

LIST OF TABLES ........ x

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........ xi

VITA ........ xiv

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: MY JOURNEY TO THIS PROJECT ........ 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT ........ 6
PROJECT PURPOSE ........ 9
    Research Questions ........ 10
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EXPERIENCES OF MIGRANT YOUTH IN THE SAN QUINTÍN VALLEY ........ 10
DISSERTATION STRUCTURE ........ 13

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ........ 18

CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ........ 19
    The Global Fresh Produce Industry ........ 20
    Neoliberal Economic Policies in the San Quintín Valley from 1980's-Present ........ 21
    Impact on Migrant Farmers Livelihoods ........ 22
    Tensions Between Growers and Farmers ........ 24
    Educational Experiences of Migrant Children ........ 25
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ........ 27
    Contemporary Studies of Social Reproduction in Education ........ 28
    Deterministic Conceptions of Social Reproduction ........ 30
    Social Reproduction – Structural Constraints, Agency and Resistance ........ 31
    Social Reproduction in the San Quintín Valley ........ 30
CHAPTER SUMMARY ........ 38

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS ........ 39

WHAT IS CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY? ........ 40
    Positionality ........ 42
    Power and Representation ........ 44
OVERVIEW OF PROJECT ........ 46
    Explanation of Research Questions ........ 46
    Research Site and Study Participants ........ 47
        Research Site ........ 46
        Study Participants ........ 47
    Overview of Methods ........ 50

Language Concerns ........ 50
Informal Interviews ........ 50
Group Interviews ........ 51
Participant-Observations ........ 52
Structured Activities ........ 55
Fieldnotes as a Reflexive Tool ........ 56
Data Analysis ........ 58
Ongoing, On-site Analysis ........ 57
Member Checks of Preliminary Findings ........ 58
Interview Transcription ........ 58
Second-Round of Data Analysis ........ 59
CHAPTER SUMMARY ........ 61

CHAPTER 4: WHY GO TO SCHOOL? ........ 62

THE PARADOX ........ 62
OBSTACLES TO SCHOOLING ........ 67
Costs of Education ........ 68
Birth Certificate Documentation ........ 71
Limited Access to Information ........ 74
Prospera ........ 74
Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas ........ 75
Family Obligations ........ 79
SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES ........ 83
“Teachers Always Nag at Me” ........ 84
“Not for Someone Like Me” ........ 86
THE INESCAPABLE DICHOTOMY: SCHOOL OR FIELDS ........ 88
CHAPTER SUMMARY ........ 90

CHAPTER 5: "THE FIELDS" ........ 91

“TRABAJO” – WORK ........ 91
First Day in The Fields ........ 92
"Money, Money, Money!" ........ 92
"Sufrimineto" *[Suffering]* ........ 94
Working Conditions ........ 100
Typical Day ........ 104
"Cansado" [*Tiring*] ........ 105
“NO HAY NADA” – THERE’S NOTHING HERE ........ 109
The Labor Market in San Telmo ........ 111
Impact of Child Labor on Educational Opportunities ........ 113
“Carrera” vs. “Trabajo” ........ 115
ASPIRATIONS – “ALWAYS IN THE SAME PLACE” ........ 118
CHAPTER SUMMARY ........ 122

CHAPTER 6: THE AMERICAN DREAM ........ 124

CROSSING THE BORDER – “IT’S RIGHT THERE!” ........ 125
MOTIVATIONS TO WORK IN THE UNITED STATES ........ 130
Higher Wages ........ 131
“Necesidades” – The Necessities ........ 133

  Material Aspirations – *"Get Rich, Go Home"*......135
    Own Land and Build a Home......135
    Purchase iPhone or "S"......136

OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS VS. MATERIAL ASPIRATIONS......142
SHIFTING ASPIRATIONS – SOCIAL REPRODUCTION AND RESISTANCE IN SAN TELMO......144
CHAPTER SUMMARY......146

CHAPTER 7: DRUGS, GANGS AND RESPECT......148

"LAS CALLES" – THE STREETS......149
GANG CULTURE – BELONGING, RAP AND RESPECT......151
ASPIRATIONS – "DON'T THINK ABOUT YOUR FUTURE. LIVE IN THE PRESENT."......170
CHAPTER SUMMARY......174

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION - "ECHELE GANAS"......175

EPILOGUE......176
CONFRONTING THE LIMITS OF RESISTANCE – STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS, AGENCY AND SUFFERING......180
IMPLICATIONS......185
  Human Rights Violations – Right to Education......185
  Labor Exploitation and Worker's Rights......187
CONCLUSION......188

APPENDICES......190

APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES DURING FIELDWORK......190
APPENDIX B: STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES FOR ENGLISH CLASS WITH STUDENTS......191

Works Cited......193

# LIST OF FIGURES

*Figure 1.1* Photo of the Transpeninsular Highway ........ 1

*Figure 1.2* Photo of neighbor's house ........ 3

*Figure 4.1* Photo of playground at Hope Elementary School ........ 63

*Figure 4.2* Photo of local soccer field ........ 64

*Figure 4.3* Photo of classroom at Hope Elementary School ........ 64

*Figure 4.5* Photo of parents waiting to speak to government officials ........ 77

*Figure 5.1* Photo of Belinda making tortillas on metal press ........ 80

*Figure 5.1* Photo of Photo of the fields in San Telmo off Transpeninsular Highway ........ 91

*Figure 5.2* Photo of Araceli's hands stained green from working ........ 96

*Figure 5.3* Photo of San Telmo ........ 108

*Figure 5.5* Photo of the San Quintín Valley ........ 110

*Figure 6.1* Photo of student's activity (favorite place to go) ........ 125

*Figure 6.1* Photo of student's activity (childhood aspiration) ........ 141

*Figure 7.1* Photo of Juan's redecorated shirt with marijuana leaves ........ 151

*Figure 7.2* Photo of rap lyrics written by Martín's older sister ........ 161

*Figure 7.3* Photo of Los Callejeros ........ 162

*Figure 7.4* Photo of Martín clothing representing his gang ........ 164

# LIST OF TABLES

*Table 3.1* Description of Study Participants........................................................................48

# AKNOLWEDGEMENTS

I have received an overwhelming amount of support and encouragement during the process of research and writing this dissertation. Most importantly, I would like to thank the youth and families of San Telmo who have generously welcomed me into their homes and life events since my childhood and more recently during my fieldwork in the community. I never imagined that my childhood experiences in their homes would continuously shape my life passions for education and social justice. I want to especially thank the Soñadores, Callejeros and Guanajuato Sisters who trusted me with their personal narratives and moments of vulnerability. Arthur and James, whose real names cannot be used, were also two friends who provided invaluable support as they provided honest insight and guidance for my writing and thinking process. I am indebted to their willingness to walk with me through this journey, which was built upon over ten years of friendship. I also want to acknowledge the support of the School Director, students and families at Hope Elementary School who helped shape the purpose and direction of this project through their insight and personal experiences in the community.

My research and the writing of this dissertation have been made possible by several communities at UCLA. I would first like to thank my Co-Chairs Dr. Edith Omwami and Dr. Teresa McCarty for your continuous guidance and support during my journey at UCLA. Your countless hours of discussion and feedback have shaped the trajectory of my study. Most importantly, your personal care for me has enabled me to pursue my passions for education and the community of San Telmo. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee members Suárez-Orozco and Philippe Bourgois who have both uniquely contributed to my project with their expertise and insights in qualitative research, youth and social justice. I would also like to acknowledge the support of Carleen Velez and Janet Goodwin in the Writing Programs

Department at UCLA who have given me countless opportunities to grow professionally in my experiences as an educator and academic mentor for my students.

I would like to thank my family who has always supported me since I embarked on this journey at UCLA to write about the beautiful community of San Telmo. I want to thank my parents who started taking me to San Telmo since I was twelve years old to help the community in whatever ways we can. These experiences have forever changed my life. They introduced me to the realities of social inequality in impoverished communities and amongst the hurting from a young age. They have exemplified what it means to live out lives dedicated to serving and loving others. My brother, David, has also served as an invaluable source of inspiration through the years as he has believed in me and also taken an active role to uplift underserved communities through education. Through the years, my family has played an active role in helping me through the research and writing process of my dissertation and they have helped me to stay focused and process my research findings and understanding of the narratives of the youth in San Telmo.

There is no doubt that I would not have finished this dissertation without the loving support of my husband, William, who has walked with me side by side through this entire journey. We both moved to San Telmo together to carry out my project not knowing what to expect. During my fieldwork, he sat with me through interviews, participated in school and community events and spent every waking moment with the youth on the streets. He stayed up with me as I wrote out my fieldnotes and processed all the details with him. Unexpectedly, our time in San Telmo changed our entire life trajectories as we both felt the need to live our lives dedicated to serving the hurting and broken in this world. Deep into my writing process, he acted as my soundboard and commented on my research findings. At 38 weeks pregnant, I was able to complete my dissertation because of his unwavering support. I am forever grateful for his love and companionship.

Finally, I want to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He has given me wisdom, guidance and strength to persevere throughout this memorable journey. He has opened the door for me to love and serve the families of San Telmo. I will forever be grateful to be a part of the love story He is writing in this community. May He receive all the glory, honor and praise.

# VITA

| | |
|---|---|
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## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Suh, A. (2013, April). *Unequal Educational Access for the Rural Poor in Baja California.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of Comparative International Education Society's Western Regional Conference, Los Angeles, CA.

Suh, A. (2013, April). *Migrant Children Working for Agro-Corporations in Mexico: Labor, Education and Exploitation.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of Comparative International Education Society's Western Regional Conference, Los Angeles, CA.

Suh, A. (2016, May). *Migrant Children Working for Agro-Corporations in Mexico: Labor, Education and Exploitation.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of International Institute Graduate Student Conference, University of California, Los Angeles.

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION: MY JOURNEY TO THIS PROJECT

I begin this chapter with the premise that ethnographic research is always carried out from a particular lens. My project employed critical ethnographic methods with the hope that my research would avoid neutral description and instead bear knowledge that will result in meaningful social change. Accordingly, positionality is critical because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround the participants in our study (Madison, 2005). My personal experiences and beliefs inevitably influence my research aims, approaches and outcomes. As a researcher, it is necessary for me to critically reflect on the impact of my positionality on my project. As my study is viewed through my lens, I begin this chapter by sharing my personal story and journey to the project.

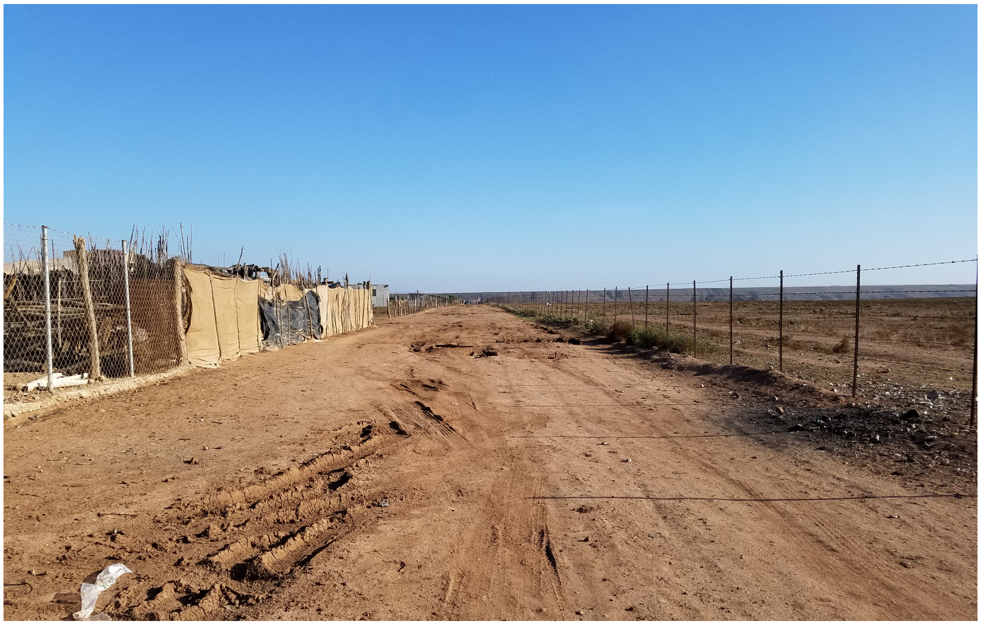

*Figure 1.1* One of the main roads off the Transpeninsular Highway leading into the community.

My positionality as a researcher is shaped by my family upbringing and the many privileges that I hold growing up in the United States. My mother and father both migrated from South Korea a few years after the Korean War ended in 1953. As an immigrant family, my parents strongly emphasized family values and education. Both of my parents became Christians as young adults and consequently raised our family with Christian beliefs. As a child, I grew up in the suburbs of San Diego in a relatively safe community. I have been privileged to grow up in a home with running water, electricity and quality public schools that were accessible in my neighborhood. My mother worked several jobs to ensure that we were able to afford rent to attend quality public schools with the end-goal of sending me to college. My father was a missionary throughout my entire life. His passionate desire to help people and build schools and health clinics in Latin America undoubtedly shaped my childhood experiences, which were filled with international travels that deeply influenced my aspirations and research journey.

Since I was 10 years old, my summers were spent in a small quaint community called San Telmo, Mexico in the larger region of the San Quintín Valley. The first time that I came into contact with this community was when my father took me along with our church to visit for a few days. Although this community is called Heroés de Chapultapec on official maps, many of the locals call their community San Telmo. To this day, I am not sure why, but it is the name that I too have adopted for this community. While most of the community is farmers, some own small businesses with household items that are directly housed in their own four-walled wooden homes. One of the complaints that residents often voice is the lack of green scenery and water in the community. San Telmo can be characterized for its brown dirt roads and frequent dust clouds that create a tan hue on the walls and roofs of any structure in the community, whether is it a cardboard home or four-walled wooden *tienda* [store]. Over the past decade, electricity has become more common in this community; many families even have cable television in their homes. One thing that has not changed however, is the lack of access to running water and quality drinking water. Families store water in underground wells that often accumulate dirt on the bottom. Residents in the community purchase water from a truck that drives around charging anywhere from $20-30 to fill their wells a few times a month.

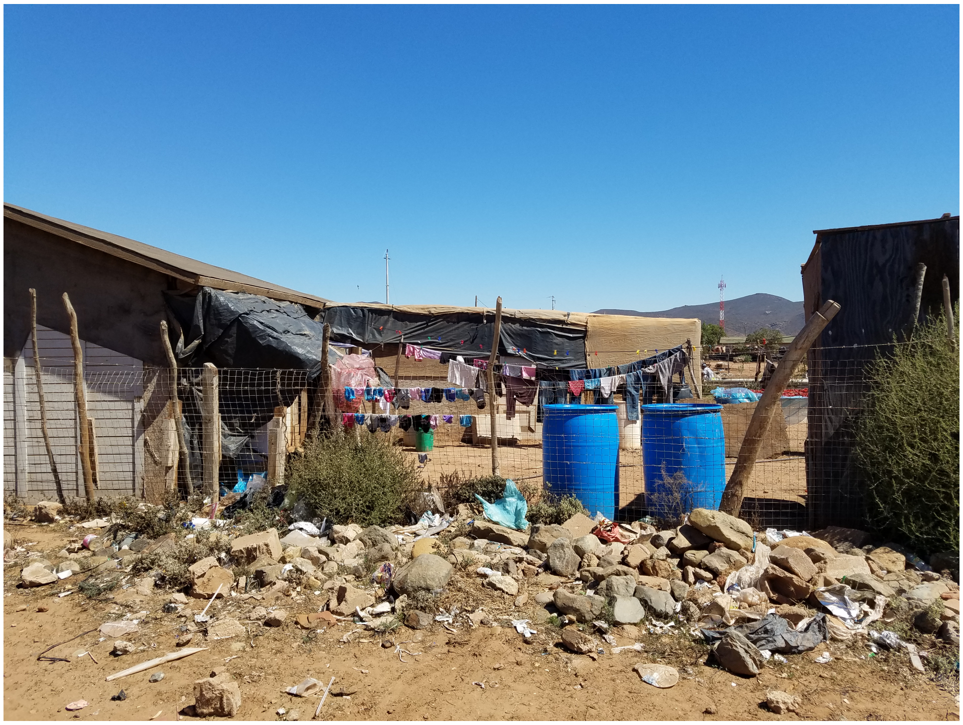

*Figure 1.2* My neighbor, Belinda's house near where I was residing during my fieldwork.

Most of the community members are farmers working for growers of multinational agro-corporations. As a young child, I recall both adults and young adolescents slowly gathering on the corners of the main dirt road at the crack of dawn. Many of them appeared with masks over their faces, gloves in their back pockets, and hats on their heads. Slowly, the noises of buses would get louder as dust clouds slowly form. The buses would stop in front of the group of workers; and one by one, the migrant workers would mount the buses to travel to the fields. Workers usually returned to the community in the late afternoon. Children and family members, who are not working, would wait outside their homes to welcome them. I would see families socializing with each other in the form of drinking, cooking, and eating, and finally sleeping after sundown. The routine repeats itself every day until Sunday, which is their only day off during the week. Sundays are when the San Telmo is significantly noisier than all the other days of the week. Families are seen going to the local market, children are seen helping their parents with chores, and children are playing with each other in the streets. Most of my time spent with local neighbors took place on Sunday afternoons when children were playing outside and families were more relaxed than any other day of the week.

As a privileged child growing up in the United States, my understanding was that every family had a home, a school and enough to eat every day. My summers spent in San Telmo opened my eyes to the reality that the world I live in is not quite like that. Every trip across the border was unforgettable and moving. Every time that we visited, I remember seeing children running out from their homes, many without clothes and shoes. We would spend hours playing on the dirt roads imagining and laughing. Their mischievous smiles always conveyed an unrestrained outlook on life. We often talked about what we wanted to be when we grow up. These aspirations were what ended up bringing us together as we created our own *imagined* community with some of us as cops, others as doctors and myself as a teacher. I would always leave the community asking my parents when we were going to return, only to go back every summer to find that many of the children that I grew fond of were no longer residing in the community. I would go around asking neighbors and storeowners to where my friends disappeared. With an untroubled expression, many would simply point to the dirt road and say *trabajo* [work].

Over the next few years, I occasionally ran into some of the children that I spent my summers with. To my surprise, they were clothed with working gloves, caps and handkerchiefs over their faces. Their attitudes conveyed a different set of emotions from the last time that I saw them – one of indifference and apathy. I initially tried to laugh at our unplanned run-in and bring up some of the silly things that we used to laugh about, but their responses to my stories were often somber and reserved facial expressions. When asked if they are in school, they often pointed to their gloves in their back pocket on their jeans. A few would cautiously show me their calloused and cut hands that were stained green from picking strawberries and blueberries during the summer. They seemingly expected me to understand that they are *different* now – their lives are *different* now. In other instances, I met a few children who surprisingly continued to hold onto their hopes of becoming a teacher or physician to support their families. They hesitantly expressed an optimistic attitude towards school and their futures outside of the fields. Others voiced that although they are no longer in school due to their need to work, they are determined to return to school so that they do not have to work in the fields when they are older.

It was not until I took a college course on transnational corporations at UC Davis that I made the connection between "*trabajo*" (work) and the changing attitudes conveyed among the children that I use to play with in San Telmo. Many of the children that I spent my summers with were residing in San Telmo because their parents were working for agro-corporations such as a Driscoll's and Monsanto. When the harvest season was over, parents, along with their children, would move back to the south in search of other jobs. The transient nature of San Telmo can largely be attributed to the cyclic migration that is characteristic of many families working for agro-corporations. Over the years however, migrant families in the San Quintín Valley have been able to settle down due to the intensified demand for labor all year-round (Zlolniski, 2011). The settlement process has provided benefits for migrant families including increased access to consistent schooling and jobs. Consequently, I have been able to develop long-standing relationships with several migrant children and youth due to their settlement in the region. To my surprise however, I found that many migrant youth continue to work in the fields, drop out of school and more recently, engage in drugs and gang activity instead of attending school.

These diverging attitudes towards schooling continued to perplex me. From our childhood experiences, it was evident migrant youth understood that education is a powerful instrument to change their exploitative circumstances and possibly enable them to have a future outside of the fields that their parents have worked in for generations. Some of the questions that I have grappled with over the years are: What happens to migrant youth as they start working? Why do some youth continue to hope that they will achieve their aspirations while others continue to work in the fields? I grew increasingly disconcerted with the transformation of migrant youth from imaginative aspirers to somber workers who *appeared* to be indifferent about their futures. My hope was that my study would shed light on how the lived realities of working migrant youth are shaped by processes of globalization and neoliberalism. I particularly focused on the schooling and work settings of migrant youth to understand how they responded to and often resisted structural constraints in their everyday lives.

## Problem Statement

The rapid evolution of globalization and neoliberal economic policies has resulted in U.S. agro-corporations exporting their operations south of the border to Mexico in order to benefit from cheaper land and labor. In particular, San Quintín has risen to be the epicenter of agricultural exports to the United States (Zlolniski, 2011). In order to maintain a supply of cheap labor, agro-corporations have strategically recruited Indigenous families from southern states to work in their fields (Zabin & Hughes, 1995). Migrant farmers working for agro-corporations often suffer from exploitative living and working conditions that serve to reproduce their marginalization in a system of power that benefits *mestizo* (non-Indigenous) workers and local growers (Martinez Novo, 2004). Labor management and recruitment practices by growers in Baja California are structured to depend on family-based migration and settlement as a way to anchor their labor force (Zabin, 1997). While child labor laws are enforced in the United States, in Mexico young children form a significant part of the labor force (Stephen, 2001).

Although migrant families previously migrated cyclically during harvest seasons, many have been able to permanently settle in the San Quintín Valley due to the year-round demand of labor in the region over the past two decades (Zlolniski, 2011). Many families have expressed a sense of progress about their settlement experiences because they are able to send their build their own homes and work steadily (Coubés, Velasco, & Zlolniski, 2014). Consequently, migrant children have increasingly had the opportunity to attend formal schools in the San Quintín Valley without repeated disruptions in their school attendance due to the steady demands of labor in the region (Evaristo, 2006). However, despite increased school opportunities, many migrant youth continue to work in the fields alongside their parents (Evaristo, 2006). Drug use and gang violence are also widespread in the San Quintín Valley, and consequently impact youth who are exposed from younger ages. A recent study reported that adolescents who reported exposure to gang violence had significantly higher levels of education (Volkmann et al., 2013). Gangs in the community may be drawn to school settings, where residents with more years of education would subsequently experience an increased exposure to gangs (Volkmann et al., 2013).

While migrant families widely acknowledge that formal education is crucial to accessing higher paying jobs and improved living standards, a critical question arises: Why do migrant youth continue to work despite increased educational opportunities? Examining the schooling and working experiences of migrant youth can illuminate how neoliberal economic policy and globalization processes shape the lived realities of migrant farmers and specifically how they influence the educational experiences and life trajectories of migrant youth. Much of the literature on neoliberalism, globalization and transnational economic policy focuses on macro forces that have established agro-corporations as power regimes in Mexico, but largely ignores the question of how such forces operate on the ground (Coubès, Velasco, & Zlolniski, 2014). Ethnographic studies can provide in-depth knowledge of the effects of globalization and neoliberal economic policy from local grounded perspectives and particularly how these forces shape the everyday realities of working migrant youth in their working and school settings.

The literature widely discusses how processes of globalization and neoliberal economic policies have established agro-corporations as regimes of power that reproduce economic inequality, labor exploitation, poverty and health problems among migrant families (Ortiz, 2005). On the surface, it is tempting to make unchallenged assumptions about where working migrant children are headed. Economic deterministic approaches to understanding the life experiences of migrant youth might assume that migrant children will end up working the same labor-intensive agricultural jobs that their parents have due to their material conditions. On the other hand, cultural approaches may be inclined to argue that individual agency can help explain why migrant youth may *choose* to work instead of attend school. These approaches produce problematic and dualistic perspectives that largely undermine the importance of understanding grounded perspectives of *how* migrant youth respond to structural constraints in their lives. Willis (1977) points out the there is no clear separation between agency and structure; these two cannot be understood in isolation from one another.

Rather than assuming that migrant youth are passively shaped by processes of globalization and power relations in their working and schooling settings, it is critical to examine *how* they respond to structural constraints. As youth begin working the fields alongside their parents, they often express changing aspirations that reveal how they perceive larger structures of power and processes of globalization in their everyday lives. Aspirations illustrate the complex relationship between what individuals desire and their perceptions of what society can offer them (MacLeod, 2008). While some working migrant youth are hopeful about their futures outside of the fields and consequently view schooling as an avenue to achieve their aspirations, others perceive schooling as not holding any promises for their futures and often assume oppositional attitudes and behavior in their work and school settings.

## Project Purpose

My study employed a Critical Ethnography approach, which "begins with an ethical responsibility to address the processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain" (Madison, 2005, p.5). As noted at the beginning of this chapter, I intentionally sought to avoid "neutral" stance in my role as a researcher and participant in the community with the hope that my study will yield knowledge that invokes meaningful social change for migrant youth and families residing in the community. Migrant youth have worked in exploitative conditions for agro-corporations that have shaped their educational experiences and consequently, influenced their life trajectories. The purpose of my project was to explore their shifting aspirations in school and work settings among migrant youth working for agro-corporations in the San Quintín Valley. My field site was a small community called San Telmo in the larger San Quintín Valley. During my fieldwork in the community, I volunteered at a local elementary school called Hope Elementary School as an English teacher.

Although much of the literature discusses how processes of globalization and neoliberal policies shape the working and schooling experiences of migrant youth, examining aspirations of migrant youth can further illuminate how they react to and resist such forces. Aspirations provide a conceptual link between structure and agency in that they are rooted in individual liking (agency) but sensitive to perceived societal constraints (structure) (MacLeod, 2008). My study endeavored to transcend the structure-agency dualism by focusing on the active and ongoing experiences of migrant youth and while still recognizing macro forces of globalization and neoliberal economic policies that constrain individual agency. Rather than assuming that migrant youth are unresponsively influenced by structures of power, my study explored how they often contest their structural constraints in their work and school settings.

## Research Questions

My project was guided by the following questions:

1. How does the labor market in the community affect study youth's schooling experiences?
2. How do youth's relationships within their social networks shape their aspirations?
3. What is the relationship between youth's aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories?

## Significance of the Experiences of Migrant Youth in the San Quintín Valley

In December 2014, journalist Richard Marosi published a series in the Los Angeles Times titled "*Product of Mexico.*" His series featured several articles describing the harsh working and living conditions of migrant farmers, agro-corporation's neglect of social responsibility and the use of child labor in the industry in Mexico (Marosi, 2014). His articles focused on migrant populations of Indigenous day laborers in Baja California that cyclically move from region to region depending on the availability of work throughout the year. These articles shed light on a disturbing reality that most consumers in the United States are unmoved by until media images do what words cannot. An entire section of the series was dedicated to depicting the reality of migrant youth working in unimaginable conditions while earning less than $6-8 a day. The segment featured video footage of youth picking produce and interviews of them describing their working experiences and former aspirations before working the in fields. Interviews with contractors reveal that despite child labor laws, migrant youth are forced to forgo formal schooling to help support their families.

Only three months later after the "*Product of Mexico*" series was released, thousands of farmers participated in the largest protest against U.S-based agricultural corporations seen in Baja California since the 1990s. On the other side of the border in the U.S., thousands of consumers and labor activists in the United States boycotted produce distributed by growers from Mexico including BerryMex and Driscoll's. The protests crippled Mexican produce exports to the United States and resulted in extensive negotiations between farmer unions and corporate representatives for higher wages and improved living and working conditions. The series of events in the past year reflect the pressing everyday realities of migrant farmers – particularly migrant youth. The experiences of migrant youth working for agro-corporations are widely understudied. Consequently my study seeks to challenge the misguided belief that the problem of child labor has diminished in the San Quintín Valley. While child labor in Mexico's agroindustry has declined, it has not been eradicated. Today, it is reported that over 378,000 migrant children continue to work in the fields to help support their families performing labor-intensive jobs in the agroindustry (INEGI, 2013).

Finally, my study seeks to contribute to literature that illuminates the problematic relationship between migrant laborers, multinational corporations and the state. The blame for agricultural exploitation has largely been placed on the private sector thereby freeing the government from the need to invest its resources in agriculture as it is required to do so in other parts of the country (Taracena, 2003). Since the 1980s the state has been increasingly involved in order to bring social and political stability to the massive population that developed with the growth of the agro-export sector in the San Quintín Valley. The state has been most visibly involved in mediating labor disputes between local growers and laborers in a climate marked by high levels of social inequality and conflict (Coubès, Velasco, & Zlolniski, 2014). As universal primary education and the eradication of extreme hunger and poverty has been declared by the United Nations as basic human rights in their Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), who is responsible for the violation of human rights of the laborers—and particularly migrant youth? Despite the recent protests in March 2015 that resulted in a slight increase in daily wages, migrant laborers are still vulnerable to exploitation as they are left unprotected by the state and restricted to participate in independent (non-state) unions that boycott against multinational corporations.

Over the years the state has attempted to establish programs that are targeted to assist impoverished rural families, the majority of which are employed by agro-corporations. While programs such as *Oportunidades* or *Apoyo a la Gestión Escolar* (AGE) provide financial support for underserved communities that send their children to school, research reveals that these programs have not been effective in serving extremely poor populations (Gertler, Patrinos, & Rubio-Codina, 2012). Migrant families comprise a significant percentage of the poorest populations in Baja California. They are often faced with particular challenges such as cyclic migration, language barriers and cultural differences that limit their access to such programs. Consequently, it is critical to consider how migrant children and youth perceive and react to state-sponsored educational resources given their working and living conditions. Even when faced with increased schooling options or access to government sponsored educational resources, migrant children and youth continue to work in the fields or forgo schooling opportunities altogether to help support their families. Understanding these perceptions and attitudes can help policymakers reform programs and policies to effectively respond to the lived realities and needs of working migrant children and youth in the San Quintín Valley.

## Dissertation Structure

My dissertation is comprised of eight chapters. The first three chapters build the conceptual framework of my study addressing my personal story, relevant literature and how my project was carried out. The structure and content of my first three chapters do not follow a rigid format by limiting my literature review and personal experiences to separate sections, but rather interweaves these pieces throughout the three chapters to help contextualize and justify my study decisions. Chapters 4-7 discuss themes related to my research questions that emerged during my fieldwork. I describe in detail the findings of my study as share the stories of migrant youth and families who have worked for the agroindustry in Mexico for generations. Finally, Chapter 8 includes a brief epilogue and describes the implications of my study.

In Chapter 1, I begin building my conceptual framework by providing an introduction to my study. I start with my personal story to help the audience understand my approach to the study as both a researcher and friend to many families in this community. The rest of the chapter continues to introduce my topic by providing a background of my study, problem statement, project purpose, and research questions. I conclude the chapter by discussing the significance of my study, which has implications for policy and contributions to the gap in the literature addressing the generational poverty of migrant farmers in Baja California, Mexico.

Chapter 2 continues to construct my conceptual framework by discussing existing literature and the theoretical base of my study. The overview of literature in this chapter discusses the emergence of the global fresh produce industry, neoliberal economic policies, processes of globalization in Mexico's agroindustry and the livelihoods of migrant families and youth. My discussion of the literature attempts to ground my topic in an ongoing conversation addressing the experiences of migrant youth in the San Quintín Valley. It is in this chapter I further problematize the gap in the literature discussing the narratives of migrant children and youth. In the second part of this chapter, I provide an overview of social reproduction theorists who seek to understand the specific mechanisms in schools that serve to reproduce social inequality in its various forms. I then discuss how theories of social reproduction can serve as analytic tools to understand the experiences of working migrant youth. I conclude the chapter by discussing the how I hope my research will specifically contribute to the literature addressing theories of social reproduction and ethnographic studies.

Chapter 3 addresses the "how" of my study. In this chapter, I discuss critical ethnography as an epistemic stance that recognizes the importance of positionality, power, and representation in research. I also outline my rationale for my research site, study participants and method of recruitment. I subsequently describe my research methods by providing a research timeline and an explanation for the research methods employed in my study. I particularly define and elaborate on how I carried out participant observations, informal interviews and group interviews throughout my fieldwork. I then discuss my data analysis process, which occurred during my time on the field and upon my return, and the development of themes of my study.

Chapter 4 begins to address the findings of my project as I describe the educational contexts and experiences of migrant youth in San Telmo. The beginning of this chapter describes the seeming paradox of the reality that although migrant farming families have been able to settle down after decades of seasonal migration, migrant youth and children continue to drop out of school or not attend altogether. I endeavor to unravel this paradox as I share the experiences of migrant youth and their families; particularly obstacles to schooling they face and their schooling experiences. My exchanges with migrant youth and their families concerning barriers to schooling and their schooling experiences brought to light the dualistic perspective between schooling and work that were widely held on the community. This perspective shaped the decision-making process amongst families and students who either continued schooling or dropped out altogether.

Chapter 5 focuses on the working experiences of migrant youth and the ways in which such experiences shaped their aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories. In the first part of this chapter, I describe the experiences of migrant youth working in the fields, including narratives of their first day at work and working conditions. In the second part of this chapter, I describe my efforts to dig deeper into a phrase that was often states by migrant youth during my fieldwork – “there’s nothing here.” Conversations with migrant youth concerning this phrase revealed their perspectives of the labor market in the larger community; namely, what jobs they perceived were available to them. I conclude the chapter by describing how their perceptions of the labor market evidently shaped their childhood aspirations.

In Chapter 6, I share the narratives of the Soñadores, a group of four migrant youth who have aspirations to work in the United States: Javier, Verónica, Gerardo and Emmanuel. In particular, they frequently described “The American Dream”—simply put, their desires to cross the border to work in the United States. In the words of Emmanuel, “There is a dream that all Mexicans have – To move to the United States to work.” For Emmanuel, the American Dream was to go the United States, make as much money as possible and eventually return to San Telmo. The “American Dream” expressed by the Soñadores is important to understand, as they are representative of many migrant youth in San Telmo. Although the Soñadores primary motivation to work in the United States was the opportunity to earn higher wages, our conversations revealed that earning money was actually a means to achieve material aspirations.

While previous chapters address the restricted labor market and “The American Dream,” Chapter 7 focuses on how peer relationships and gang culture have shaped the aspirations and perceptions of life trajectories of migrant youth. This chapter specifically highlights the narratives of “Los Callejeros” (Street Roamers). Los Callejeros are a group of four youth boys who have proudly given themselves that nickname: Lucas, Martín, Juan and Carlos. The Callejeros are in a gang called “Vatos Locos” and are neither consistently working or in school. Throughout my conversations and time spent with Los Callejeros, it became apparent that gang culture has deeply shaped their aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories.

I conclude my dissertation with Chapter 8, which begins by describing the optimism expressed by migrant youth despite the uncertainty of tomorrow in the phrase *echale ganas* [give it your best]. Despite such hopefulness, I found that migrant youth often ended up working in the fields with a pessimistic perception of their futures, which is described in my epilogue detailing my visits back to the community and reconnecting migrant youth. I also revisit my research questions and provide a brief discussion of the findings of my study, particularly highlighting the limits of resistance and contestation in the lives of migrant youth. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the implications of my study including the ways in which social reproduction continues to reproduce itself in San Telmo and palpable violations of human rights. Such harsh realities highlight the need to recognized the lived experiences of migrant youth whose lives are filled with suffering, disappointment and exploitation. In order to truly understand the

In the following chapter, I continue to build my conceptual framework, which includes a discussion of existing literature and the theoretical base for this study. Because my project endeavors to uncover the *ways* and *process* in which migrant youth respond to macro forces of neoliberalism and globalization in their everyday lives, a comprehensive overview of the historical, political and social contexts of the San Quintín Valley is critical. Chapter 2 also further describes how my study has been conceptualized by social reproduction theories; namely, Henry Giroux's resistance theories and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. Instead of assuming that the life outcomes of migrant youth are predetermined by global capitalist forces, I aspire to uncover ways in which they resist and contest these structural constraints in their everyday lives. As Giroux (1983) emphatically states, "resistance theories celebrate a dialectical notion of human agency that rightly portrays domination as a process that is *neither static nor complete*" (p. 289).

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter continues to construct my conceptual framework, which “presents [my] theory of the world [I] will be studying” (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). According to Rossman and Rallis (2011), the conceptual framework is comprised of the researchers’ experience, existing research and a theoretical base. In Chapter One, I described my childhood memories with migrant children and their shifting aspirations as these experiences undoubtedly informed my conceptualization of my study. In the first part of this chapter, I will continue to build upon my conceptual framework by providing an overview of existing of literature. Maxwell (2013) cautions researchers against simply reviewing and summarizing some body of theoretical or empirical publications. Such an approach can lead to a narrow descriptive focus on the literature and tends to generate a strategy of “covering the field” instead of focusing on studies and theories that are particularly relevant to the research topic (Maxwell, 2013). Consequently, I follow Rossman and Rallis’s (2011) approach to reviewing existing literature by interweaving relevant literature into the contextualization of my study to recognize what is already known, clarify logic, provide substantiation for points, suggest theoretical frameworks and justify decisions.

In the second half of this chapter I discuss the theoretical base of my conceptual framework. Rossman and Rallis (2011) discuss the difference between Theories and theories in the theoretical base of a conceptual framework. Theories (with a capital “T”) are propositions that are grounded in extensive research and are accepted as explanations for a particular phenomenon; while theories (with a lowercase "t") refer to personal theories-in-use which guide our work (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). I address Theories in a discussion of social reproduction theorists who seek to understand the specific mechanisms in schools that serve to reproduce social inequality in its various forms (social, political and economic). I conclude this chapter by discussing my personal theories-in-use concerning the educational experiences of working migrant youth in the San Quintín Valley. Maxwell (2013) points out that it critical for researchers to have at least *some* theory of the phenomena to guide research design decisions. At the same time however, it is important for researchers to not *impose* theory on their study design to avoid creating preconceived categories and preventing the researcher from outside events and relationships that do not fit the theory (Maxwell, 2013).

## Contextualizing the Study: Review of the Literature

As the lives of working migrant youth in Mexico's agroindustry are embedded in an era of globalization and neoliberalism, my perspective of globalization is informed by Appelbaum and Robinson's notion of *critical globalization studies* that address the increasing global inequality, contradictions and hierarchies of power that mark this epoch of global capitalism (Appelbaum & Robinson, 2005; Robinson, 2008). This perspective of globalization avoids a detached study of the subject and is instead concerned with its adverse impact on billions of people, as well as the struggles and hardships of the people living through this particular era (Appelbaum & Robinson, 2005). The crisis of global capitalism is anything but a neutral process as "there is a new configuration of global power that becomes manifest in each nation and whose tentacles reach all the way down to the community level" (Appelbaum & Robinson, 2005, p. 24). It is in this era of crisis that migrant youth in Mexico's agroindustry are working, living and *resisting* forces of globalization and neoliberalism in their everyday lives.

## The Global Fresh Produce Industry

Central to the discussion of working migrant youth in Baja California is the complexity of Mexico's export-led agroindustry, which is situated in a contemporary era of intense globalization and neoliberalism. A critical perspective of globalization and neoliberal economic policies is necessary in order to understand how macro economic, social and political structures shape the lived realities of working migrant youth. While earlier conceptions of globalization emphasized the growing integration of global markets, networks, flows and relations, recent literature argues that globalization is not simply the interconnectedness of the world but rather the emergence of a new global economic order governed by powerful players (McGrew, 1998; Ohmae, 1995). While earlier stages of globalization brought us an international division of labor, increasing global inequality and the divide between the North and the South, this new era is bringing the world together into a singular global civilization (Robinson, 2008). The neoliberal restructuring of world economies that took place in the 1980's and 1990's resulted in a new global system of world capitalism changing regional and national economies (Ohmae,1995; Robinson, 2008; Torres, 2002).

Over the past few decades the rise of the "global supermarket" and the global reorganization of food production and distribution have involved the transformation of national and regional agricultural systems (Robinson, 2008). Robinson (2008) describes how changes in the pattern of consumption by middle-class consumers in industrialized countries have created year-round demand for a variety of fresh produce, forming an incentive to transnational agribusinesses to outsource their production to several regions of the world to ensure continuous supply. Consequently, the agroindustry has served as a primary intermediary for developing nations to widen their participation in global trade and become key players in international commodity chains (Alvarez, 2006). In Latin America the export of fresh fruits and vegetables has become the fastest growing agricultural sectors, often employing Indigenous workers who are connected through transnational social networks (Huacuja, 2001). As globalization is characterized by contingent and unequal transformations, it is critical to understand how transnational forces from above are able to reproduce and utilize regional inequalities to serve global capitalist interests and how social forces from below continue to operate through local institutions in struggles against global capitalism (Robinson, 2008).

### Neoliberal Economic Policies in the San Quintín Valley from 1980's-Present

The 1980s were marked with economic turmoil due to the oil crisis as the global economy hit a historical recession. In efforts to address the debt crises and failing economies, the loan-lending nations began to implement neoliberal economic policies in their loan-lending programs, resulting in the adoption of structural adjustment programs and free market economic policies in developing nations (Zlolniski, 2011). In the case of Mexico, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was a historic policy that enabled neoliberal economic ideologies to influence the Mexican economy and all actors involved. Structural adjustment programs required local governments to encourage foreign investments, privatize government programs and invest less resources into social welfare programs (Zlolniski, 2011). It was during this time that protectionist foreign policy approaches in Mexico were encouraged to remove trade tariffs and barriers that would limit profitable exports to the United States. Not only did NAFTA enable the free trade of goods and capital across international borders, it allowed the expansion of the links in labor markets, product markets and capital markets between Baja California and the United States (Zabin,1998).

The expansion of the fresh produce industry in Mexico was the result of neoliberal policies enacted by the government to encourage agricultural production for exports to international markets (Stephen, 2001; Martinez Novo, 2004; Zabin, 1997; Otero, 2011). During the 1980s, the produce industry in the San Quintín Valley further expanded due to several interrelated factors. The cheap land available in Mexico was an attractive opportunity for U.S. agribusinesses to move their production south of the border. Furthermore, the passage of NAFTA allowed agricultural corporations to establish direct relationships with local growers and directly invest in the region (Huacuja, 2001). During this time many U.S.-based agro-corporations, such as Driscoll's and Andrew and Williamson, established satellite offices in the region to establish relationships with local growers (Zlolniski, 2011). A system of contract agriculture developed whereby Mexican growers provided access to land, labor, water, and managed production, while their U.S. partners provided capital, technology, seeds and technical assistance (Martinez Novo, 2004; Wright 2005; Zlolniski, 2011). By 2009, the San Quintín Valley had become Mexico's second-largest region in the exportation of tomatoes to the United States, the largest exporter of cucumbers and raspberries, and a growing producer for strawberries to the international markets (Zlolniski, 2011).

**Impact on Migrant Farmers Livelihoods**

Despite the continuing modernization of technology, the agroindustry continues to be labor-intensive (Martinez Novo, 2004). Consequently, another critical incentive for U.S. agribusinesses to move their operations south of the border was the availability of cheap indigenous migrant labor, which accessible through joint agreements with Baja California growers. The privatization of *ejidos* (communal lands) left local farmers with fewer options for subsistence. Small-scale farmers were virtually excluded from participating in the contract-farming system that is prevalent in Mexico due to transaction costs that are more profitable with large-scale growers (Huacuja, 2001). Resultantly, many farmers were forced to turn to the agroindustry for contract jobs to ensure their survival (Barron & Rello, 2000; Martinez Novo, 2004; Zabin & Hughes, 1995). Growers strategically recruit Indigenous laborers from southern states to secure their flow of labor (Zabin, 1997). Buses are sent out to mountainous regions to recruit and transport families to agricultural fields in the northwest regions of Mexico for anywhere from three months to years at a time depending on the season and contracts issued to the workers (Zabin, 1997). Families, including women and children, collectively migrate to maximize their earnings from their migration journey (Barron & Rello, 2000).

Previous studies on the living and working conditions of migrant farmers in Baja California have denounced the violation of human rights that is rampant in the San Quintín Valley (Kearney, 2000; Nagengast & Kearney, 1990; Wright, 2005). The labor camps and *colonias* in which migrant farmers reside often lack basic sanitary facilities, heaters, running water, and consistent electricity (Barron & Rello, 2000). Labor wages, which are determined by profitability of agricultural exports, are kept low to ensure maximum profits (Zabin, 1997). Migrant farmers also suffer from lack of basic healthcare, exposure to pesticides, over work and dangerous conditions that result in serious health conditions (Holmes, 2013). Ethnic differences are often used to justify the poor living and working conditions of migrant laborers as they are often portrayed as “traditional” and “primitive” (Nagengast & Kearney, 1990; Holmes, 2013; Kearney, 2000; Martinez Novo, 2004). Growers often express that migrant farmers “like the way they live" and their physical attributes (short height and dark skin) make them suitable for the agricultural tasks they perform (Martinez Novo, 2004).

As briefly described in Chapter One, migrant families have been able to permanently settle in the San Quintín Valley due to the year-round demand for labor since the early 1990s (Coubès, Velasco, & Zlolniski, 2014). Increased consumer demands for fresh-produce has given rise to intensified production, which required a steady workforce. Over the past few decades, economic growth in the fresh-produce industry has fueled unprecedented demographic growth. Between 1990 and 2000 alone, the population in the San Quintín Valley has increased from 38,151 to 74,427 inhabitants (Zlolniski, 2010). This demographic growth has been accompanied with a shift from labor camps (temporary housing) to *colonias*, which are local subdivisions of house lots on which migrant families have settled down (Zlolniski, 2010). Although the number of labor camps has decreased, living conditions in the *colonias* have not significantly improved as families continue to live in similar conditions.

## Tensions Between Growers and Farmers

The tension that is present today among local growers and farmers in the San Quintín Valley illustrates the sharp power inequalities between a small elite of mestizo growers and a large mass of Indigenous workers segmented along ethnic lines (Martinez Novo, 2004; Wright, 2005; Zlolniski, 2010). The power structure that continues to benefit *mestizo* growers and U.S. commercial partners is not solely the product of international market forces but historical socio-political relations that were already present in the region (Martinez Novo, 2004; Wright, 2005). The modernization of horticultural production has exacerbated the power gap between workers and growers (Martinez Novo, 2006). Growers have gradually become transnational capitalist actors, as structural forces have integrated them into the international agribusiness market and they are increasingly untouched by local struggles due to their political influence (Zlolniski, 2010). It is critical to consider how larger power structures present in the agroindustry act as a vehicle for macro forces of globalization and neoliberal economic policies to operate through on the ground subsequently shaping the ongoing experiences of migrant youth.

### Educational Experiences of Migrant Children

As described in Chapter One, my study confronted an understudied issue: the educational experiences of working migrant children in Baja California. Today education is widely lauded as a means of improving individuals' potential for economic security and overall social well-being (Gibbs & Heaton, 2014). In 2000, the United Nations passed the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), which put forth that primary school education as a human right. Since the 2000s, Mexico has been able to increase the primary school enrollment rates to 95-99% (UNICEF, 2010). While government cash-transfer programs such as *Oportunidades* have significantly increased primary school enrollment in rural regions, the sharp drop in enrollment rates at the secondary school level indicates that children continue to leave school for various reasons (Gibbs & Heaton, 2014). Furthermore, children marginalized by rural residence and poverty particularly experience high risks of dropping out (as cited by Gibbs & Heaton, 2014). Rural residents also generally live farther from schools, have lower quality schools and see education as less relevant given the job opportunities available (Schultz, 2000).

Children of migrant farm workers, who are mostly from Indigenous communities, continue to have the lowest levels of education (UNICEF, 2010). It is critical to consider how school enrollment among migrant children does not indicate that they are fully participating in school. As migrant children move from state to state due to the nature of work in the agroindustry, teachers often cannot offer relevant education that addresses different cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students (UNICEF, 2010). Low levels of birth registration among Indigenous families also restrict their access to educational institutions and government resources (UNICEF, 2010). In the case of migrant children in the San Quintín Valley, their rural location and working conditions dually contribute to their low educational levels.

In the San Quintín Valley, migrant children continue to leave school to work for the agroindustry in large numbers. Agro-corporations in Baja California particularly benefit from working children as labor management and recruitment practices accommodate the employment of entire migrant families, including women and children (Zabin, 1997). Furthermore, while child labor laws are enforced in the United States, children form a significant part of the labor force in Mexico (Stephen, 2001). In the past, children often accompanied their parents in the fields as young as four or five years old (Hindman, 2009). Stricter enforcement of child labor laws in the past few years due to media coverage has significantly lowered the presence of working children for large agro-corporations; however, mid-size and small farms continue to let children between the ages of ten and fourteen work on their fields, and even large companies continue to employ children during harvests, especially during the summer when they are out of school (Zlolniski, 2010).

Although migrant families largely depend on the income generated by their children, the employment of children entails harmful costs to their families, as their children are not able to attend school regularly. Working migrant children are often characterized for their malnutrition, illiteracy, and school low-attendance (Hindman, 2009). While education is a critical instrument for migrant farmers to access higher paying jobs, migrant families are condemned to work the hardest and worst paid positions for generations due to their low levels of education (Barron & Rello, 2000). Previous literature that has explored the educational experiences of working migrant children has widely focused on their role in the family as a wage-earners (Bey, 2003; Evaristo, 2006; Taylor & Yúnez-Naude, 2001), the impact of government welfare programs on educational attainment among rural youth (Behrman, Parker, & Todd, 2005) and school-based efforts to accommodate particular needs (Taracena, 2003) but have not particularly centered the narratives of children themselves in their studies.

Very little is known about the everyday lived realities of working migrant children and youth in Baja California in their school settings. As discussed earlier in this section, macro forces of globalization and neoliberal economic policies largely transpired through the major restructuring processes that took places in the 1980's to the present. The interdependence between growers and U.S. agribusinesses, heavy capital investment production technologies, sophisticated methods of labor control, and shift to a steady workforce (Zlolniski, 2010) illustrate ways in which macro forces have materialized to shape the lived experiences of working migrant children. In my study, I focused on the aspirations of migrant youth to understand how their educational experiences are multiply shaped by their working experiences in Mexico's agroindustry. In the next section of this chapter, I provide an overview of the theoretical base of this study, which draws upon the work of social reproduction theorists to explain how structure and agency interact to shape the everyday realities of migrant youth working for Mexico's agroindustry.

## Theoretical Framework

This section of the chapter will discuss what Rossman and Rallis (2011) describe as the theoretical base of my conceptual framework. Rossman and Rallis (2011) state that the theoretical base links the researcher's research questions to larger theoretical constructs and discussions. Accordingly, I begin this section with a discussion of contemporary studies of social reproduction, which has helped conceptualize my study. While education is often viewed as a powerful equalizer, social reproduction theorists have argued that schools have been become the most important agency for the reproduction of social inequality (Nash, 1990). Social reproduction theories, which are widely discussed in Sociology and Education literature, attempt to illustrate the specific mechanisms and processes that contribute to the reproduction of generational inequality (MacLeod, 2008). Subsequently, I discuss Theories of social reproduction and particularly focus on Henry Giroux's *resistance theories* and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus*, which are critical concepts that have also guided the conceptualization of my study.

Theories inform our experiences by guiding what we look at and how we make sense of what we see and hear (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). However, what we see and hear re-informs our Theories. Consequently, I conclude the chapter by discussing my *personal theories-in-use* (Rossman &Rallis, 2011), which attempt to make sense of how theories of social reproduction "actually work" in the San Quintín Valley where migrant families have been exploited for generations. I particularly address how I hope to contribute to existing literature on theories of social reproduction with a rich ethnographic study. While several empirical studies have examined theories of social reproduction among the working class children in developed countries, hardly any studies have explored how these theories operate in rural communities in developing nations in Latin America, where farmers have been subjugated to inhumane working conditions for generations.

## Contemporary Studies of Social Reproduction in Education

My study was conceptualized by two renowned ethnographic studies, which continue to be widely discussed in contemporary literature on social reproduction in education. Paul Willis's book *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* and Jay McLeod's book *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood* have purposefully addressed the question of how social inequality is reproduced in schools while focusing on the cultural agency of the individuals in their studies. Willis (1977) focuses on the *lads* in his study who assume oppositional attitudes against schooling due to their perceptions of job opportunities available in the labor market in Britain. His central question of "how working class kids get working class jobs" is concerned with the *process* of how the lads respond to their cultural contexts with non-conformist behavior (Willis, 1977). MacLeod (2008) assumes a similar approach as he also seeks to understand oppositional and conformist attitudes of two groups of students towards the Achievement Ideology, which is the belief that the United States as an open society that is fair and full of opportunity. His study however, focuses more narrowly on the aspirations of the students in his study as a means to understand how they perceive macro structures in their society (MacLeod, 2008).

In the same light, my study addressed a critical question of how farmers in the San Quintín Valley working for the agroindustry continue to be exploited for generations. The literature on globalization and neoliberal economic policies in Mexico largely focuses on how these macros forces have uprooted traditional forms of farming in rural communities and created a population of farmers that are left to work for the agroindustry for generations in order to survive (Barron & Rello, 2000; Hindman, 2009; Kearney, 2000). However, fewer studies have examined how these macro forces actually operate on the ground and particularly in the lives of migrant children. Rather than assuming that migrant children are passively shaped by structures of power, my study examined *how* they resist and contest their structural constraints in settings of work and education. Although much of the literature discusses how processes of globalization and neoliberal policies shape the working and schooling experiences of migrant children, examining aspirations of migrant children can further illuminate how they react to and resist such forces. Similar to MacLeod's study, my study focused on aspirations to understand how migrant children perceive larger structures of power in their everyday lives.

## Deterministic Conceptions of Social Reproduction

Several scholars have argued that the Marxist nature of social reproduction theory places too much importance on the structural determinants of inequality and undermines the cultural agency of individuals (Giroux, 1983). Deterministic approaches to social reproduction theories start with the structural requirements of the capitalist economic system and attempt to demonstrate how individuals are obliged to fulfill predefined roles that ensure the perpetuation of a class society (MacLeod, 2008). Althusser (1971) is known for his essay that conceptualized the school as an agency of class domination that achieves its effects through ideological practices that disseminate knowledge and dispositions according to class-differentiated individuals. Shortly after, Bowles and Gintis (1976) provided a similar account of social reproduction by emphasizing their *correspondence principle*, which highlights similarities between the social relations of production and personal interaction in the schools (Bowles & Gintis, 1987; Giroux, 1983; MacLeod, 2008). Bowles and Gintis propose that schools train the wealthy to assume their places at the top of the economy while conditioning the poor to accept their lowly status in the class structure (MacLeod, 2008).

Since the late 1970s, several scholars have critiqued economic deterministic perspectives of social reproduction arguing that such views leave little room for moments of self-creation, mediation and resistance (Giroux, 1983; Willis, 1981). Marxist views of social reproduction that stress the notion that history is made "behind the backs" of members of society largely dismiss the individual agency of people or the idea that people do make history, including it's constraints (Giroux, 1983). These perspectives leave little room to determine whether there is a significant difference between the existence of various structural and ideological modes of domination and their *actual* unfolding and events (Giroux, 1983). Structural determinist theories remove human agency by ignoring the complex ways in which people mediate and respond to the interaction between their own lived experiences and structures of domination and constraint (Giroux, 1983). Accordingly, Willis (1977) points out that there is no clear separation between agency and structure; these two cannot be understood in isolation from one another.

## Social Reproduction – Structural Constraints, Agency and Resistance

While Pierre Bourdieu is not considered a resistance theorist, he attempts to step away from Bowles and Gintis's structural deterministic perspective of social reproduction by examining the "deep" principles and logic according to which reality functions (MacLeod, 2008). Bourdieu seeks to move beyond a micro-macro and dichotomy of individual and society to understand the process in which structures influence individual agency to produce social actions (Collins, 2009, Reay, 2004). Giroux (1983) states that Bourdieu's argument proposes that:

> Rather than being directly linked to the power of an economic elite, schools are seen as part of a larger social universe of symbolic institutions that subtly reproduce existing power relations through the production and distribution of a dominant culture that tacitly confirms what it means to be education. (p. 87)

In particular, Pierre Bourdieu's notable contribution to social reproduction in education is his concept of *habitus*, which describes the process in which the attitudes, beliefs and experiences that are internalized in individuals and consequently influence their perceptions towards their external worlds (Nash, 1990). Bourdieu's conception of the habitus attempts to make sense of how unequal structural elements of society do not simply translate directly into the actions of individuals, but must rather be internalized in the habitus of the individual (MacLeod, 2008). According to Bourdieu, the habitus acts as a regulator between individuals and their external world; between human agency and social structure (Crossley, 2001; Jenkins, 1982; MacLeod, 2008). McLeod (2008) observes that Bourdieu proposes a circular relationship between structures in practices in which objective structures produce structured subjective actions, which tend to reproduce objective structure.

Several scholars criticize Bourdieu's concept of habitus as being paradoxically deterministic for its fixed outcome of the reproduction of "objective structures" through subjective knowledge (Crossley, 2001; Jenkins, 1982; King, 2000; Schatzki, 1997). While such criticisms have emphasized Bourdieu's reproduction of deterministic approaches to social reproduction, his concept of the habitus proves to be an unprecedented concept that is still widely disputed today. According to Bourdieu (1977), the habitus acts as a system of lasting transposable dispositions which, incorporating past experiences, operates at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions. While structuralist analysis focuses on the official picture of social relations, Bourdieu argued that this is often a far reality from the negotiated situation one finds at the ground level, where interests, desires, contingencies and material constraints all come into play (Crossley, 2001). Accordingly, this concept helps cognize the *process* of how ongoing experiences and interactions are internalized and rationalized to influence individual perceptions of their external realities (Crossley, 2001; Harker, 1984; MacLeod, 2008; Reay, 2004; Schatzki, 1997).

It is with this understanding of the habitus that McLeod (2008) describes how "aspirations are not the product of rational analysis; rather, they are acquired in the *habitus* of the individual" (p. 15). MacLeod (2008) describes the importance of understanding the aspirations of the students in his study as, "there is a strong relationship between aspirations and occupational outcomes; if individuals do not aspire middle-class jobs, then they are unlikely to achieve them" (p. 4). Accordingly, aspirations illustrate the complex relationship between what individuals desire and their perceptions of what society can offer them (MacLeod, 2008). To many outsiders, the depressed aspirations of the *Hallway Hangers* in his study are perceived as incomprehensible self-defeatism, but in-depth conversations with the students reveal that their leveled aspirations are perceptive responses to the plight in which they find themselves (MacLeod, 2008). In regards to agency and structure, aspirations act as a mediating link between socioeconomic structures (what society offers) and individuals at the cultural level (what one wants); and consequently, play a crucial role in the reproduction of social inequality (MacLeod, 2008).

Finally, Henry Giroux's theories of resistance represent another critical step towards bridging the divide between structure and agency. Giroux's resistance theory examines the active experiences of individuals while perceiving oppositional attitudes and practices as a response to the structures of constraint and domination (Giroux, 2001). Giroux (2001) argues that the separation of human agency and structural analysis either suppresses the significance of individual autonomy or ignores the structural determinants that lie outside the immediate experience of human actors. While structuralists overlook human agency in their conception of social reproduction in schools, culturist theories pay too little attention to how structural embedded material and economic forces shape and influence the human experiences (MacLeod, 2008). Consequently, Giroux proposes a dialectical treatment of subjectivity and structure in order to understand the complex ways in which people mediate and respond to the interface between their own lived experiences and structures of domination and constraint (Giroux, 2001). Giroux (1983) states, "resistance theorists have attempted to demonstrate that the *mechanisms* of social and cultural reproduction are never complete and always meet with partially realized elements of opposition" (p. 260).

Giroux (1983) further contends that schools are relatively autonomous institutions that not only provide spaces for oppositional behavior and teaching but are also political, cultural and ideological sites that exist somewhat independently of the capitalist market economy. Willis' concept of *cultural production* emphasized the importance of understanding "how structures become sources of meaning and determinants on behavior in the cultural milieu *at its own level*" (Willis, 1977, p. 171). Simply because structural and economic determinants exist in society does not mean that people will irrationally obey them; in fact, macro determinants need to pass through the cultural milieu to reproduce themselves at all (Willis, 1977). The social attitudes and practices that accompany student countercultures need to be carefully analyzed for "radical significance" as not all forms of oppositional behavior stem from a critique, implicit or explicit or school-constructed ideologies and relations of domination (MacLeod, 2008).

Giroux (1983) also states that central to theories of resistance is an emphasis on the tensions and conflicts that mediate relationships among home, school and workplace. Because the lives of students are embedded in macro structures organized by systems of power and domination, it is critical to understand how oppositional behavior is often informed by counter-logic that is embodied in the families, workplaces, street life and peers that make up their culture and points to a more different and *convincing* reality (Giroux, 1983). On this note, Giroux (1983) emphasizes that resistance theory assigns an active role to human agency and ongoing experiences as key mediating links between structural determinants and lived realities.

## Social Reproduction in the San Quintín Valley

Education is broadly discussed as a critical instrument to eliminate social inequality (Gibbs & Heaton, 2014). The vast majority of the literature addressing the generational poverty of farmers working for the agroindustry in Mexico has stressed the need for resources that would enable migrant families to attain higher levels of education to access better paying jobs (Barron & Rello, 2000; Hindman, 2009). While recent literature has stated that migrant families have expressed a sense of progress for being able to permanently settle in the San Quintín Valley and send their children to school (Zlolniski, 2010), the recent series of events depicting child labor suggest otherwise. The *Product of Mexico* series published by the Los Angeles Times in 2014 and the large-scale protests only three months later illustrate the existing inequality that characterizes the San Quintín Valley.

The social and political context in which my study took place was critical to recognize as migrant families were uprooted from their communities of origin in large part due to the effects of neoliberalism and globalization. Migration, neoliberal economic policies and processes of globalization have contributed to the generational reproduction of inequality among migrant families working in the agroindustry. While educational opportunities have increased since migrant families have been able to settle in the San Quintín Valley, migrant children continue to work, engage in oppositional behavior or drop out of school altogether. Misguided assumptions of child labor as a cultural norm among Indigenous families (Zlolniski, 2010) and the widespread perception of rural youth as *cholos* (gang members) (Volkmann, et al., 2013) unfairly place the blame on migrant families for their exploitative circumstances. Consequently, it is critical to understand the how migrant children perceive their external realities and make perceptive responses according to their circumstances.

Missing from this narrative of labor, exploitation and child labor are the voices of the children themselves. It is critical to center the narratives children in our understanding of how these forces *actually unfold* on the ground. Henry Giroux's Resistance Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the habitus offer a set of theoretical tools to understand the active and ongoing experiences of migrant children. In accordance with Giroux's resistance theories, my study endeavored to transcend the structure-agency dualism by focusing on the active and ongoing experiences of migrant children and while still recognizing macro forces of globalization and neoliberal economic policies that constrain individual agency. Power structures are embedded in the everyday lives of migrant children in the form of the labor hierarchy they are subjected to in the agroindustry and their interactions at schools, which act as ideological, political and social sites (Giroux, 1983). As work and school settings are spaces that are marked with contradictions and conflict, many migrant children in the San Quintín Valley assume oppositional attitudes that are informed by counter-logic that is embodied in their surroundings including their peers, families, work and school settings (Giroux, 1983). My study explored and documented these forms of opposition and resistance in their work and school settings by using Giroux's resistance theories as a theoretical framework.

Furthermore, Bourdieu's concept of the habitus offer critical frameworks to understand the *process* through which relations of power are internalized in migrant children through their experiences and resultantly naturalized in their perceptions of reality and the structural opportunities available to them. As the primary focus of my study was on the shifting aspirations of migrant children in their working and school settings, it was critical to consider that aspirations are not the product of rational analysis but rather acquired in the habitus of the individual (MacLeod, 2008). As I described in Chapter One, I observed that the aspirations of migrant children often changed as they transitioned from school to work in their early years. While many migrant children were hopeful about their futures outside of the agroindustry and consequently view schooling as an avenue to achieve their aspirations, others perceived schooling as not holding any promises for their futures. As aspirations reveal how individuals perceive the larger socioeconomic structures in their lives, my study focused on *shifting aspirations* as migrant children work to understand how their working experiences affected their schooling and perceptions of their futures.

I hoped to contribute to existing literature on social reproduction theories by carrying out an ethnographic study that examines how generational poverty reproduces itself amongst the working poor by examining the aspirations of working children, who comprise a significant portion of the poorest populations in Mexico. My study found how aspirations can "capture" the tensions and contradictions that migrant children face in their everyday lives. While Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* attempts to make sense of past experiences and ongoing interactions operate to shape perceptions of the individual, a study of shifting aspirations can provide the actual *process* of how individuals internalize their perceptions of their future. Furthermore, Giroux's theories of resistance offer a critical lens to understand how oppositional attitudes and behavior illustrate how individuals respond to structural constraints in their lives. In the same light, my study uncovered how shifting aspirations could reveal the ways in which migrant children *resist* and *contest* structural domination in their everyday lives.

Lastly, I hoped that my study would be able to contribute to literature that has shed light on how theories of social reproduction can be used to understand the generational transmission of poverty that continues to plague rural communities in developing nations. Previous studies on social reproduction in schools have widely focused on the working class and class inequality in industrialized countries such as the United States and Western Europe. Surprisingly, there are fewer studies that use social reproduction theories to examine the ongoing experiences of working children in rural communities in developing nations. As discussed earlier, with the passage of the MDG's, primary education is deemed a basic human right throughout the globe. Accordingly, it is critical to consider how policymakers and national leaders must understand the specific mechanisms that continue to reproduce generational poverty among the rural poor. In-depth ethnographic studies also have the potential to understand and document the perceptions and lived realities of individuals to inform policy reform to effectively respond to the lived realities and needs of working children.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed relevant existing literature and the theoretical base of my study. I specifically discussed the advent of a global fresh produce industry and the transpiration of globalization and neoliberal economic policies through the agroindustry. In the second half of my chapter, I outlined my theoretical base, which draws from the works of Henry Giroux and Pierre Bourdieu. Giroux contends that although oppositional behavior and attitudes are important to understand, they must be combined with the study participants' own explanations of their behavior and contextualized in the nexus of peer, family and work relations out of which resistance emerges (Giroux, 2001). In order to center the narratives of working migrant children in my study, I hoped to gain an in-depth understanding of how they make meaning of their attitudes and behavior in their everyday lives from their own perspectives. To accomplish this, my study employed a critical ethnographic approach, which includes *naturalistic* participant-observations and informal interviews. In the following chapter, I discuss my methodological approach, research questions and research methods.

## CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

In the first part of this chapter, I will provide a brief overview of critical ethnography as a research methodology. Central to critical ethnography as an epistemic stance is the recognition of the crucial significance of positionality, power and representation in ethnographic accounts. As critical ethnography seeks to use research not simply to document injustices, but as a tool for social change and emancipation, the researcher's positionality, power relations and the ways in which research participants are represented are critical to challenging "traditional" or colonizing research methods (Villenas, 1996). The second part of this chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of the rationale for my selected research site and study participants. I subsequently discuss my research methods and process of data analysis. I conclude the chapter by providing tentative timeline of my dissertation from the writing process to my final dissertation defense.

### What is Critical Ethnography?

Critical ethnography in the field of education is the result of the tension between critical theorists who have been inclined to view ethnographers as too neutral in their approach to research and ethnographers who have regarded critical theorists as too theory driven and biased in their research (Anderson, 1989). Madison (2005) addresses this theory and method nexus by describing critical ethnography as the "doing" or the "performance" or critical theory. Critical ethnography takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo and brings to light underlying operations of power and control (Madison, 2005). Bourgois (1995) states, "ethnographic techniques developed primarily by cultural anthropologists since the 1920s are better suited than exclusively quantitative methodologies for documenting the lives of people who live on the margins of a society that is hostile to them" (p. 13). Bourgois (1996) laments the "death of ethnography" in a postmodernist era that denounces "totalizing representations" and "partial truths". Such an approach emphasizes fragmented social realities or interpreting culture as text thereby making it difficult to prioritize experiences of injustice and oppression (Bourgois, 1996).

In a reflection on his participant-observations in inner-city apartheid in the streets of urban New York City, Bourgois (1996) writes that his experiences gave him a more critical perspective on the subjective limits of ethnographic methods. He describes how his realizations began with "an emotional sense of betrayal at the hopelessly idealistic and elitist education he had received in graduate school where they never really addressed the blood, sweat, and tears of peoples, suffering real oppressions" (Bourgois, 1996, p. 254). Bourgois (1996) concludes his reflection by emphatically arguing that:

> anthropology's fundamental methodological caveat of suspending moral judgment is occasionally problematized on an intellectual level, but it also needs to be confronted *emotionally* if it is to help us address effectively and with respect the lives of the millions of people who survive in settings of extreme social misery. (p.255)

In *Reinventing Anthropology*, Dell Hymes (1974) argues for ethnography that helps build a world culture that is a moral community. McCarty et al. (2011) describe how Hymes found within ethnography not only the methodological tools for understanding diverse ways of speaking, but also a tool for social change. In fact, Hymes (2003) argues, "our ability to learn ethnographically is an extension of what every human being must do, that is, learn the meanings, norms, patterns of a way of life" (p. 13).

## Positionality

Accordingly, positionality is central to critical ethnography as “it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denounce the power structures that surround our subjects” (Madison, 2005, p. 7). McCarty et al. (2011) put forth that critical ethnography “contains within in the seeds of transformation whereby hierarchies between the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’ can be dissolved” (p. 31). Villenas (1996) states, “as researchers, we can be insiders and outsiders to a particular community of research participants at many different levels and at different times” (p. 722). Our life experiences are impacted by our gender, age, social class, political affiliation, religion and region, and consequently shape our perspectives and interpretation as researchers (Banks, 1998). Consequently, Narayan claims that our positionality is determined by where we stand in relationship to the Other and is constantly shifting as different aspects of our positionality may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider and outsider status (as cited in Merriam et al., 2001, p. 412).

Positionality requires that researchers direct their attention beyond themselves to acknowledge how their *subjectivities* in relation to the Other informs and is informed by their engagement and representation of the Other (Madison, 2005). In considering my own positionality, my researcher approach to this study was met with uncomfortable tensions as I attempted to make sense of the contradictions inherent in my insider/outsider status. Since I first started visiting this community fifteen years ago, I frequently considered myself an *insider* because of my long-standing relationships and mutual trust that is shared between myself and many of the families in the community. I was positioned as an *insider* with several families in this community who have called me “Andréa,” with an accent on the “e,” summer after summer. My meaningful relationships in this community have resulted in the creation of a storehouse of memories and experiences that have created friendships based on mutual love and affection. As an *insider*, I was not a colonizing researcher, but rather a long-time friend and family member.

Conversely, it was critical for me to consider how I am simultaneously an *outsider* in the community because of the multiple privileges and identities I hold due to my U.S. citizenship, educational experiences, religious background, gender and social class. I am an Asian American with no historical roots in this community. I could call this community my home; and to do so would not be respectful to local families who call this community their home – a place of rest, toil, hardships, and resistance. Spanish was not my first and native language. Furthermore, my focus on education in this community was another contradiction in itself due to the colonial nature of Western education. Perhaps the most conflicting aspect of my positionality was my status a consumer of the fresh produce that was a direct result of the labor produced by the very individuals who participated in my study. This myriad of privileges and cultural identities I possess largely substantiated and contributed to the structures of power in the agroindustry operating in the San Quintín Valley. I am a walking contradiction with a direct relationship to academia and my obligations as a researcher, while being committed to this community as a friend to several families for over fifteen years.

This *insider/outsider* and *researcher/researched* dichotomy triggered a tension within me that left me trying to juxtapose these two identities. However, Villenas (1996) states, researchers must acknowledge that our positionality is not a fixed or unchanging; rather it is constantly shifting contingent to the time and space we find ourselves. With this perspective, I strove to be transparent and reflexive of my own power, privileges and biases so that I could actively work towards dismantling dominant discourses that portray migrant children as passive and powerless. I chose to resist being a neutral observer by "*othering*" the participants in my study. Instead, I hoped to dialogue with participants, acknowledging that dialogue is both difference and unity, disagreement and agreement – both a separation and coming together (Madison, 2005). As a researcher who endeavored to unmask repressive power mechanisms in Mexico's agroindustry, I had to be *reflexive* of my multiplicity of identities as a researcher and insider/outsider in this community. It was through this reflexive process that I faced these contradictions and assumptions to see myself as a part of a larger community and world that is mutually affected by each other's experiences.

### Power and Representation

When discussing ethnography as a form of inquiry, Hymes (2003) puts forth that much of what we seek to find is knowledge that others already have. Consequently, it is critical to recognize the power dynamics that is inherent in all research and that power is something not only to be aware of but also to negotiate in the research process (Merriam et al., 2001). Power operates not just on people but also through them (Dippo & Simon, 1986). Accordingly, I often questioned the power dynamics present between my study participants and myself as the researcher. Hymes (2003) brings this issue to light as he asks, "how often, one wonders, are decisions reached on the basis not only of numbers and experiences, but also on the basis of privileged personal accounts, fleshing out the data to make it intelligible?" (p.13). As a researcher I tried to be cautious of allowing my assumptions and experiences privilege my interpretation of the study participants and their experiences.

Hymes (2003) further stresses the necessity of knowledge that comes from participation and observation in the community. Pillow (2003) states that power must be *shared* between the researcher and study participants by including discussions of co-development of the research focus and analysis, use of extensive member checks, and actively "sharing data" with all participants. Representation should not be the sole responsibility of the researcher, but rather a shared commitment in which the researcher avoids making assumptions derived from their privileges, which often results in a misrepresentation of the Other's situation (Pillow, 2003). Representation of the participants' experiences must be voiced and articulated by the participants themselves, which includes a process of collaborative data collection, analysis and presentation. It is critical to recognize meanings to be subject to change, re-interpretation and recreation (Hymes, 2003). Hymes (2003) also puts forth that ethnographers need to think of people not just as the intersection of vectors of age, class, income, and occupation alone, but also as individuals making sense of disparate experiences.

It was alluring to approach my study with a romanticized perspective of working migrant children as individuals who were in need of "saving" and "better lives." However, such assumptions make the grim mistake of placing my experiences, values and beliefs at the center of my study by determining the focus and goals of my study. In order to engage in meaningful research, it was critical for my study participants to articulate and give meaning to their experiences from their own perspectives. Conquergood (1991) frames this dialogue with community members as reciprocal giving and receiving, as it is intensely committed to keeping the meanings between the conversations with the researcher open and ongoing. Rather than trying to arrive a conclusion, it was essential to view study participants and their experiences as active and ongoing rather than finite and determined. This approach has the potential to dismantle dominant discourses that continue to present the experiences of the Other as an unchanging historical artifact (Madison, 2005) with momentary significance.

## Overview of Project

The following section of this chapter will provide a detailed overview of project. My study took place over a period of six months as I began my fieldwork in July 2016 and returned in January 2017. It is important to note that I have used pseudonyms for study participants, school name and other key sites in my study to protect the privacy and identity of the community and it's members. Appendix A provides a detailed description of my research activities during my time in the community. Although it is not noted on the table, I maintained detailed field notes and analytic memos as much as possible throughout my fieldwork. I also provide my research questions and provide a brief discussion of my rationale for the selection of my research site, participants, methods and my data analysis process below.

### Explanation of Research Questions

My project was guided by the following questions:

1. How does the labor market in the community affect study youth's schooling experiences?
2. How do youth's relationships within their social networks shape their aspirations?
3. What is the relationship between youth's aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories?

My first research question highlighted my concern with the ways in which the labor market in the agroindustry has shaped the schooling experiences of working migrant children. As migrant children begin working, they are exposed to a different realm of expectations, experiences, and norms that inevitably shape their attitudes and perceptions of schooling. Much of the components listed have to do with their working conditions and school settings to focus on how these aspects of their everyday lives shaped their schooling experiences. My second research question built upon my first question by taking into consideration how their wide array of social networks might influence their aspirations. Interactions with social networks can range from short conversations with people they work with to their time spend with a group of friends, family members and teachers. Finally, question three attempted to understand the relationship between migrant youth's aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories.

I initially began my study with the intention of focusing solely on occupational aspirations; however given the complex realities of migrant youth in this community, I later widened my understanding of aspirations to any future goals or aims that they expressed. Given the restricted labor market, I found that youth often aspired to become to obtain things outside of the traditional labor market. Expressions of their future aspirations, whether they were occupational or not, revealed the ways in which migrant youth resisted and contested structural constraints in the wider community and their everyday lives.

## Research Site and Study Participants

**Research Site.** My study took place in a small community called San Telmo, which is located in the larger San Quintín Valley region in Baja California. My primary research site was initially at a school called Hope Elementary School, which was a private government certified primary school serving over 120 students with 6 teachers and 3 staff members. The majority of the families enrolled in this school were farmers, although there were a few business owners. The selection of my research site was largely based on my access to the site and long-standing relationships I had with the teachers, students and families at the school. I had already been in frequent communication with school staff and families concerning the purpose and timeline of my study. Although Hope Elementary School ended up not being my primary research site, I began my research activities at the school and conducted participant-observations and interviews with teachers, students and students' families.

After the first few weeks in the community, however, I unexpectedly ended up spending more time with migrant youth who were not in school due to the relationships I quickly developed with them. I found this was more appropriate for the focus of my study as I was interested in the working and educational experiences of migrant youth, who were often not in school. I often spent time in public spaces such as the community basketball court, local stores, parks and other open spaces where migrant spent their free time instead of in the classroom or at a school site.

**Study Participants.** My method of recruiting study participants was snowball-sampling, which entails locating a few potential participants based on the research purpose (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013). The "snowball" grows larger as the participants refer the researcher to their social networks (Merriam, 2009). Maxwell (2013) also emphasizes the importance of selecting participants with whom you can establish the most productive relationships with, ones that will best be able to answer your research questions. Initially I conducted interviews and participant-observations with students and families at Hope Elementary School. Within a few weeks however, I ended up developing relationships with the *Callejeros* [street roamers] and working migrant youth, who were not enrolled in school.

Initially, my study was focused on the schooling and working experiences of migrant children (ages 12 and below). Throughout my time in the field however, I ended up spending most of my time with adolescents (older than 12) who were not in school. Although this was a natural occurrence, I found that it helped directly address my research questions as adolescents were old enough to reflect on their lived experiences attending school and working in the fields. I found that that this age group was able to comfortably articulate their changing aspirations and personal experiences from their own perspectives during our interviews.

In particular, there were three groups of migrant youth with whom I spent the most time during my fieldwork: 1) the Guanajuato family, 2) Los Soñadores, and 3) Los Callejeros. I spent most of my time with these three groups of migrant youth because of my existing relationships with them and their availability to spend time during the day or on the weekends when they were not working. Additionally, these three groups of migrant youth were not strangers to each other as many of them are friends and neighbors. Consequently, sometimes we all spent time together playing basketball or just talking together in a large group after they returned from work. The ages of the migrant youth in each of these groups range from 12-21 years old and all of them spoke Spanish, while a few also spoke their Indigenous language.

In Chapters 4-7, I provide a fuller description of the stories of each group, including my conversations and interactions with them during my fieldwork. I also interweave personal narratives of each participant throughout my chapters as I describe my findings. In Table 3.1 (see below), I provide a short description of each group study participants and additional details about each migrant youth.

**Table 3.1 – Description of Study Participants**

| Group Name | Description | Participants |
|---|---|---|
| Guanajuato Family | A family of eight women who migrated from Guanajato, a southern state in Mexico. Leticia and Araceli are sisters. Like many migrant families from the south, their mother decided to stay in San Telmo because of the availability of work all year round. | Leticia, 21 years old<br>Araceli, 17 years old |
| Los Soñadores (The Dreamers) | *Soñadores* [Dreamers], a group of four migrant youth who have aspirations to work in the United States. In particular, they frequently described "The American Dream"; simply put, as their desires to cross the border to work in the United States. | Javier, 17 years old<br>Gerardo, 18 years old<br>Verónica, 17 years old<br>Emmanuel, 21 years old |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Los Callejeros (Street Roamers) | *Los Callejeros* [Street Roamers] are a group of four migrant youth boys who have proudly given themselves that nickname. They are in a gang called “Vatos Locos” and are neither consistently working or in school. | Lucas, 16 years old<br>Martín, 15 years old<br>Carlos, 16 years old<br>Juan, 14 years old |

It is important to note that I refer to the youth in my study at “migrant” youth although many of them have lived in San Telmo for several years or were even born in the area. I have intentionally referred to the youth in my study as “migrant youth” because most of them have expressed they desire to go back to their communities of origin or see themselves in a transitory state with the possibility of moving to the United States or another state in search of work. This attitude is evident in the ways that migrant youth often emphasized, “No somos de aquí.” A story of their migration journey would often follow this phrase as migrant youth explained that they still have family in the south and were not originally from the area. In fact, this attitude is reflective of the reality of many migrant families in the community who often shared their plans to move to another state in search of work or return back to their communities of origin. While many families have “settled down” in the San Quintín Valley for several years, the prospect of packing up their bags and moving back south or even to the United States is always a possibility for them.

## Overview of Methods

Because my study employed ethnographic methods, my research approach was as *naturalistic* as possible and consequently primarily utilized three methods: (1) informal interviews (2) participant-observations and (3) group interviews. I carried out a few structured activities with students from Hope Elementary School, but these activities were not the main source of my findings. I disclosed my researcher role to my study participants and was transparent about the aims of my study at all times during my fieldwork whether I was conducting interviews or engaging in participant-observations. Due to my frequent interactions and personal relationship with several families in this community, I anticipated that informal interviews and participant-observations will yield the most natural and rich data as these are the two most common forms of interactions that I have had with the community for the past fifteen years at the time of my study.

**Language Concerns.** It is important to note that all of my interviews with migrant youth were conducted in Spanish without a translator. I did not have a translator as I felt that I was able to communicate with migrant youth in Spanish, which was the language they were most comfortable with. Contrastingly, a few of my interviews with parents from Hope Elementary School and adults in the community required the presence of a translator as many of them spoke Indigenous languages. Usually migrant children and youth would accompany us during our conversations and help translate. A few parents spoke both their Indigenous language and limited Spanish; in such cases, I found that they would prefer to speak in Spanish and have their children assist them translations when necessary.

**Informal Interviews.** Madison (2005) states that ethnographic interviews open realms of meaning that permeate beyond surface information or finding the "truth of the matter". Merriam (2009) describes informal interviews as "almost like conversations" with no predetermined sets of questions. Interviews are often intimate encounters that require trust (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). On this note, Seidman (2013) emphasizes that it is critical for researchers to establish rapport with their participants, which "implies getting along with each other, a harmony with, a conformity to and an affinity for one another" (p. 89). Accordingly, during the first few weeks during my fieldwork, I focused on conducting informal interviews to establish rapport with my study participants. Informal interviews are usually unexpected; occurring while the researcher is hanging around a setting or entering a home to conduct a more formal interview (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). They can be casual conversations, incidental occurrences or social interactions (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). There were a few informal interviews with parents that place in unexpected settings as I was visiting their homes. In some cases, parents spoke their Indigenous languages and their children helped translate as we conversed back and forth.

Merriam (2009) points out that one of the main goals of informal interviews is to learn enough about a situation to inform questions for subsequent interviews. Accordingly, I conducted exploratory informal interviews during the first few weeks of my fieldwork with the purpose of getting to know the narratives of study participants. I continued to engage in informal interviews throughout my fieldwork as opportunities present themselves. Most informal interviews took place in public spaces such as soccer fields, playgrounds, street corners and any other places where migrant youth spent their time. Although I never strived for informal interviews to be tape-recorded for transcription, I made decisions to record interviews based on the situation in which the interview took place. I logged detailed field notes after each informal interview as frequently as possible to document such interactions while they are fresh (Emerson et al., 2011). Field notes were recorded on a word processor as well as on tape recorder when necessary.

**Group Interviews.** Surprisingly, many of my group interviews, which took place in Spanish, proved to be a very productive strategy for interviewing youth. Fontana and Frey (1991) argue that group interviews are excellent mechanisms for bringing the research closer to respondents as it is flexible group members often stimulate each other. Group interviews can provide a greater depth of understanding about the field context and the relationships between members in a particular setting as it can stimulate new ideas, identify language or symbols not previously acknowledged (Fontana & Frey, 1991). During my fieldwork, I often found that the Callejeros and Soñadores enjoyed group interviews in the form of natural conversations as they reconstructed memories together and argued about local meanings and presented individual responses to some of the topics that I would ask them about. It was also evident that a group dynamic made migrant youth feel more comfortable to share their experiences and opinions with peers they were familiar with.

Most of my group interviews spontaneously occurred as we were hanging out in a public space, whether it was in the streets, basketball court or a local store. There is a great advantage to group interviews because instead of simply observing groups, the interviewer can enter the group and pose questions (Frey & Fontana, 1991). In the same light, it was evident that my active participation in the group interviews made migrant youth feel comfortable with my presence in the group, as there was a reciprocal exchange. I also found that even when I told migrant youth that I was going to record our conversation, they still felt comfortable conversing since they were not being interviewed or asked questions individually but in a public and group setting. The informal and unplanned nature of our group interviews in the form of conversations often resulted in dynamic and lengthy interactions between peers and myself.

**Participant-Observations.** I carried out participant-observations as a *participant as observer*, which is when a researcher's observer activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher's role as a participant (Merriam, 2009). However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, my positionality shifted throughout the research process depending on how I was positioned in particular contexts. Merriam (2009) points out that in reality, researchers are rarely total participants or total observers. There is a mix of roles wherein a researcher might begin as either a full participant and then withdraw into more of an observer stance or reversely begin as a total observer and become more a participant over time (Merriam, 2009). Consequently, my involvement as a participant and observer was fluid and changing depending on the situation and the people I was surrounded by throughout my fieldwork.

During my time in San Telmo, I was directly involved in school activities as an English schoolteacher. During a visit to Hope Elementary School, I asked several teachers and our school director how I could meaningfully participate in school activities during the six months that I am carrying out my fieldwork. After a discussion with the school director, she suggested that I hold after-school classes to help students who are in need of additional support with their studies. However outside my involvement with school activities, I acted a participant-observer as I spent time with migrant youth through everyday activities such as playing soccer, sharing meals together, hanging out at local stores and visiting each other's homes. I strived to *immerse and co-participate* in the research setting as much as possible to learn the specialized language and norms of the setting (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). In most situations, I disclosed my researcher identity and study purpose to avoid deception or participant mistrust and to establish trust and rapport with potential study participants and the larger community.

I also want to emphasize that although I was focusing on the educational experiences of migrant youth, I did not only observe or participate in activities within the school. Bourgois (1996) writes, "perhaps the greatest weakness of education ethnographies, however, remains their arbitrary focus on a single institution – the school – and worse yet, the classroom within the school" (p. 251). He continues to point out that radical ethnographers fail to venture out into the hallways, playgrounds, or the surrounding streets thereby reinstating the failure of privileged intellectuals to confront street culture on its own terms (Bourgois, 1996). As I am focusing on *how* migrant youth resist and confront structural constraints in their everyday lives, I refrained from staying within the walls of the classroom and strived to spend as much time possible with migrant youth in their preferred settings. I actively tried to participate in activities outside of the school, on the streets, in homes to understand the experiences of migrant youth in their own contexts.

I strived for "thick description" in my field notes at all times during my fieldwork. Emerson et al. (2011) point out that writing field notes is not a matter of passively writing "facts" or "what happened" down. Emerson et al. (2011) state that there is no one "natural" or "correct" way to write about what the researcher observes. Because writing field notes involves issues of perception and interpretation, different descriptions of similar events are both possible and valuable (Emerson et al., 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2011). The observer must be intentional about including details that go beyond descriptions of the physical settings and conversations that occur in the field to also make note of interactional processes, everyday routines, and participants' reactions and body language (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam 2009). Attending to such details allow the researcher to see beyond fixed, static entities, to understand the active "doing" of social life (Emerson et al., 2011). As San Telmo was mostly comprised of Indigenous families, it was critical for me to discern local meanings by looking for concerns embedded and expressed in naturally occurring interactions (Emerson et al., 2011).

All field notes taken during participant-observations and interviews were recorded in my research journal as "jottings", which ranged from short phrases to entire paragraphs describing the observed interaction or setting (Emerson et al., 2011). Every day I "recalled in order to write," which means that I went through the process of reimagining and replaying the scenes and events that marked the day to write down as many details as possible as my desk (Emerson et al., 2011). I used my jottings to construct my desk field notes, which included depiction of scenes, dialogue and characterization (description of individuals) in the form of *sketches* and *episodes* as described in by Emerson et al. (2011). While some days I wrote field notes as a day's entry describing the day's experiences and observations, I will also wrote *sketches* and *episodes* which are often more focused on producing "close up picture" of a single individual, interaction, setting or event from that particular day (Emerson et al., 2011).

**Structured Activities.** Although my time in the field was largely centered on the experiences of migrant youth, who were not enrolled in school, I continued to carry out structured activities with elementary students at Hope Elementary School as their English teacher. Recent literature addressing the importance of developing new ways of working with children to reposition their narratives in research has emerged in the 1990's (Barker & Weller, 2003). Barker and Weller (2003) discuss how an increasing number of research projects have adopted a multi-method approach to enable children to communicate in ways that are comfortable for them. Some of these methods include drawing, photography and the use of journals to provide children with different possibilities to express their thoughts and experiences (Barker & Weller, 2003; Darbyshire et al., 2005; Punch, 2002). It is necessary to recognize that children perceive and experience the world differently from adults. Children often have shorter attention spans and may be more accustomed to *doing* activities rather than *listening* (Punch, 2002).

As an English teacher, I carried out a variety of unstructured activities, including drawing activities and daily journals. Drawings enable children to be creative and actively involved in the research process (Punch, 2002). In the classroom, journals are useful activities that give children opportunities to describe their daily activities and what they specifically wish to share (Punch, 2002). With the consent of the participants in my study, I had students participate in drawing and journal activities during my English class. Although these activities did not take place every day, children were able to communicate their thoughts and experiences in a manner that they feel most comfortable. Participation in these activities was voluntary and did not impede their ability to attend my class. Appendix B describes some of drawing activities and journal topics that I asked my students to write on. Although this is not an exhaustive list of the activities and topics they were asked to participate in, I began with these topics and modified and re-created activities as themes and topics emerged during my fieldwork.

**Field Notes as a Reflexive Tool.** Field note descriptions of any event will differ depending on the choices, positional personal sensitivities, and interactional concerns of the observer (Emerson et al., 2011). Consequently, it is critical to recognize that different field note descriptions invoke and rely on different lenses to interpret, frame and represent these matters (Emerson et al., 2011). To be reflexive about my subjective lens as a researcher, I wrote reflective memos as much as possible that documented my thoughts and interpretations throughout the research process. Emerson et al. (2011) refer to these memos as *asides*, *commentaries,* and *in-process memos*. *Asides* are brief, reflective pieces of analytics writing that clarify, explain, interpret, or raise questions about some specific happening; while in *commentaries*, observers take a few moments to mentally review an important, confusing or memorable issue to raise and briefly explore (Emerson et al., 2011). Writing *In-process memos* allows researchers to develop analytic leads and insights early in the fieldwork process that will help them elaborate and formulate theoretical significant for future writing and data analysis (Emerson et al., 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2011).

These different forms of reflective writing are critical to regularly complete as reflexivity captures both the reactions that naturally occur because an outsider enters and interacts with the setting, and the capacity of the observer to reflect on those reactions (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Accordingly, Rossman and Rallis (2011) state, “reflexivity is a package of reciprocal and iterative reactions between the researcher and the participants in the setting” (pg. 47). One observable difference between this community and myself is my outward appearance as an Asian American. Although I had long-standing relationships with several families in the community, my physical appearance always changed the settings I walk into regardless of whether the participants knew me personally or not. It was critical for me to record subtle reactions and interactions to reflect on how my study participants and myself were mutually affected by each other. Although the longer that I stayed in the community, the less my presence may have affected everyday routine, this assumption could not be made for all community members. Consequently, I utilized my field notes as a reflexive tool to reflect on the etic and emic processes and how my actions are perceived by study participants and the larger community. Reflective writing was also useful for triangulation of data and data analysis and writing process.

## Data Analysis

**Ongoing, On-site Analysis.** Data were continuously analyzed during my time in the field. Initially, I hoped that all interview transcripts and field notes would be loosely coded as they are completed. However, I was only able to transcribe a few interviews as I spent most of my free time writing field notes, analytical memos and reflections. I created descriptive and analytical codes, which is coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning (Lyn, 2005). These codes were useful for on-site data analysis of my field notes. I also attempted to create preliminary *categories* (or themes), which are conceptual elements that capture come recurring pattern that cuts across my data (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Rossman and Rallis (2011) point out that critical ethnography will specifically search for evidence of hegemony, paternalism, resistance and reproduction. As Merriam (2009) states, “devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge, and the meaning made explicit by the participants themselves” (p. 183-184). I regularly referred to my conceptual framework and research questions to facilitate the analysis process (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). *In-process memos* will also assist coding process and category construction process by providing analytic leads and links between my different sets of data.

**Member Checks of Preliminary Findings.** Rossman and Rallis (2011) discuss several strategies to help enhance credibility, reliability and validity of the study, which include the *triangulation* of multiple sources of data and *member checks*. *Triangulation* is the process in which multiple sources of data, multiple points of time or a variety of methods are used to build the picture that the researcher is investigating (Maxwell, 2013; Rossman and Rallis, 2011). *Member checks* (respondent validation) is when the researcher solicits feedback from study participants to ensure that the study data is not misinterpreted (Merriam, 2009). It is crucial that participants can recognize or re-construct their experience in your interpretation and writing. Consequently, I performed member checks with my study participants during the last month of my fieldwork as I shared my analytical memos and field notes with them. The rationale for carrying out member checks the last month was to share after significant data collection to present a more “complete” picture of my preliminary findings. This was a highly relational process as migrant youth often laughed at my summary of our conversations and would many times correct my adaptation of their responses or my reactions.

**Interview Transcription.** Upon returning from my fieldwork, I transcribed my interviews in the Spanish language using the software “Express Scribe,” which provided variable speed playback. I chose to transcribe my interviews in the Spanish language to retain original meanings in the contexts of the conversations I was having with study participants. There were a few places in the interview where I had a hard time understanding what they were saying or did not understand the meaning of the phrase used. In such instances, I asked study participants to translate or elaborate on what was said during my visits back to San Telmo.

**Second-Round of Data Analysis.** Upon completion of my data collection, I performed another round of analysis on all my data including field notes, analytic memos and interview transcriptions. During this process, I coded my field notes and interview transcriptions in detail while referencing my research questions and conceptual framework to guide my analysis. Merriam (2009) states that data needs to be presented as evidence; and it is the quality and quantity of the evidence provided that persuades the reader that the findings are trustworthy. The building of evidence requires the researcher to move beyond thematic analysis to a higher level of synthesis to find meaning beyond the specifics of the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Interpretation entails connecting the way that the researcher understands and interprets the data with a larger concept, research or theory (Maxwell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2011). As Rossman and Rallis (2011) state, "what you have seen in the field, what you heard participants say, symbols and signs you have noted, all come together into an experience that has meaning for the participants and you." Hence, interpretation is capturing that meaning and expressing it so that it fits into a larger picture during the writing process (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Accordingly, my second-round of data analysis moved beyond creating codes, categories and themes to connect my findings to my theoretical framework.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter began by discussing a larger discourse of critical ethnography. Drawing upon the work of ethnographers such as Teresa McCarty, Dell Hymes and Philippe Bourgois, I described how ethnography can be used as a powerful tool for social change by documenting injustices and oppression that is often neglected in a larger discourse of post-modern perspectives. The second part of this chapter described my research design, including research site and participants, study methods and how I performed data analysis upon my return from the field. In the following chapter, I begin to discuss the findings of my study beginning with the educational experiences of migrant youth. As migrant families have settled down in San Telmo, I endeavored to understand why migrant youth continued to drop out of school despite increased access to schooling. I also discuss obstacles to schooling and classroom experiences of migrant youth, which helped understand the ways in which such experiences shaped migrant youth's decisions to drop out of school and consequently their aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories.

# CHAPTER 4

## WHY GO TO SCHOOL?
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF MIGRANT YOUTH

*I didn't like it (school). It was boring. The teachers yelled at me. I'm dumb. I didn't learn anything while I was in school. It's not for people like me. (Lucas, Interview, 10/16/2016)*

This chapter provides an overview of the educational contexts and experiences of migrant youth in San Telmo. I begin by first describing "The Paradox" that I ran into throughout my fieldwork. While farming families have been able to settle down and consequently have increased access to schooling opportunities available in their communities, why did children and youth continue to drop out of school? I began investigating this paradox by exploring the educational contexts of the community, particularly the accessibility and presence of schools in the wider San Telmo Community. I continued to attempt to unravel the paradox by asking migrant youth about obstacles they faced in order to continue their schooling. Although these responses helped me make more sense of why children and youth struggle to complete their schooling, I grew particularly interested in the schooling experiences of migrant youth that I spent time with during my fieldwork. It was during these conversations that they often described their interactions with teachers, childhood memories and aspirations. As migrant youth described their childhood aspirations and their current aspirations, the paradox that I was exploring in the beginning of my study slowly started unraveling.

### The Paradox

It is critical to understand the educational experiences of migrant youth to consider how social reproduction continues to transpire in the community. Although migrant farming families have been able to settle down over the past decade, generational poverty persists in San Telmo as migrant youth continue work in the fields as their parents have for generations. In the same light, while education is broadly discussed as a critical instrument to eliminate social inequality, migrant youth in San Telmo continued to drop out of school. Exploring the educational experiences of migrant youth can help understand the ways in which processes of social reproduction take place both inside and outside the classroom. In particular, the paradox that I continued to run into throughout my fieldwork profoundly shed light on the attitudes of migrant youth towards education and subsequently their aspirations and life trajectories.

In the past, working migrant families were forced to move frequently due to the seasonal nature of the agroindustry. In the past decade, the families in my study have been able to settle down in San Telmo due to advances in technology in the agroindustry and the increased demand of fresh produce year-round. The availability of jobs year-round has resulted in increased living standards for migrant families. During my time in San Telmo, I observed that many families started businesses, opened small local stores and were even able to purchase their own land. Over the past decade, one additional primary school and two “telesegundarías” (tele-secondary schools)[1] have emerged in the community. Furthermore, migrant children also have the opportunity to attend schooling throughout the year without disruptions in school attendance and the emotional and social challenges of adjusting to new classroom settings during their migration journeys. When migrant children accompanied their parents on migration journeys, they would often not enroll in school or struggled with the challenges of frequently having to adjust to a new school. Interestingly, despite having increased opportunities to attend school, children of migrant farmers continue to drop out of school or not attend school altogether.

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[1] Telesegundarías (tele-secondary schools) were established in the late 1960s with the purpose of meeting the educational needs of rural hard-to-reach areas in Mexico, mostly in communities of under 2,500 inhabitants (Durán,

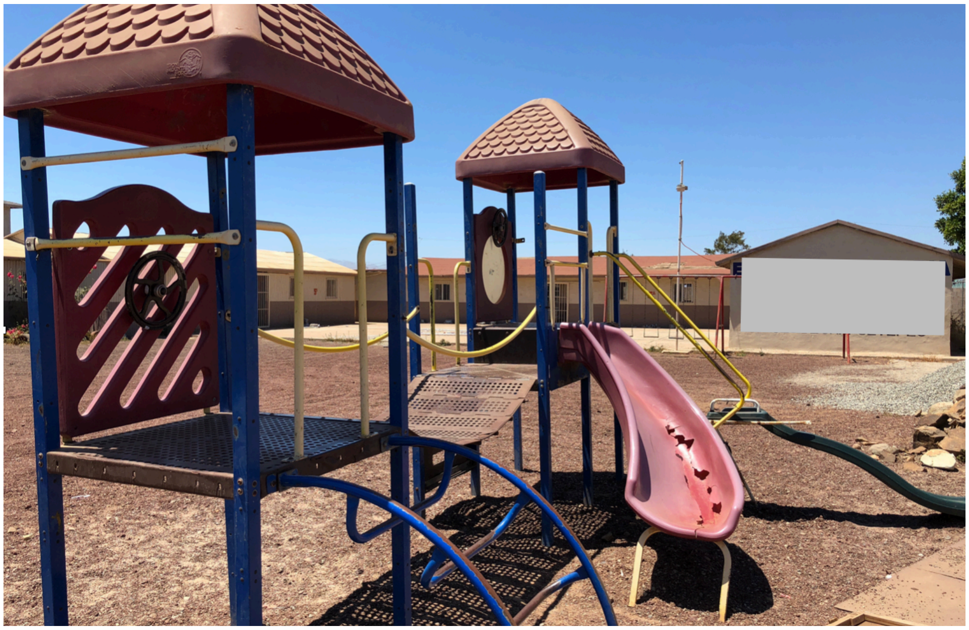

*Figure 4.1* The playground for lower grades in the schoolyard at Hope Elementary School.

At the time of this study, San Telmo had three local *primarías* (primary schools), two *segundarías* (secondary schools) and one *prepa* (high school)[2]. Two of these schools were private schools that charged tuition, while the rest were government public schools that operated free of cost to the public. Due to the small size of the community, all of these schools were within walking distance of each other. The rundown façade of the school buildings almost made it appear that they were not operational. However, the loud noises of voices in the classrooms and students playing outside in their uniforms were clear markers that classes were in session. Most primary schools had rundown playgrounds with rusty swings and slightly dented slides. Secondary schools were a little better equipped with beat-up basketball court rims and backboards. Classrooms were minimally furnished with worn desks, chairs and small chalkboards. Despite the tired appearance of the classrooms, the vibrant work of students and projects posted on the walls brought life to the classrooms. The efforts of teachers to maintain their classrooms were evident in the posters and artwork posted on the walls that correlated with their lesson plans. Teachers often excitedly pointed out the latest projects their students were working on and voiced their needs for more resources such as books, classroom furniture and school supplies for their students.

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[2] In Mexico, primarías (grades 1-6) are equivalent to elementary schools, segundarías (grades 7-9) to middle schools, and preparatorías (grades 10-12) to high schools in the United States.

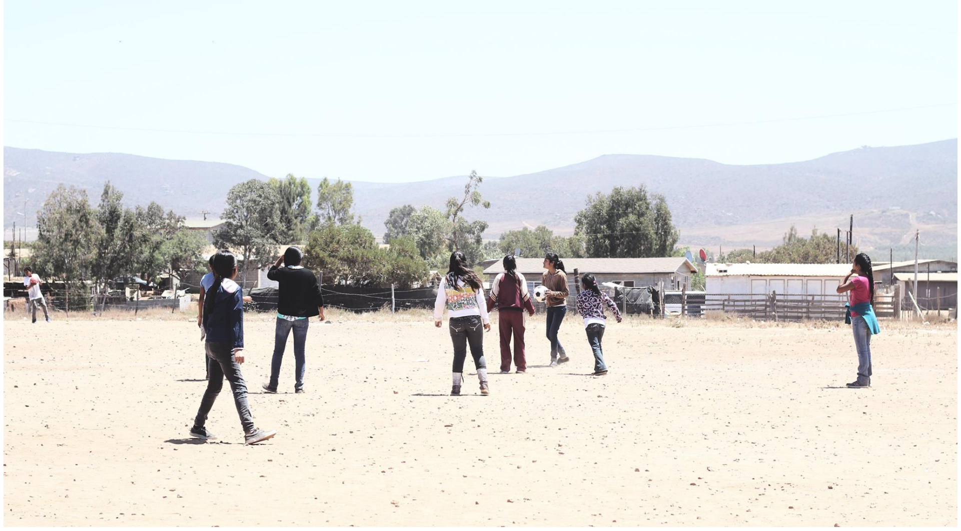

*Figure 4.2* A soccer field outside the one of the telesegundarías in the community.

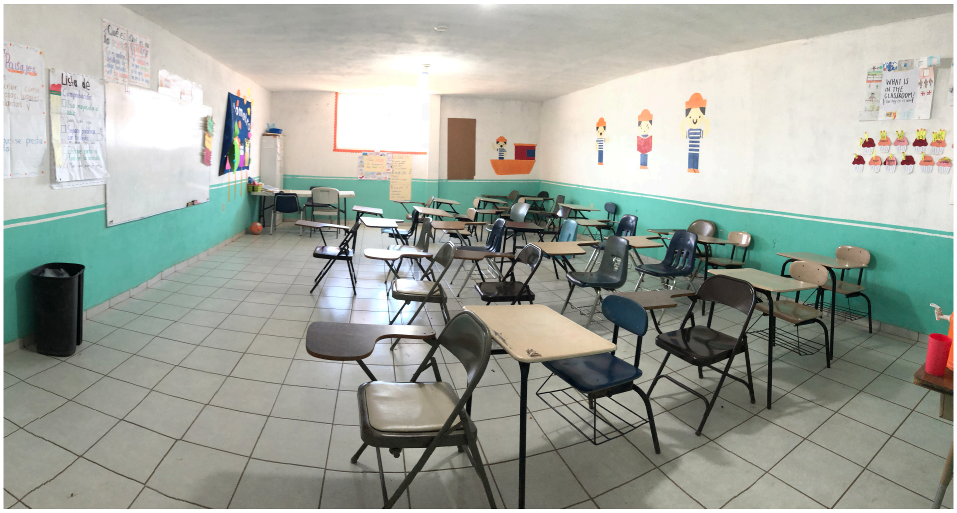

*Figure 4.3* The third grade classroom in Hope Elementary School.

After visiting these schools, it became apparent that the absence of schools in the community is not the reason why students drop out or do not attend school. Interestingly, migrant youth held the perspective that in order to have better futures and obtain higher-paying jobs outside of the fields, they need to continue their schooling. In one of my conversations with the Callejeros, the group of street boys described my previous chapter, our exchange reflected the paradox that I kept running into during my time in the field.

Andrea: What do you want to do when you're older?

Juan: We don't have futures! We didn't go to school. We don't even know how to read.

Andrea: So, you don't think you can have a future without education? Then why aren't you in school?

Juan: Because I don't like school.

Carlos: Because I'm working.

Andrea: Oh, are you working every day?

Carlos: No, I work when I want to! I'm out on the streets on my bike and listening to rap music. (laughs)

As a group of street boys with a particular reputation to uphold, it was important to the Callejeros to make it clear that they weren't in school nor did they like school. Juan and Carlos are both core members of the Callejeros as opposed to other peers that hang out with them occasionally. Juan was born in Oaxaca, Mexico and moved to San Telmo with his family when he was five years old. Despite his parents' persistent requests for him to continue schooling, Juan dropped out of school when he was in third grade because he was "bored." Juan would always appear wearing his signature blue beanie with a green painted marijuana leaf in the middle. His long hair would slip out of his beanie and slightly cover his large eyes as he often laughed quietly at the jokes his friends would make about him. Similar to Juan, Carlos was one of the more quiet boys in the group. He was born in San Telmo to parents who migrated from Oaxaca in search for work. Over the years, he has worked occasionally selling water jugs house to house in the community. His signature outfit was comprised of black square sunglasses, regardless of the weather, and a dark blue flannel that was always worn inside out with the numbers "13" painted on his sleeves. Carlos dropped out of school in first grade because he did not like his teachers or sitting in class "doing nothing." When asked what his parents thought about him dropping out of school, Carlos shrugged his shoulders and said they didn't really care as long as he was working.

Based on the conversation above, it was quite obvious that Carlos and Juan both perceived that in order to have higher-paying jobs and "futures" they needed to go to school. Interestingly, neither was in school at the time of the study and neither made it past third grade. Moreover, they weren't consistently working in the fields and instead spent their time roaming the streets with their friends on their bikes. This circular exchange occurred frequently with most migrant youth I interviewed wherein they stressed the importance of education for their futures but said it was not a worthwhile option for them. The same question continued to reemerge throughout my study: Why do migrant children continue to drop out of school or not attend altogether despite increased educational opportunities? Within this question was the paradox that guided my project during my time in San Telmo. Throughout my exchanges with migrant youth, I found that their schooling experiences varied widely and offered different explanations for why they continued their schooling or dropped out of school altogether.

## Obstacles to Schooling

When asked about the average educational attainment of children in the larger community, migrant youth shared that most complete primary school but do not continue to secondary school due to varying reasons. While schools in the local community were tuition-free, families continued to face a number of obstacles that made it difficult for them to send their children to school or for children to continue their schooling beyond primary school. The different obstacles to schooling that migrant youth faced revealed the ways in which social reproduction persisted through informal and formal mechanisms in social networks, local institutions and interactions in the family.

## Costs of Education

Although public schools are tuition-free, the most widespread response to why participants did not finish or dropped out of school are the costs that accompany attending school. The cost of uniforms, school supplies, lunch and books were financial burdens for families in San Telmo. In one of my conversations with Javier, one of the Soñadores described in my previous chapter, he explained that he did not finish secondary school due to costs of schooling and instead started working in the fields to support his family.

> Andrea: Why did you begin working instead of finishing secondary school?
>
> Javier: Because I didn't have money.
>
> Andrea: Oh.
>
> Javier: That's the basically the reason. I didn't have money and it takes money to go to school. Going to school requires so many things. Pencils, books, shoes.
>
> Andrea: If you can, would you want to continue going to school?
>
> Javier: For me, education means a good life. If you're educated, you have money. But many people can't go to school. It costs money to go. It costs money to continue studying. I think for everyone this is the reason why. We don't have money.

Not only does it cost money to attend school, but also costs money to continue schooling. From the time of my study, Javier graduated from primary school only three years before. He attended secondary school for one year before dropping out to work in the fields. Although his parents offered to help support him if he wanted to continue schooling, Javier made his own decision to work so that he can help support his other siblings who were still in primary school. Most of my conversations with Javier took place in the evening as the sun was going down when he was returning from work. It was routine for me to be sitting outside on basketballs courts that were located directly in front of where I was living. He would wave at me, slowly walk over and sit down next to me to tell me about how his day went. His face and shoes were often stained with patches of dirt from picking and moving produce in buckets all day. In the conversation above, Javier described how he dropped out of school because of the costs of attending and continuing schooling. Referring to the larger community using the word “we,” he emphasized that this is situation for most youth who drop out of school due to the costs of schooling.

In the same conversation, Verónica shared her personal experiences with the accruing costs of continuing her schooling. She was also one of the Soñadores who aspired to move to the United States to work. I have known Verónica since she was six years old. Over the years, I have seen her grow to become a strong-willed individual. Her hair was always neatly tied back in a ponytail and her usual outfit consisted of jeans and a worn loose yellow sweater she bought at the *segunda* [second-hand clothing store]. Her serious demeanor and strong eye contact conveyed the ways in which she carried the weight of the world on her shoulders as a dutiful daughter, sister and student. The burden of being a student did not come from the pressure to get good grades, but rather because she was the only person in her family, out of five siblings, who was in school. Her mom and stepdad never attended school, while her older brother dropped out of school when he was in third grade. As the youngest sibling in her family, the expectations of her getting a *carrera* [career, white-collar job] weighed heavily on her since everyone else in her family was working in the fields to put food on the table and support her schooling. When asked what she wanted to be when she finishes school, she shrugged her shoulders and quietly replied, *quien sabe* [who knows]. Even after such an uncertain response, she looked up at me and quickly flashed a reassuring smile.

Surprisingly, she was the only youth I interviewed who was still in school at the time of my study. Although she wanted to work in the fields to help support her family, she understood that her mother, stepfather and brother have worked in the fields to finance her studies so that she could avoid working in the fields. To my surprise, Verónica expressed that she was tired of studying. Regardless of how she felt, however, she continued her schooling because she did not want to disappoint her family. As the conversation continued, Verónica described how the rising costs of schooling deter youth in the community from continuing their schooling.

> Andrea: Have you ever thought about working instead of studying?
>
> Verónica: Hmm. No. I've only thought about how I am tired of studying. I don't really want to study anymore. But I think about my dad and how much money he has spent. And I don't want to disappoint him. I feel that he really trusts me. I don't want my dad to get upset with me or feel sad.
>
> Andrea: Do you need to pay to go to high school?
>
> Verónica: Yes, we need to pay for books and a registration fee. Some high schools in Camalú (neighboring community) have expensive uniforms and registration but the books are free.
>
> Javier: (Interrupts) And the tests are 100 or 200 pesos. And sometimes, other tests cost more. You just pay money, pay money, pay money.
>
> Verónica: There are kids that finish primary school and do not enter secondary school. There are some that finish secondary school and do not finish high school. There are even some that finish high school and work in the fields. Because there isn't any money. You

> have to take exams and pay for things. There are many that study but do not finish. There are very few that end up getting a career. There are only two or three. In this entire area, there are only three, two or one.

Evidently, although students might have enrolled in school, continuing and finishing school posed additional obstacles because families had to pay additional costs. Verónica explained that it was rare for students in the local community to obtain a university degree and get a career (white collar job). There were some students who finished high school and still ended up working in the fields due to the exams and high tuition costs of attending a university. Consequently, while some students managed to continue schooling beyond primary school, the increasing costs of taking exams and tuition deterred students from obtaining a university degree, which would have given them opportunities to access higher paying jobs outside of the fields. Because the cost of sending children to school steadily increases, parents preferred to have their children work alongside them as an additional source of income when they were old enough and physically able to begin working.

### Birth Certificate Documentation

Another barrier to continuing schooling for farming families was their lack of *papeles* [papers]. During my fieldwork, I picked up that when parents used the word, *papeles*, they were actually referring to legal documentation. In most cases, they were referring to birth certificates and the legal fees associated with registering births. Many of the families that resided in San Telmo and worked in the fields migrated from southern states in Mexico, such as Oaxaca and Guerrero. Because many families had their children during their migration journey or never registered their child's birth from their community of origin, they did not have birth certificates, which were required for children to receive their certificates of graduation from any level of schooling. This was the case for many families I was able to interview during my fieldwork. While their children were allowed to attend primary school without a birth certificate, they were not allowed to receive their certificate of graduation, which was required to enroll into secondary school.

For example, the Martinez family, one of the families I interviewed from Hope Elementary School, migrated from Guerrero and settled in San Telmo just eight years ago before the start of my study. Their daughter Jessica was in the sixth grade and loved to study science. Every morning she would come to school with her hair tied up in a tight ponytail and bangs brushed to the side. She often smiled and was eager to present her science projects in class. Because her mother, Lizeth, speaks Amuzgos and did not speak Spanish fluently, Jessica translated my conversations with her. During one conversation, Lizeth explained that her daughter would not be able to continue secondary school because they do not have her birth certificate.

Andrea: Which secondary school is Jessica going to attend?

Lizeth: (Pauses) Well, we're not sure if she will attend. But she really hopes to so we're hoping for the best.

Andrea: Why isn't Jessica going to continue?

Lizeth: We don't have her papers (birth certificate). She was born in Guerrero before we moved here. In order to get her papers, we have to go back but we just don't have the money to do that right now.

Andrea: Have you spoken to the School Director? Maybe she can help somehow.

Lizeth: (Interrupts) Well, we did but when we went to an office over there in Camalú (neighboring community) but they didn't have anyone that speaks my language. We didn’t know what papers to fill out. We also have to pay 600 pesos. We can’t do that right now.

Jessica: I will talk to the School Director again but if I can’t go to secondary school, I can go to the fields and help my mom until we can get my paper.

Although Jessica finished her years in primary school with impressive scores, she was not able to receive her certificate of graduation and enroll into secondary school because a birth certificate was required. The Martinez family, along with several other families, expressed that they were told different information by school staff, officials in the state office and their neighbors. Some families were told that they needed to return to their community of origin to register their child’s birth, while others were told that they could register their children during certain months of the year. Regarding cost, the Martinez family was told they would have to pay 600 pesos. Other families were told that they would be able to register their children for free in certain offices. Many families grew tired of getting the runaround and consequently ended up taking their children to work or had them stay at home with their siblings. Furthermore, for families such as the Martinez family, language barriers presented serious challenges to obtaining the information or personnel they needed. This was a widespread issue for many farming families since many of them migrated from isolated communities and spoke one or more Indigenous languages. The lack of translators and resources available to them in their native languages limited their access to pertinent information for obtaining proper birth certificate documentation.

Such experiences reveal how social capital was critical to migrant families receiving the information and support that they needed. Bourdieu (1985) puts forth that social capital can be understood as social relationships that allow individuals to have access to resources possessed by their associates and the amount and quality of those resources. Portes (1998) writes that social capital essentially denotes the ability of actors to obtain benefits due to their membership in social networks or other social structures. Because migrant families were chiefly new to the community, they lacked access to individuals in local state offices who were able to provide with them with accurate information needed to register their children to obtain a birth certificate. Additionally, because most of their long-standing social relationships in the communities were with other migrant families that were not originally from the community, they continued to share differing information with each other based on what they heard from other neighbors.

Perhaps the most critical limitation that migrant families faced was their inability to access someone who was able to speak their language, provide necessary information and help direct them to the right people. In such situations, it is clear how lack of social capital prevented migrant families from accessing critical resources to further their children's schooling. Such informal mechanisms evidently contributed to social reproduction as parents felt they had no other choice other than to take their children to the work in the fields with them if they could not enroll them into school.

### Limited Access to Information

As described above, many families had limited access to information and professional personnel necessary to obtain the needed direction to continue their schooling. In the situations described below, it is again clear how lack of social capital prevented migrant families from accessing information regarding government assistance programs; namely, Prospera and Programa de Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas. Both of these programs focus on providing financial support and resources for families in rural communities; particularly farming families. During my time in the field, it was apparent that not all families knew about the existence of these programs nor had information on how to access them. Furthermore, because information about these programs frequently spread through word of mouth, several families were misinformed about the requirements and their eligibility. As a result, many families were not receiving the educational and early childhood development resources that were available to them in the local community. Although the lack of access to government programs did not directly inhibit migrant families enrolling their children into school, they were not able to benefit from resources that were specifically designated for migrant families working in the agroindustry.

**Prospera.** Prospera is a government assistance program that offers conditional cash transfer to primary caretakers of families in exchange for their compliance with program requirements (Gill-García, 2015). Children are required to attend school regularly in order for families to receive cash from the program. Payments are made directly to beneficiaries rather than through intermediaries or bureaucracies (Gill-García, 2015). This program is a significant resource for farming families since parents often take their children to work in the fields as an additional source of income. With Prospera, families are paid to send their children to school. While an increasing number of families in San Telmo are enrolled in the program, there remain a large number of families who are unaware of the program entirely or misinformed about the programs regulations.

In one of my conversations with Maria, another mother of a student at Hope Primary School, she explained that her neighbor informed her that her children do not qualify for the program because they need to be in school for a certain period of time before registering. Later, Maria learned that families are required to register beforehand so that their children's attendance can be recorded. School attendance must be confirmed before families can receive cash from the program.

Maria: My neighbor told me that I couldn't register because my children must be in school for a few months before I can apply for the program. But later I discovered from my friend that you need to register your children before so they know how many days the children were in school.

Andrea: Did you register your children after you found out?

Maria: Well, now there is a waiting list. I am not sure what else I need to do. Some people tell me different information.

Andrea: Maybe you can talk to the School Director? She might be able to help you with the paperwork.

Maria: Well, that's what the School Director told me. She told me to wait because there is a waiting list. My neighbors told me it was easy to register. (Sigh) But, I don't know.

Because families received differing information from members of the community, they often failed to register for the program. Still, there were many families who were unaware of the program entirely. Information about Prospera was spread by word of mouth amongst networks of community members. Most families who knew about the program obtained information from neighbors, friends and school staff. While Prospera offered financial support for families to send their children to school, misguided information about the program prevented many families from being able to enroll into the program.

**Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas.** Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas is a government program that is under the Ministry of Social Development. The broad mission of the program is to help improve the living conditions of day laborers and their families in the agroindustry with initiatives in food, health and education (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, 2015). Among several other services, the program particularly provides support for school attendance, monthly scholarships and support for child care and education centers (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, 2015). While this is a meaningful resource for migrant farming families, the informal structure of the program and its leadership has limited knowledge of the program to a few networks of families connected to "Alianza De Organizaciones por la Justicia Social," a group of local organizations that formed a labor union in 2015.

Just a week after I settled into the community, one of the parents at Hope Primary School, Hector, excitedly approached me and asked if I would like to accompany him to their meeting about scholarships for farming families. With a surprised face, I agreed and walked across the street to a find a cluster of parents waiting in front of a convenience store. Although the meeting was supposed to start at 9:00 am, there were not any signs of a meeting in session. For the next hour, I asked parents about how they knew about the time and location of the meeting. Most of them shrugged their shoulders and said they heard from a friend or neighbor. About an hour later, a white truck speedily drove in and parked right in front of the store. Two men with white dress shirts and name badges got out of the truck and slowly set up a table with a sign that read "Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas." Hector pointed at them and whispered, *gobierno* [government]. The parents remained in their places talking amongst themselves. A few minutes later, a beat-up black car pulled up in front of the store. Three men wearing large straw hats and black leather boots quickly got out of the car. Several parents walked over and shook their hands and gave them hugs. It was apparent that the parents were more familiar with these faces than the officials from the government. Hector pointed at these men and said, *líderes* [leaders]. Later, I discovered that these men were the leaders and organizers of the labor protests in 2015.[3]

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[3] See Chapter 1 for details about labor protests in 2014.

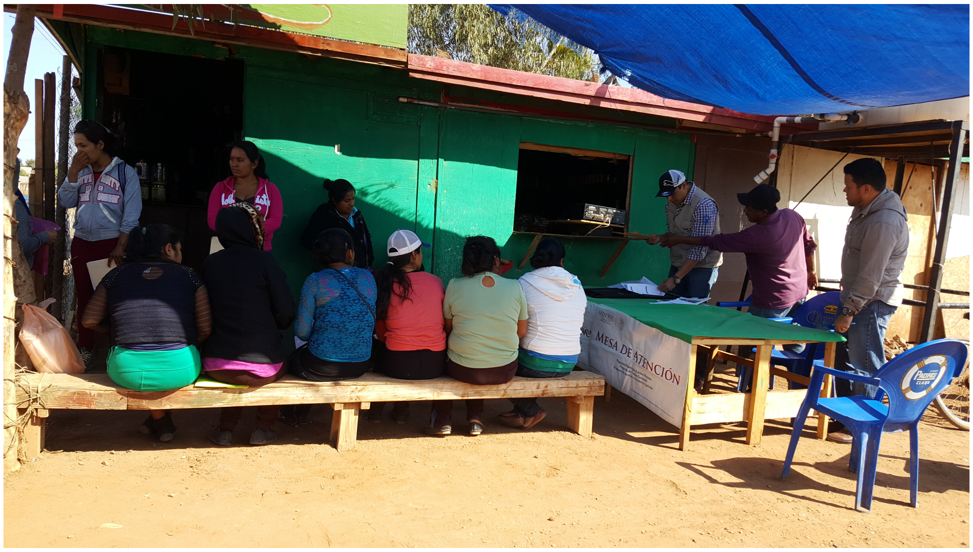

*Figure 4.4* Parents waiting for government officials from Atención a Jornaleros Agrícolas to give instructions on how to register their children for the program.

After a few minutes, the government officials addressed the parents and gave a quick description of the application process and eligibility requirements for the program. As the meeting was concluding, one of the men with a straw hat brought out a megaphone and further elaborated on the specific terms and documents the families needed from their labor contractors to receive these scholarships. After the meeting, several parents approached the three men to thank them for their time and efforts or ask additional questions. As I walked back across the street with Hector, he explained to me that families who were present at the meeting were involved with "Alianza De Organizaciones Por La Justicia Social." Some families preferred not to get involved with this organization because of labor protests in 2014 and fears of losing their jobs, while others were grateful for their efforts in helping their families. Subsequently, although this was a government program available to all migrant farming families, access to this information was again restricted to a particular network of community members. Because schools were not aware of these scholarship opportunities, information about how to register or apply was distributed primarily by word of mouth.

## Family Obligations

Another way in which social inequality persists and consequently contributes to social reproduction can be understood through cultural capital. Lamont and Lareau (1988) proposed that cultural capital is “institutionalized, i.e. widely shared, high status culture signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goals and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion” (p. 156). In educational settings, cultural capital is often used in attempts to explain the connection between social privilege and school success as schools often reward individuals who possess social values of the upper-class elite (Kingston, 2001). Cultural capital is also related to family-based processes (parenting styles or interactions in the home) that are associated with academic success (Kingston, 2001). While education is clearly valued amongst migrant families in San Telmo, they were all too familiar with the disappointment of the promises of schooling in a community with jobs that are largely limited to the agroindustry. As described above, some students who finished high school still worked in the fields due to financial difficulties. From the experiences of migrant families, schooling has yielded little financial and social benefits to better their immediate living conditions. As a result, parenting styles and interactions at home regarding schooling amongst migrant farming families were realistic and practical to the immediate realities they faced as struggling farmers.

Consequently, another obstacle to schooling that migrant youth faced was their family and domestic obligations. Amongst the migrant youth that I interviewed during my fieldwork, the average family size was 10-12 people. Because families in San Telmo tend to have many children, older siblings often stayed at home to take care of their siblings while their parents were at work until they were old enough to start working. Parents expected their children to stay at home to watch their home and take care of household chores until they returned from work.

They often shared that if their children did not want to be in school, it made the most sense that they would be at home to do chores and take care of their siblings. In one of my conversations with Verónica, she elaborated on the responsibilities children are often given at home.

> Andrea: But if the kids aren't in school, what are they doing?
>
> Verónica: (shrugs shoulders) If they're not on the streets, they are at home taking care of their siblings. There are a lot of people to take care of. For example, many families have a lot of children. And their children should be in school but they stay in the house to take care of their siblings. They clean, cook and play.

Not surprisingly, domestic and family responsibilities often weighed heavier on girls since they were expected to carry out gendered responsibilities. Although Verónica was in school, she was not exempt from carrying out household responsibilities. In several conversations I had with Verónica, she described her day and the various responsibilities that she was expected to carry out. She started by describing how her day starts at 6am when she wakes up, washes up and prepares breakfast for her mother, brother and father. "Eggs and tortillas. Very simple," she would say with a shy smile. Shortly after, she would get dressed and start on her 20-minute walk to "prepa" (high school). After school, she would walk home and prepare a dinner for her family. Dinner was usually tortillas, beans, sausage and chicken on some special occasions. Late in the afternoon, her family returned from the fields, sweaty, dirty and exhausted. After washing up, they would eat their meals separately depending on what their plans for the evening were. Usually for her mother and father, it was watching TV. Her brother would go visit his friends, while she was tasked with finishing her homework before the sun went down. On the weekends, her days looked a little different. Sometimes she accompanied her mother and brother to work in the fields, which she had been doing since she her childhood.

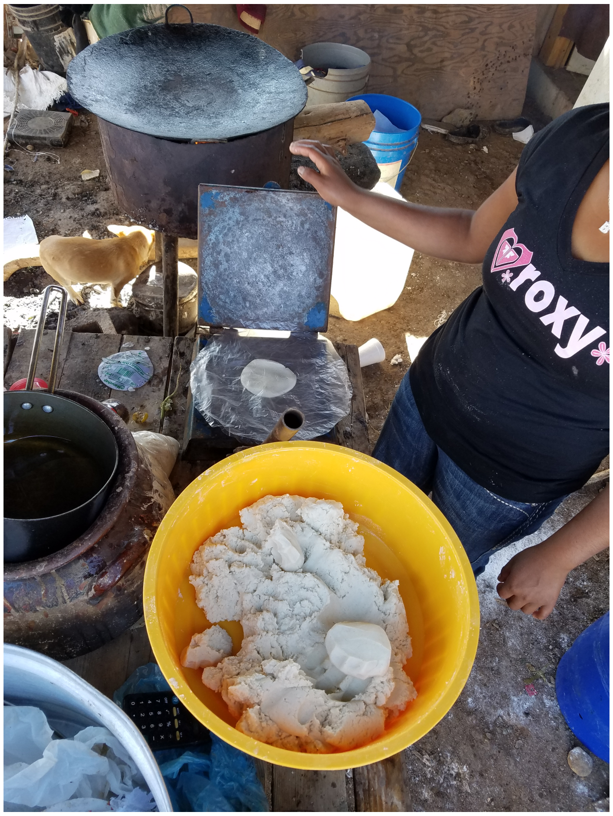

*Figure 4.5* Belinda making corn flour dough to make tortillas with a metal press.

Another example of how household responsibilities weigh heavier on girls can be seen in the life of Belinda, a former student from Hope Elementary School, who stopped attending in fourth grade to stay at home and take care of her siblings. At the time of my study, Belinda was 14 years old. One day, I visited Belinda at home during the later afternoon. As I walked through their gate, I saw that her hands were white from rolling dough into balls to make tortillas. She glanced up and walked over to greet me with a hug. I washed my hands and helped her use a press to flatten out the balls of dough into flat tortillas. During our time together, she shared that she started staying at home when she was nine years old to take care of her siblings since they were young infants.

Andrea: When did you start staying home?

> Belinda: I was in third grade. I stayed at home to take care of my brother and sister. (Smiles) They were little babies. My mom was working in the fields a lot. When they got old enough, I started working too.
>
> Andrea: Why aren't you working now?
>
> Belinda: My mom asked me to stay home. I cook, clean and pick up my brother and sister from school. I make sure they get lunch and I walk to their schools to bring them home. I also take care of our dogs and chickens. I like this better. My older brother works in the fields with my mom.
>
> Andrea: Do you want to go back to school?
>
> Belinda: No, I don't remember much from school. I still work in the fields on the weekends sometimes. But, I like staying home to take care of my family. Especially, my mom. She needs my help. And (pauses) I like helping her.

From a young age, Belinda's mother assigned her to carry out specific responsibilities as the eldest daughter of the home. While both Belinda and her brother worked in the fields from a young age, Belinda was expected to perform added household responsibilities and on top of working in the fields. In the conversation above, Belinda expressed that she enjoyed taking care of responsibilities at home instead of working in the fields; primarily because she carried a burden to help her mother. Evidently, family and domestic responsibilities often weighed heavier on girls due to gendered expectations. There were other female migrant youth who also recounted that they stopped going to school in order to help their mothers with household responsibilities such as cooking that only they would be able to do.

Lack of cultural capital in alignment with mainstream values regarding education amongst migrant families evidently contributed to processes of social reproduction and the transmission of generational poverty amongst migrant families in San Telmo. For migrant families, mainstream values of academic success, persevering through school and intellectual abilities held little promise of financial and social benefits for their lives in San Telmo. Consequently, parents did not force their children to go to school but rather had them help in practical ways in their homes. From the perspectives of migrant families, having their children take care of their siblings, perform household chores and work in the fields alongside them provided immediate rewards that were relevant to their realities.

As migrants, most families had a collective identity wherein parents made decisions for their children and children also made decisions for the betterment of their families. Although migrant youth such as Belinda and Araceli were not forced to stay home, they perceived that it was important for them to make decisions that would benefit their entire families and not just themselves. Staying at home to cook or working in the fields alongside their parents were decisions that several female youth made to support their families. Parents also took it upon themselves to not force their children to attend school, but take them to the fields to work alongside them to have them stay at home for the benefit of the entire family. In reality, almost none of the decisions made by migrant youth or their parents were for individual advantages, but to help support the entire family.

## Schooling Experiences

As I started to learn more about barriers to schooling faced by migrant youth, I also became interested in how their schooling experiences shaped their attitudes towards education in general. Throughout most of my fieldwork, I was able to have lengthy conversations with migrant youth about their experiences in the classroom. I was particularly interested in hearing stories about their experiences in school because it revealed how much of their attitudes and perceptions of schooling were shaped by their classroom experiences. Because most migrant youth that I interviewed did not complete primary school, most of their stories described why they dropped out of school or did not continue to secondary school. In particular, the boys whose interviews are discussed below are from families that recently migrated from Oaxaca. Their parents and older siblings did not enroll into primary school because they were constantly migrating in search of work. Consequently, their parents pushed them to continue attending school since such opportunities were not available to their family before. The following sections highlight expressions that emerged several times during my conversations with migrant youth.

### "Teachers Always Nag at Me"

Amongst the migrant youth that I interviewed, the Callejeros often described how their teachers would often yell and nag at them at school. Their initial description of their schooling experience would typically center on how they didn't like being told what to do and how they were frequently nagged or disciplined by their teachers. In one of my interviews with Juan, he used a high-pitched voice to mimic his teacher.

> Andrea: Why did you stop going to school so early?
>
> Juan: (in a high-pitched voice) "Don't fight! Do your homework!" They always nag us and tell us what to do. It's boring. I didn't like it. (laughs)

Another youth named Lucas from Los Callejeros recalled how his teacher would nag him about his uniforms and his behavior in class. Amongst the Callejeros, Lucas was clearly the designated leader. I have personally known Lucas since he was nine years old. At the time of my study, Lucas was 15 years old and was just getting out of a local drug rehabilitation center. Although he was supposed to be in the rehab center for one year, he stayed six months and decided to leave despite his mother's protests. Due to drug use, Lucas dropped significant weight. His feeble and malnourished body was in stark contrast from his once athletic build from before getting involved with the Callejeros. Over the past few years, he had transformed to an emaciated figure that left him barely recognizable. His face was marked with scars and scratches from his street fights with rival gangs. Despite his frail appearance, Lucas continued to maintain his dominating presence in the Callejeros. During my time spent with the Callejeros, Lucas was one of the few boys amongst the Callejeros who was not afraid of sharing his experiences in a candid manner.

> Andrea: Why didn't you finish? You only had one more month until you graduate.
>
> Lucas: It's because I didn't want to go. The truth? I just didn't want to go. The teachers always nagged me about my uniforms and when I talked in class. My mom couldn't pay for my uniforms, school materials and tuition. I just decided to stop going.

The experiences of Juan and Lucas illustrate how interactions with teachers shaped the participants' attitudes towards schooling. Other migrant youth further explained that because some teachers nag their students, children simply preferred not to be in school. From their perspectives, school was not worthwhile because they were always getting disciplined and it required money to attend school. They would rather be roaming the streets, staying at home watching television or helping their parents work. Additionally, because of the cost of schooling, many parents did not want to force their children to go to school if they were not going to participate in school. Several parents expressed that they did not want to force their children to go to school if they were not going to listen to teachers in the classroom or cause trouble. Consequently, parents often took their children to work when they were old enough or asked them to take care of the home while they were out at work.

### “Not for Someone Like Me”

Another expression that emerged several times amongst migrant youth was simply that “school is not for them.” This view was especially prominent amongst Los Callejeros, who were concerned with maintaining their reputations on the streets. Carlos describes how while he was in the classroom, he wasn’t learning anything because he is “dumb.”

Andrea: Why didn’t you finish? You had just three years left.

Carlos: Because I’m dumb [*burro*]. Nothing goes inside here (points at head). I wasn’t learning anything. School isn’t for someone like me.

Juan: Yes, we’re all dumb [*burros*]. (laughs)

Carlos’s explanation of how school wasn’t for someone like him because he is “dumb” revealed his perception that school was for specific types of students, and he wasn’t one of them. This sentiment was held by other members of Los Callejeros who shared that schooling wasn’t for people like them who liked to be in the streets. During several of my exchanges with the Callejeros, they would make fun of each other by calling each other dumb and point out how they can’t read.

In one of my conversations with Lucas, he explained why education simply wasn’t for someone like him. Although Lucas’ response was similar to that of Carlos, his response reveals a profound perception of schooling that was prominent in the larger community.

Andrea: Then, do you think schooling is important?

Lucas: I don’t know.

Andrea: Why would you think that it is *not* important?

Lucas: (pauses) Honestly, because it doesn't really help you get ahead. I guess it's important because it can help you get a better job. But at the same time, it's not for me. I'm dumb. I don't like school.

Although Lucas also called himself "burro" [dumb], he made a further claim that gave me a deeper understanding of why students did not view schooling as a meaningful investment in their lives. Lucas explained that while schooling might be able to help you get a job, it doesn't *really* help you get ahead. The irony in this statement reflects the stark reality of this community. Because everyone in San Telmo works in the fields, Lucas perceived that schooling in reality doesn't make a difference for his future occupation. Consequently, Lucas' conclusion that "school isn't for someone like him" illustrated the disconnect between what benefits he perceived schooling can offer him and the reality of the jobs available to them in San Telmo.

The expressions and conversations with migrant youth above revealed the ways in which cultural capital contributed to the reproduction of social inequality in San Telmo within the classroom. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) describe school as a playing field in which doing one's schoolwork and attempting to get good grades are types of practices in this field. Bourdieu (1984) found that teachers have the most cultural capital and tend to reward students who possess it. Children who have more cultural capital feel more comfortable in school and are consequently more likely to do well in school (De Graaf, De Graaf, & KraayKamp, 2000). Because their parents and older siblings did not ever enroll into school, the boys lacked the family-based processes in their homes that nurture cultural capital valued in school. During my time in the field, I observed that while other parents in the school made their children lunch, created study spaces at home and disciplined their children in their homes for misbehavior, the boys were told by their parents that they did not need to attend school if they wanted to work.

This was largely because their parents had experience working in the fields and perceived the immediate financial benefits of having their children work alongside them.

In the classroom, the experiences and expressions described above revealed the ways in which lack of cultural capital shaped the boys' educational experiences. Dumais (2002) describes how a person from the lower class is aware that people from that class tend to have little cultural capital and that without cultural capital, they are unlikely to success educationally. This mindset was especially evident when the boys used expressions such as "school isn't for people like me." Furthermore, the boys perceived that their teachers excessively nagged and disciplined them in comparison to their peers. Such experiences led them to the conclusion that school was simply not for people like them, who are not book smart and do not like being told what to do. Because the boys did not have the cultural capital that was rewarded and valued by teachers in their classrooms, they often felt singled out amongst their peers. In the United States, lower-class students who are aware of their low cultural capital tend to self-select themselves out of the college-going track (Dumais, 2002). In San Telmo, the boys self-selected themselves out of the track to continue primary school and education entirely as their experiences in the classroom shaped their perceptions of schooling and eventually their decisions to drop out of school.

### The Inescapable Dichotomy: School or Fields

My exchanges with migrant youth concerning barriers to schooling and their schooling experiences brought to light the dualistic perspective between schooling and work that were widely held on the community. If students did not continue their schooling, they would most likely end up working in the fields as their parents did. This perspective shaped the decision-making process amongst families and students who either continued schooling or dropped out altogether. In one of my conversations with Javier, he explained why he didn't think it was important that students continued to attend school if they did not want to be in school.

> Javier: I mean, they (parents) do not obligate you to go to school. If kids don't want to go, they don't go. If they want to go, they do.
>
> Andrea: What do you think about that?
>
> Javier: I think that (pauses). Who knows. I say it's good and bad. See, if you want to continue schooling, it costs money. If you don't study, you can work.
>
> Andrea: Interesting. I didn't know that there were so many children that aren't in school.
>
> Javier: Yes, because they are already working. Personally, I think it's okay they go to work. It's okay that they go to help their mothers. Or it's okay to go study. It doesn't matter because it costs money to continue schooling.

Javier's comments reflected the attitudes towards schooling and work that were held in the wider community. There were essentially two inevitable options for children and youth in the community; they can either continue schooling or work in the fields alongside their parents. Consequently, parents did not obligate their children to go to school because the other option for them is to work in the fields, which provides financial support for the family. This dichotomous reality inevitably shaped the occupational aspirations and perceptions of life trajectories of children and youth in San Telmo. MacLeod (2008) makes the distinction between *aspirations* and *expectations* when he writes, "Aspirations are one's preferences relatively unsullied by anticipated constraints; expectations take these constraints squarely into account" (p. 62). The conversations described throughout this chapter began to reveal the ways in which migrant youth expressed their aspirations, more vivid in their childhood, and their expectations, which began to take root, as they grow older.

## Chapter Summary

I began this chapter endeavoring to bring light to a paradox I encountered throughout my time in San Telmo. While migrant farming families have been able to settle down and consequently have increased opportunities for schooling, children and youth continue to drop out of school or work in the fields alongside their parents. It became apparent throughout my fieldwork that the absence of schools within walking distance was not the reason why children and youth were not continuing their schooling. In response to this paradox, I discussed obstacles to schooling and classroom experiences among migrant youth during our conversations and my participant observations in the field. As discussed above, it can be seen how obstacles to schooling and schooling experiences of migrant youth contributed to the reproduction of social inequality in the community. Families lacked the social and cultural capital to access the necessary social networks and available resources to enroll and maintain their children in school. These conversations revealed the ways such experiences shaped their childhood aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories. I concluded the chapter by briefly addressing the inescapable dichotomy that became apparent to me throughout my time in the field. In the following chapter, I will continue to further delve deeper into this dichotomy as I describe migrant youth's perceptions of the labor market – "the fields" – in San Telmo.

# CHAPTER 5

## "THE FIELDS"

*Yes, I remember many things that happened when I was working in the fields. I remember my first day. And all the other days I worked in the fields. I suffered a lot. In fact, my family suffered a lot. (Araceli, Interview, 09/12/2016)*

Although in the Spanish language, the word "trabajo" means work, in the context of this community, "trabajo" more directly translates into "el campo" – the fields. This chapter describes the working experiences of migrant youth and the labor market in San Telmo. In the first part of this chapter, I describe the experiences of migrant youth working in the fields, including narratives of their first day at work and working conditions. In the second part of this chapter, I describe my efforts to dig deeper into a phrase that was often made by migrant youth during my fieldwork – "there's nothing here." Conversations with migrant youth concerning this phrase revealed their perspectives of the labor market in the larger community; namely, what jobs they perceived were available to them. I conclude the chapter by describing how their perceptions of the labor market evidently shaped their childhood aspirations. The narratives of migrant youth revealed the ways in which such perspectives of the labor market and their working experiences have shaped their occupational aspirations, educational attainment and consequently, perceptions of their life trajectories.

### "Trabajo" – Work

In San Telmo, the word "trabajo" was synonymous with "the fields" and more specifically, work in the agroindustry. Although this word literally means work in Spanish, there weren't any other occupational implications in this word. Often times, when I asked migrant youth what they would like to be when they grow up, they would shrug their shoulders and respond with the word "trabajo." When asked what type of work, their responses would be a finger pointing in the direction of the fields. Their puzzled stares communicated that it was supposed to be quite obvious what "trabajo" means. Very rarely did migrant youth ever clarify what "trabajo" meant; it was used synonymously with *el campo* [the fields].

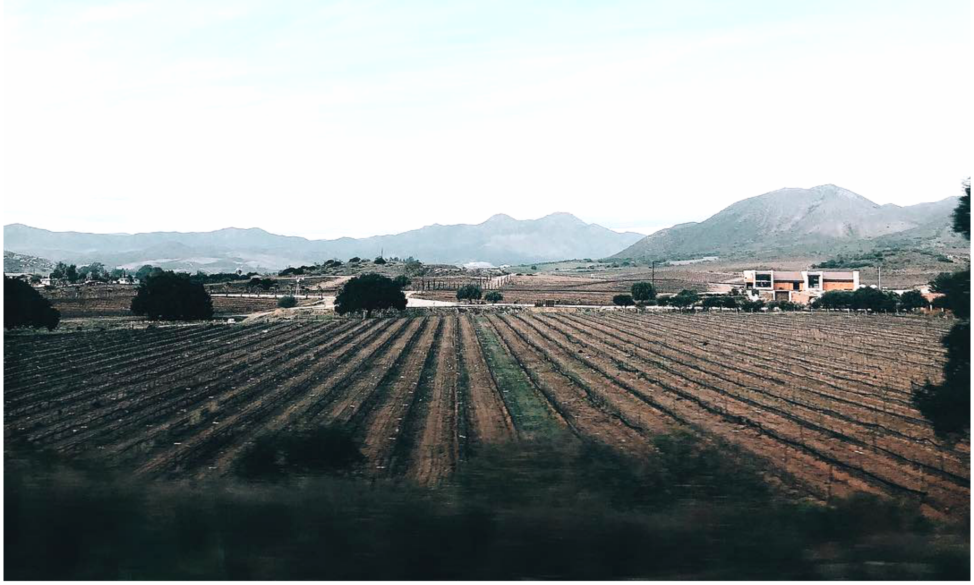

*Figure 5.1* The fields in San Telmo off of the Transpeninsular Highway in Baja California, Mexico.

The dualistic perception of life choices, either school or work, prevalent amongst youth in San Telmo is embodied in this very word. A majority of migrant youth that I interviewed did not complete primary school and have spent significant time working the fields alongside their parents from a young age. When asked about their childhood, most migrant youth described their years in school and working experiences in the fields. It became apparent that these were two crucial spaces in which interactions and experiences shaped the occupational aspirations and perceptions of life trajectories of migrant youth.

## First Day in The Fields

One of the first topics that often emerged during my conversations with migrant youth was their first day working in the fields. I was particularly interested in their accounts of their first day in the fields because it brought to light the initial experiences, thoughts and feelings they had towards work as a young child. Almost all participants vividly remembered their first day at work. Not surprisingly the memories of their first day working in the fields varied widely amongst the youth I interviewed. Some expressed an excitement in being able to help make their parents money, while others expressed a sense of affliction in having to work in such difficult conditions in the fields.

**"Money, Money, Money!"** At the time of the study, Gerardo was 19 years old and had been working in the fields for nine years. He belonged to the group of Soñadores who aspired to work in the United States. I often spent time with Gerardo in the late afternoons just as he was returning from work. He would often stand in front of the house I was staying at and call out my name, "Andrea!" and motion for me to come outside. We would end up sitting for anywhere from half an hour to an hour just catching up our day's activities. Of course, a topic that would frequently come up was the United States. He always laughed and said with a dramatic low voice, "Ya me voy!" [I'm already on my way there]. With one glance at Gerardo, you might guess that he was already well into his thirties because of the deep creases on his face and calloused fingers, which were symbolic of his long hours in the fields. His big smile and mischievous eyes however, communicated otherwise. One of Gerardo's defining characteristics was his piercing laughter, sense of humor and ability to make just about any situation comical and less burdensome. This quality is evident as he recounted his migration journey and first day working in the fields.

Gerardo's first time in the fields was with his aunt in Oaxaca. He was eight years old when he first started going out to the fields with his aunt. At the age of 11, his mother moved their family to San Telmo after learning from their uncle "up north" that jobs were available year-round in the northern states. When asked if he remembered the migration journey, Gerardo quickly looked up at me with a smile and said, *claro* [of course]. He began by describing how he along with his his mother, younger brother and sister, aunt and two other cousins packed their belongings in large thick plastic bags and boarded a bus bound northward to Baja (San Quintín Valley), a three-day journey from where they were. Each ticket cost about 1,800 pesos, equivalent to $120. He recalled that nobody in the bus could sleep throughout the journey because they were on uncomfortable seats and people were constantly shuffling in and out at each stop. Additionally, because they were afraid that travelers would steal their belongings, Gerardo and his brother took turns watching the bags, which were carefully placed in between each of their family member's legs. Finally, after three days, they arrived at a town that is 20 minutes from where they lived at the time of the study. They got in contact with their uncle and stayed with him for less than a week before they found a small piece of land to rent. Gerardo paused at this point in his story and breathed a heavy sigh. After a few seconds, he shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well that's it. That's how we ended up here. We stayed."

A year after moving to San Telmo, he started working regularly to support his mother and siblings. He excitedly described his first day at work in San Telmo and the thoughts that were running through his head. He began by recounting, "It was hot. Very hot." He described how as a young boy, he was not accustomed to standing in the sun too long as all the other workers were. With a quiet laugh, he explained how he would walk over to a small patch of shade next to a truck that parked close to them. To his surprise, the *Mayodormos* [field manager] and other workers did not scold him for taking frequent breaks from his work; he assumed it was because he was just a young boy. As he continued his description of his first day in the fields, he smiled and said "Dinero, dinero, dinero" [money, money, money]. Gerardo recounted that he was eager to work in the fields because of "money, money, money." As he was speaking, his hand made a scissor-like gesture as if he was going to cut something. Then, he bent over, got really close to the ground, and made a "snip, snip" noise showing me how he would cut as many *chícharos* [peas] as he could. His hands moved quickly as he walked, bent over, up and down his imaginary rows of "chícharos." He then looked up at me and sat down on the ground to continue his story.

Gerardo recalled he was happy to begin working because he felt a sense of responsibility to earn money as the eldest male in the family. "Since my dad left us, my mom was on her own," he explained. His experiences in the fields making money motivated him to continue working to help support his family. Even during his years in school, Gerardo expressed that he would rather be in the fields working to earn money than being in a classroom. He studied in school until second grade but decided to drop out because he enjoyed being paid for his work on a daily basis. When asked what he wanted to be when he was older, he shrugged his shoulders and would say in an animated tone, "nothing." At first, I thought that he was trying to be funny or shrug off my question, but after a few conversations it occurred to me that he never really aspired to obtain a job outside of the fields because of his short years in school. It was apparent that he perceived school was required to "become something," but since he dropped out of school, he assumed that he would end up working in the fields as his family members did. He dropped out of school after second grade because, simply put, it was *aburrido* [boring]. The teachers yell at you. You're not allowed to play. And he's just really *burro* [dumb]. He would often acknowledge that school is important but it just wasn't for someone like him—someone who was going to end up working anyway.

***Sufrimiento* [Suffering].** Other participants did not describe their experiences in the same light. One youth in particular named Araceli described her first day at work as one of *sufrimiento* [suffering]. At the time of my study, Araceli was 17 years old, pregnant with a baby boy. She had a petite frame with short curly brown hair. She was one of the daughters in the family that migrated from Guanajato, a southern state in Mexico. Araceli shared that their migration journey was long and strenuous as they stopped in two other states to work for a span of three years before settling down in San Telmo when she was 11 years old. Like many migrant families from the south, her mother decided to stay in San Telmo because of the availability of work all year round. As described in my earlier chapters, she came from a family of eight women who took pride in being able to support each other over the years. Araceli, along with her seven sisters, carried a deep sense of responsibility for their mother. Although some of them had different fathers because their mother was in and out of relationships since their childhoods, it was evident that they all had a close relationship with their mother since none of them had contact with their fathers. Araceli in particular recounted how she felt the need to protect and care for her mother from a young age because of the domestic violence they suffered.

> Araceli: Of course I remember many things. I remember many things from when I was a young girl. I remember when my dad would hit my mom. And when he would hit us. I remember a lot because I told myself to work hard and never forget these things. I had a father who would hit us with a cable. He would hit us badly. When my mother was pregnant, he hit her really badly. I suffered a lot with my family. It's the truth (pauses), I suffered a lot. Everything happened when I was five years old and I never forgot. I never forgot these things.
>
> Andrea: Araceli, but look at your life now…
>
> Araceli: (Interrupts) Yes, now I am very happy because I can be a mother.

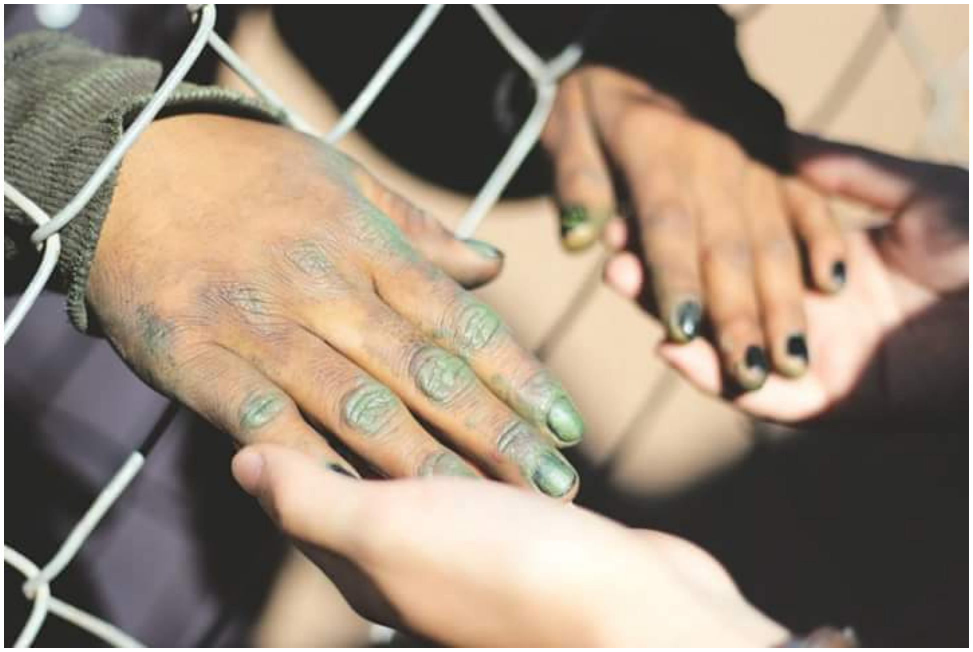

*Figure 5.2* Araceli's hands stained green from picking strawberries in the fields.

Such childhood experiences shaped Araceli's aspirations and perceptions of her life trajectory. Because Araceli experienced domestic violence from a young age and her mother worked tirelessly to support their family, she carried a burden to help provide for her family. Consequently, she first went to the fields when she was just seven years old and worked her first full day when she was 10 years old. She accompanied her mother and performed light tasks such as sorting through produce. Although she was only 17 years old at the time of my study, her hands were calloused and worn from her work in the fields over the years. Some days when she was returning from work, she would avoid seeing me because her shoes were covered in mud and her hands were stained green from all the strawberries that she had picked. She preferred to see me on days when she was able to wash up and "look normal," as she would say with a laugh. In one of our first conversations, she sat in front of me on a painter's bucket placed upside down. We were sitting on the second floor of her family's store overlooking the community. When I asked her about her first day in the fields, she recalled that her first day at work was one of *sufrimiento* [suffering].

Araceli: When it was my first day of work, I felt pain all over my body. I was cutting tomatoes. The next day, I couldn't get out of bed.

Andrea: Wow.

Araceli: (Pauses) Mmm. I couldn't really do much on my first day because I was in so much pain.

Andrea: You were 10 years old?

Araceli: Yes, 10 years old.

Andrea: And you can remember everything?

Araceli: Yes, I remember many things that happened when I was working in the fields. I remember my first day. And all the other days I worked in the fields. I suffered a lot. In fact, my family suffered a lot.

After speaking about her first day in the fields, Araceli continued to elaborate on how she wanted to be a teacher as a young girl but had a hard time paying attention in the classroom. After a few years in school, she made a decision to leave altogether and work in the fields to support her mother, who was trying to raise a family of eight daughters on her own.

Andrea: Did you enjoy working or being in school more?

Araceli: Work. I barely enjoyed school. It's just that (pauses), when I went to school, I couldn't really pay attention. That's why I didn't really like it. But I liked the fields because you can make money. You can buy something immediately because you're making money. And when you're in school, you can't buy anything because you always have to ask your mom for things. And sometimes, I would ask for things but we didn't have enough. Well, that's why I decided to work in the fields.

Andrea: Then, you made that decision?

> Araceli: Yes, I made that decision to help my mom. Because (pauses), well my dad abandoned us when we were little. And my mom had to take care of us alone. And after sometime, when we got older, we all decided to help her a bit.
>
> Andrea: Yes, because you have needs for food…
>
> Araceli: (interrupts) I made every decision for my mom. She was alone. Everyone in our family is with someone, but she's still alone.

Throughout our conversation, Araceli made it clear that perhaps more than her inability to pay attention in school, the primary reason that she left school was because she felt the need to financially support her mother. She explained that because she was accustomed to working in the fields, sitting in a classroom all day, speaking with her teachers and doing classwork were unfamiliar activities for her that did not seem relevant to her family's pressing financial needs. Furthermore, as highlighted in the conversation above, school acted more as a financial burden for their family since her mother always had to buy her things for school. Over the years, she worked in the fields to support her mother until she got pregnant. Her attitude towards work was one of detachment. While working in the fields was exhausting and taxing on her body, not working was not an option; it was a necessity. Because at the time of my study she was expecting a child, she expressed that she would not be able to work in the fields much longer. With a smile on her face, she said, "I'm going to have to focus on the baby and many other things that are going to occupy my time."

Both Araceli and Gerardo's accounts of their first day working in the fields illustrate how their working experiences shaped their childhood aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories. While the stories of their families and migration journeys were plainly different, their schooling experiences, reasons for dropping out of school and working in the fields were evidently similar. Both youth described how they were unaccustomed to being in a formal classroom setting and how classwork activities seemed irrelevant to their life circumstances. From their perspectives, school wasn't for people like them who would end up working in the fields anyway. Because everyone in their family worked in the fields and they experienced the immediate financial benefits of working in the fields from a young age, schooling did not seem significant to their immediate financial needs. In Araceli's narrative, we can see how her aspiration to be a teacher *shifted* as she grew older and recognized that working in the fields provided more support for her family than attending school. Such realistic calculations and shifting aspirations illustrate how social reproduction occurs in San Telmo as children of farmers drop out of school and end up working in the fields as their families have for generations.

## Working Conditions

The summer before I began my fieldwork, I was able to accompany one of the community members to the fields at a "ranchero" for one day. After a few weeks of speaking with some community members about their experiences in the fields, one of my friends named Arthur asked if I would like to accompany him to the fields so that I can see their working conditions myself and learn more about what their day looks like. I graciously accepted his invitation and prepared myself to go with him the next day. Surprisingly, he explained to me that we would be going to a "ranchero" at 10 am and return by 3 pm. With a startled look, I asked him why we would be starting later the other farmers who typically leave the community by 5 pm. He explained how *rancheros* [ranches] are different from *companías* [companies]. "Rancheros" are owned by smaller U.S. or Japanese family-based businesses. They are usually less regulated by the state and have a relatively laidback working environment as they pay their workers by the day. Although work schedules vary by rancheros, they are usually more flexible with their working hours and pay their workers on average $10-12 a day. Workers at the rancheros are normally more inexperienced and older individuals who are not able work quickly, migrant families and their children and youth who are not in school. Although the labor protests in 2014 forced the agroindustry to strictly enforce child labor laws, community members disclosed that rancheros continue to let children and youth work in the fields.[4]

Companías on the other hand are fields owned by larger agro-companies that are more demanding and exacting of the labor of their workers. The working schedules of companías begin at 9 am and usually end around 4 pm, which is why workers wake up as early at 5 am and return as late as 6 pm depending on how far away they live. Companías typically pay their workers by the hour if they are in charge of packing and organizing produce. Field workers who are responsible for cutting and picking produce are typically paid by how much they are able to collect in a given day. Community members shared that the pay and work available depends on the harvest season and the demand of the produce; however workers are usually paid anywhere from $12-25 per a day depending on their tasks. Workers in companías are required to have a valid form of identification and working credentials before they can start working. They are given company identification cards (pictured below) to keep track of their work hours and bi-weekly payments. In a recent development, workers are expected to setup a bank account to receive their payments from a local bank. This made obtaining payments difficult for workers since they had to take buses to Camalú, a neighboring town 20 minutes down the Transpeninsular Highway, which was the closest location with a bank. Clearly, the structure and working environment of companías are markedly different from rancheros, which do not always require workers to have valid forms of identification and tend to pay their workers in cash from local stores.

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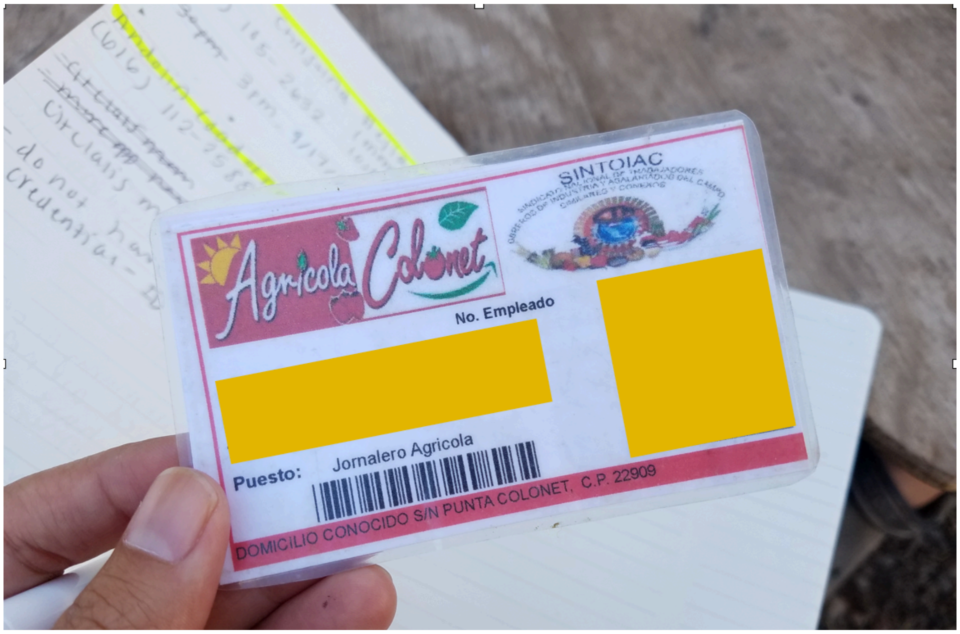
[4] As mentioned in the discussion of literature in Chapter 2, stricter enforcement of child labor laws in the past few years due to media coverage has significantly lowered the presence of working children for large agro-corporations. However, mid-size and small farms continue to let children between the ages of ten and 14 work on their fields, and even large companies continue to employ children during harvests, especially during the summer when they are out of school (Zlolniski, 2010).



Agricola Colonet

SINTOIAC

No. Empleado

[redacted]

[redacted]

Puesto: Jornalero Agricola

DOMICILIO CONOCIDO S/N PUNTA COLONET, C.P. 22909

*Figure 5.3* An identification card of a community member for “Agricola,” an agro-company in the San Quintín Valley.

The next morning, Arthur and I started driving to the ranchero at 9 am. After driving for about half an hour, we pulled off to the side in front of a small wooden structure. There were several school buses parked in front, which I assumed were transportation provided by the ranchero for local workers from different communities. We approached the structure and walked through the creaky wooden doors and were greeted by an old man wearing leather boots, a neatly tucked in t-shirt, worn jeans and a large straw hat. The man did not look surprised to see me. As an obvious foreigner, I was aware that my presence could be distracting or even alarming to workers and staff at the ranchero. Arthur looked at me and with a smile said, “I told them you were coming.” For the next 20 minutes, the old man explained that he was in charge of overseeing the workers and what they were doing. His welcoming demeanor assured me that he did not mind me being at the ranchero or even asking him questions. In response to his openness, I took out my notepad and started asking him about his own working experiences and how he ended up working at this particular ranchero. After speaking with him, I walked with him and

Arthur to the fields outside. I was surprised to see expansive fields already lined with workers dressed in long sleeves, jeans, hats and bandannas over their faces.

Although it was still the morning, the harsh sunlight was already producing drops of sweat on my face. I began to wonder what the heat would feel like in the late afternoon when the sun would be directly over us. It was unsurprisingly quiet as workers swiftly moved through the rows cutting tomatoes off vines. The only noise I heard clearly was the repetitive sound of buckets being picked up and dropped by their metal handles. I saw other workers slightly bent over as they also walked along the rows with buckets behind them collecting the tomatoes that were cut loose. I observed that most of the workers cutting and collecting tomatoes were men. As soon as this thought was crossing my mind, Arthur pointed me towards a semi-truck with the rear opened. He informed me that was where I would be helping for the day. As I approached the truck, I peered inside to see women, along with a few adolescent girls, sitting down on crates sorting through squash and packing them into boxes. It occurred to me that tasks at this particular ranchero were gendered as women were expected to pack and sort and men were expected to cut and collect the produce in the fields.

I slowly lifted myself into the truck and introduced myself to the group of women as I found a crate to sit on. I shyly explained that I was from the United States and was interested in learning about work in the fields. After a few questions about where I was from and how I met Arthur, they explained to me that they were sorting and packing squash to be shipped out to distributors in the U.S. After explaining what tasks needed to be done, they asked if I could help pack the boxes. I grew increasingly aware of my privilege as an individual from the U.S. as my un-calloused hands made it difficult for me pick up squash without getting prickles in my fingers. The experienced women who had been working in the fields for months and years had calloused fingers that allowed them to quickly sort and pack the squash. It was interesting to see that squash had to be packed in a specific way so that the "nicer" looking squash were on the top. One of the women explained, "they [distributors] will only buy them if they look undamaged and are packed nicely." In a few instances, the women would flip the boxes upside down to make sure that the squash were securely packed into the boxes.

Throughout the first part of the day, the women quietly chatted about their families and the latest gossip in the community. Their conversations mostly took place in Spanish, but occasionally a few of the older women would switch between Spanish and their Indigenous language. Later in the day however, there were long periods of silence as they carried out their repetitive tasks: sorting and packing. I surmised that the silence was not because the work was difficult and strenuous, but rather because their minds were filled with other thoughts they had shared earlier. It was apparent that there was not a rigid schedule enforced upon the workers. Everyone took lunch and water breaks at his or her ease; however it was clear that there was an unspoken expectation for workers not to linger too long. I observed that many would carefully watch where their manager was during their breaks. As the day progressed, the tired appearance of all the workers became more evident. The men outside were covered in sweat, dirt and mud from their faces all the way down to their shoes. Everyone seemed to move at a slower pace when the sun was directly above us, intensifying the heat. There was a heaviness that set in, as everyone grew increasingly quiet towards the end of the day. A little after 3pm, all the workers slowly started making their way to the wooden structure, where they were expected to sign out and board the buses to go home.

My limited experience in the fields that day enabled me realize that it was not always the strenuous working conditions that burdened workers. It was the repetitiveness of their tasks and low wages that especially weighed heavily on them. “The days are long, but the rewards are little,” Javier would often say. My conversations with migrant youth regarding their own experiences working in the fields revealed that while their laborious working conditions was taxing on them physically, the repetitive nature of their tasks and seemingly endlessly long days weighed down on their perspectives of life. In the sections below, I provide a depiction of how migrant youth described a typical day in the fields and their working conditions.

**Typical Day.** A typical day for day laborers in the field begins at 4:00 a.m. when they wake up to shower and prepare their meals for the day. When asked why they wake up so early, migrant youth explained that waking up earlier helps get rid of their sleepiness. Buses that take workers to the fields usually arrive at 5:30 a.m. On the bus ride to the fields, the driver puts on music; some people are talking to each other, while others are smoking. The time of arrival at the fields depends on how far the buses need to take them, but most arrive at their destination by 8:00 a.m. at the latest. Evidently, bus rides can range anywhere from half and hour to two hours depending on where they were working. When they arrive at the fields, the “Mayordomos” are waiting with instructions for the day. “Mayordomos” are managers who are in charge of overseeing the workers. Everyone starts working quickly once they get to the fields. They are expected not to talk excessively to get as much work done as possible. Everyone has different tasks assigned to him or her depending on their age, experiences and sometimes gender. Tasks can range from cutting, transporting and packing produce. Most children are expected to cut produce for picking since it requires less strength and skills. After hours of working, the day ends around 3:00 p.m. Workers slowly climb back on their buses and return to their homes just before the sun goes down.

**“Cansado” – Tiring.** Another daughter from the Guanajuato family, Leticia, also described her experiences working in the fields. Leticia, like her sister, Araceli, carried a heavy sense of responsibility to take care of her mother. As one of the older sisters in the family, Leticia remembered their migration journey to San Telmo in great detail. She recalled that their family had to stay in housing provided by the agro-corporations for seasonal jobs before they arrived in San Telmo, which was difficult for a family of six at the time. The houses were often four-walled rooms with one-bed and dirt floors. Workers were expected to use communal bathrooms, showers and sinks to wash their clothing. Leticia explained that their mother would feel anxious about leaving her daughters home in such conditions since Araceli was only eight years old at the time. Although her mother wanted Araceli to attend school, she needed someone to take care of her two younger daughters who were only three and six at the time. Finally, after two years of migrating from state to state, their mother made the decision to move up north where she heard there were jobs available all year round. With the money they saved up, the Guanajuato family was able to rent a small piece of land and build two small houses, which they still lived in at the time of my study.

In my conversations surrounding *trabajo* [work] in the fields with Leticia, one word that is often used to describe a day in the field was *cansado* [tiring]. A day in the fields is *cansado*. The sweat, heavy lifting, and hot sun weighing their bodies down made working in the fields physically exhausting. At the time of my study, Leticia was 21 years old and had been working in the fields for over 10 years. She richly described her first day working in the fields. She also described how working in the fields was not difficult as much as it was tiring.

Leticia: And well, in the beginning, when I first worked at nine years old, it was the first time I cut tomatoes. I realized that it was difficult because I could not recognize the color (to cut). Yes, it was difficult because I didn't really know what color they wanted.

Andrea: Oh, what color you need to cut?

Leticia: Yes, what color I need to cut. But I would jut cut them. And well, with time I knew what color they wanted. In the beginning it was a new experience but after a while, I grew very tired. The fields are difficult.

Andrea: Yes, the fields are difficult.

Leticia: It is very tiring. Not difficult, but tiring.

Leticia makes the distinction in this conversation that working in the fields is not difficult as much as it is tiring. This distinction was thought provoking because she was clarifying that the tasks themselves are not difficult. Cutting and picking produce, carrying heavy buckets and packing produce are not arduous jobs. However, working in the fields itself is tiring because of the working conditions and repetitive nature of the work itself. Being bent over all day, carrying heavy buckets on shoulders and sweating under the hot sun makes working in the fields tiring and seemingly endless.

In another conversation, Araceli also referred to the fields as "tiring" as she explained that the fields were no longer accepting children after the protests in March 2014. In order to avoid fines, most Mayordomos require all workers to bring work papers to verify their age and identity. She expressed her thoughts that this was a great improvement for the wellbeing of children in the larger community because working in the fields is physically taxing on their bodies.

Araceli: Yes, it's because in Michoacán (southern state in Mexico), they receive young and older children. Over there, they don't enforce any rules or anything. And they receive ages eight, nine or 10. Most children work a lot with tomatoes, chilies, (continues to murmur under her breath).

Andrea: But not anymore over here?

Araceli: No, not anymore because of what I explained before. They had the protests here.

Andrea: It's because no one wants to be blamed for working children.

Araceli: Yes, so they let go of the children. Because they don't want any problems. Even if they want to work, they need to bring in their papers.

Andrea: Do you think it's better that children aren't working?

Araceli: Yes, because (pauses) many children suffered a lot. They were killing themselves.

Interviewer: Killing?

Araceli: Yes, because work is so tiring. All the heavy buckets that they have to carry.

Araceli's description of the children "killing themselves" because of the laborious labor required in the fields reflects the labor circumstances of children who work in the field. As an individual who has worked in the fields from a young age, she knew the resulting physical pains all too well. Her first day working in the fields resulted in her not being able to get out of bed for an entire day. She also used the word "suffering" to illustrate her working experiences in the fields and even those of her family. It quite clear that from Araceli's perspective, the fields were a space marked with suffering. The heavy buckets, bending over all day and arduous tasks. Such descriptions revealed the stark reality of how exhausting and wearisome working everyday in the fields was. Working in such strenuous conditions also weighed down on workers' perceptions of their life trajectories. The everyday routine of working in the fields placed restraints on their ability to see life, particularly their futures, outside of the fields.

## “No Hay Nada” – There’s Nothing Here

“There’s nothing here” was a phrase that I heard countless times throughout my fieldwork. After several months, I made that connection that among many things, “nothing” refers to the sparse labor market in San Telmo. Most migrant youth would point to the dirt roads in front of them and the unending fields around them and repeat over again, “There’s nothing here.”

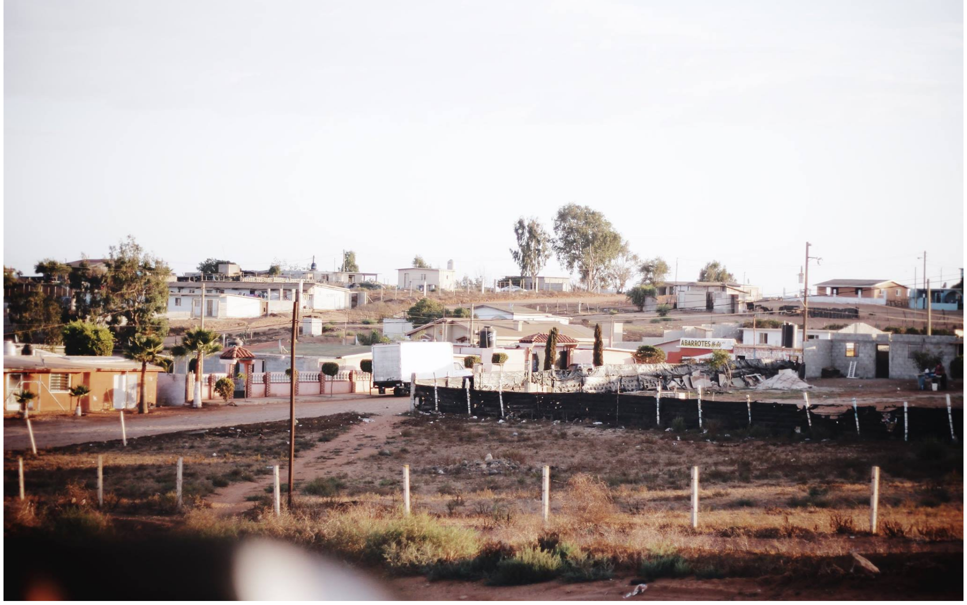


*Figure 5.4* Lucas’ and my view during our conversation about how “there is nothing in San Telmo.”

One Sunday afternoon I was sitting down with Lucas in front of a local church. There was something usually tranquil about the community that day. Music was playing from several houses nearby. Families were walking home from the local store laughing and talking with one another. There was a cool breeze that was gently moving through the branches of the tree that we were sitting under. We were on a slightly elevated hill that provided us with a scenic view of the entire community. There before us were countless houses constructed of wooden boards and shiny tin roofs that were reflecting sunlight. And just beyond the houses were fields that seemed to have no end. For a brief moment, we sat in silence looking at the expansive landscape. I looked at Lucas and nonchalantly asked him, “So, in a few years, what do you want to do?” His eyes stayed locked on the view ahead him. Without looking at me, he pointed to the fields and replied, “In this community, there is only *trabajo* [work]. There is nothing here. It’s only *trabajo, trabajo, trabajo*.” I recall thinking that heaviness of his reply did not require a response from me. We both sat in silence for a few more minutes watching the sunset behind the expansive fields.

The interaction described above portrayed the reality of the children and youth of San Telmo in relationship to their occupational aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories. Because San Telmo is largely a farming community, the jobs available in the community are mainly restricted to work in the fields. The lack of diversity in the labor market greatly affected what children and youth aspired to become occupationally and consequently, their perceptions of their life trajectories. Because their parents worked in agriculture for generations, it was difficult for children and youth to imagine themselves doing anything else. The low-wages, increasing costs of food and housing, and laborious working conditions in the fields made it difficult for farming families to save enough money to move outside of the community or obtain higher paying jobs. As a result, children and youth often accompanied their parents to the fields as an additional source of income to help support their families. Although these experiences did not directly determine their future occupations, such experiences in the fields and the limited labor market undoubtedly shaped their occupational aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories.

## The Labor Market in San Telmo

As described above, the labor market in San Telmo was largely constrained to labor in the fields for the agroindustry. In one of my conversations with Javier about jobs in San Telmo, he explained, “Everyone works in the fields. Parents, grandparents, children. Everyone.” His statement revealed the reality of the limited labor market in San Telmo. San Telmo is a located in a rural community in the northwest region of Mexico, which has been heavily invested in by the agroindustry. In fact, the communities present in this region were a result of the intensification of agricultural production in the 1990s and the need for a stable labor force (Zlolniski, 2011). Migrant families from the south such as the Guanajato family would continuously migrate in southern states depending on the seasonal availability of work, but ended up settling up north in Baja California where the demand for labor was all year round. Consequently, it made sense that the labor market in this region is restricted to the agroindustry.

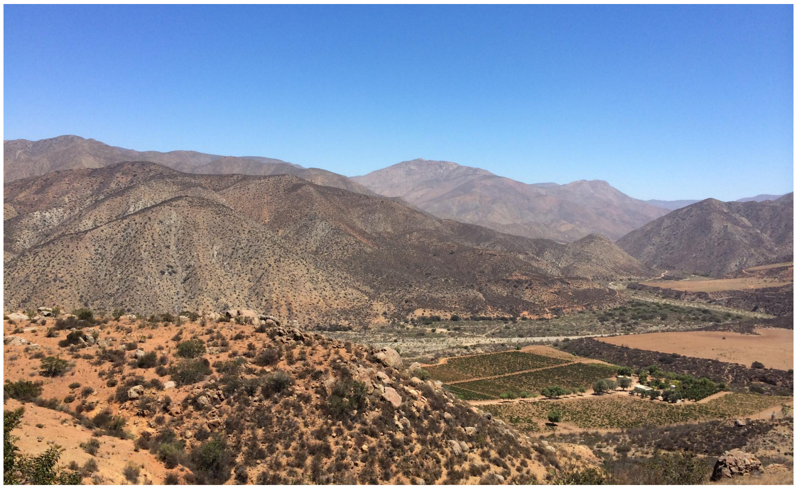


*Figure 5.5* The San Quintín Valley on my drive down to San Telmo.

Additionally, it was evident that their concern is not about the scarcity of jobs in the community, but rather the low wages and laborious working conditions in the already existing labor market. In one of my conversations with Los Callejeros, they explained why they stopped going to school but still decided to not work in the fields.

Andrea: Why did you guys decide to stop going to school?

Martín: Because we didn't have money for our uniforms. It costs money. And there isn't work.

Andrea: There isn't work?

Juan: (Continuing to explain school costs) Yes, we have to pay for school supplies, books, notebooks.

Andrea: (Interrupts) Wait, why did you say there isn't any work?

Martín: (Repeats) There isn't work.

Juan: No, no, no. There is work. There is a lot of work. But they don't pay.

Andrea: What would you prefer to do? Work or study?

Boys: School. (laughs)

Interviewer: But if there isn't much work, why would you want to go to school?

Martín: To make more money and not work in the fields.

In this conversation, Los Callejeros described a persisting cycle of poverty amongst farming families that made it difficult for them aspire to obtain a job outside of the fields. While the boys did not want to work in the fields, the restricted labor market left them with few options. Most migrant youth I interviewed acknowledged that in order to obtain higher paying jobs, they had to complete their schooling. Ironically, continuing their schooling presented a heavy financial burden for families with several children. The costs of school attendance increase as the educational levels increase due to tuition charges, exam fees and learning materials. It was common for most families to send their children to primary school so they can learn to read and write. However, as the children grew older and can physically work, parents often preferred that their children work in the fields to help financially support the family. The limited labor market provided little motivation for families and youth to prioritize schooling costs in the midst of debt and increasing living costs. In the same light, Los Callejeros made it clear that while they would rather be in school, but the costs associated with schooling and the inconsequential benefits it provided in this particular community did not provide a significant tradeoff.

While in my previous chapter the boys expressed that they did not like to be in school because they are *burro* [dumb] and teachers nag them, in the statement above, the boys interestingly shared that they would rather be in school than working in the fields. Seeming contradictions in their statements reveal the disparity in their expectations for what school can offer them and their reality of living in a community where everyone ends up working in the fields. As MacLeod (2008) states, "…expectations are merely tempered by perceptions of the opportunity structure. Even [their] aspirations are crushed by the job market" (p. 63). For the Callejeros, while they would rather be in school than working in the fields, they perceived that going to school will not *really* offer any meaningful rewards for them. Expectations are critical as they reveal what job opportunities the boys perceived were available to them. Their decision to drop out of school and work in the fields reveals the low expectations for the labor market they internalized as their families working in the fields for generations and not many youth in the community worked outside of the fields, even after completing high school.

## Impact of Child Labor on Educational Opportunities

While the restricted labor market clearly shapes the aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories amongst migrant youth, it is also evident that their working experiences in the fields undoubtedly shaped their classroom experiences and educational opportunities. In the previous chapter, I described the narratives of several migrant youth who explained that it was difficult for them to see schooling as relevant to their life situations because of their experiences working in the fields. While they made a personal decision to work in the fields to support their families, it is critical to consider that the agroindustry continues to allow migrant children and youth to work thereby contributing to their low educational attainment. Mid-size and small farms continue to let children between the ages of ten and fourteen work on their fields, and even large companies continue to employ children during harvests, especially during the summer when they are out of school (Zlolniski, 2010). As described above, migrant children and youth continue to work in rancheros in San Telmo, where are is less state regulation and the working conditions are less demanding for workers.

It is widely acknowledged that child labor perpetuates poverty as children who work are deprived of educational and healthy physical development and later grow up to become adults with low earning prospects (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005). Critics of child labor from a human rights perspective argue that while children make the decision to work to support their families, it is important to consider how employers from transnational corporations abuse their power and economic resources by allowing them to work (Arat, 2002). Because corporations fail to pay "living wages", early childhood care, and provide a safe and healthy work environment to adult workers, they create conditions that increase family dependency on child labor (McClintock, 1999). It also important to note that "labor" is not restricted to the fields. Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) discuss a substitution pattern between market and domestic work as parents leave the household to work for an employer and a child may take over many household responsibilities. As discussed in my previous chapter, household responsibilities act as obstacles to children attending school, especially young girls.

In the case of migrant youth in San Telmo, it clear that the low wages paid by the agro-industry and the loose regulation of child labor in the fields contributes to the dependence of parents on child labor. Such conditions contribute to the low educational attainment amongst children and youth in San Telmo as they often drop out of school to work alongside their parents or stay at home to take care of domestic responsibilities and their younger siblings. Although education is widely acknowledged as necessary to access higher paying jobs, migrant families continue to rely on their children as a means of income because of their immediate needs and the perceived low returns of sending their children to school. There is a clearly a chain of consequences that transpires to contribute to the damaging cycle of poverty rampant amongst migrant farming families in San Telmo.

### "Carrera" vs. "Trabajo"

While it was apparent that the word *trabajo* [work] was synonymous with the fields, this word was often contrasted with *carrera* [career]. I would often ask the youth that I interviewed to explain the difference between these two words. It became apparent throughout several conversations with students and parents in the community that *carrera* [career] referred to jobs that require higher levels of education – jobs outside of the fields. It seemed that in this particular community, *carrera* [career] generally referred to jobs outside of the fields, while *trabajo* [work] referred to jobs in the fields. Most migrant youth and community members expressed that in order to leave the fields, they would need to get a *carrera* [career]. It is evident that there is a particular struggle that rural youth in San Telmo often faced when considering with educational or economic opportunities that force them to migrate outside of their immediate community. Howley (2006) addresses the reality that rural children grow up in families for whom emotional attachment to a place and their families is clearly an important consideration. While some studies have put forth that rural attachment to a place is characterized by a "sense of land stewardship … and a value system connected to both the land and human relationships" (Flora, C. & Flora, J., Fey, 2004, p.15), for the migrant youth in San Telmo, the most pressing concern of obtaining a "carrera" was abandoning their financial responsibilities and leaving their families behind.

The difficulty with obtaining a "carrera" was again increasing costs of schooling. Even if students were able to continue their studies beyond primary school, increasing costs of schooling with higher levels of education acted as a heavy financial burden for families who were already struggling to make ends meet. Verónica and Javier explained how even if students were able to complete their schooling through high school, they were faced with additional challenges that stretched beyond immediate financial needs.

Andrea: Why would some finish high school and go work in the fields?

Verónica: Because there isn't any money. You have to take exams and pay for things. There are many that study but do not finish. There are very few that end up getting a career. There are only two or three. In this entire area, there are only three, two or one.

Javier: Because there isn't a city here.

Verónica: Because here…

Javier: (Interrupts) You can't have a career. There aren't jobs.

Verónica: For example, if I want to study at a university, I would have to go to Tijuana or Ensenada. That costs money. I don't know if I would want to leave.

Javier: Yes, you would have to leave.

Although the increasing costs of schooling presented heavy financial burdens for farming families, after completing high school students would have to leave their families and immediate community in order to continue with university education. Moving in itself required money, but it was also equally difficult for students to imagine leaving their families behind and moving to a region they have never before been to. Most youth and children have never left San Telmo and although they expressed a desire find another job outside of the community, they voiced that they would most likely have to settle down outside of San Telmo to obtain a “carrera” since there aren’t many jobs outside of the fields available. Because most of the migrant youth I interviewed endured difficult migration journeys before settling down in San Telmo, it was evident that there was a strong cohesion amongst family members and their sense of responsibility for one another. Although some migrant youth have only lived in San Telmo for less than five years, they considered the community their home since it was the longest period of time they lived in one location.

The reality of having to leave San Telmo in order to pursue a “carrera” highlights the need to consider the role of social capital amongst migrant families in shaping their educational and occupational aspirations. Byun et al. (2006) addresses the reality that rural youth are more likely than urban youth to experience conflicting goals because they need to leave their families and home communities to seek education and employment opportunities. For migrant youth I interviewed in San Telmo, the lack of social networks and relationships with school staff and adults with high levels of educational attainment prevented them from receiving the emotional and practical support they needed to navigate the decision of possibly leaving their community and families. Because many migrant parents have never lived in or visited an urban city or had low levels of educational attainment, they were also emotionally conflicted about potentially sending their children to a place they have never been before. Most migrant families have resided in and only have family in rural communities; more particularly, in the southern states. Furthermore, many migrant parents and youth lacked the relationships and social networks with individuals who were aware of scholarships available for university students of farming families.

Such struggles reveal the need for support systems and social networks that would help provide the emotional support and

### Aspirations – "Always in the Same Place"

In this part of the chapter, I seek to particularly shed light on conversations with migrant youth in which they expressed how their experiences in the fields have shaped their perceptions of their futures. As explained throughout this chapter, most migrant youth have worked in the fields from a young age; consequently, their childhood occupational aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories have largely been shaped by their interactions and work experiences in the fields. In one of my conversations with Leticia, she explained that she never really had any dreams of her future because she always knew that she was going to end up in the fields.

> Andrea: When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grow up?
>
> Leticia: I never had dreams (laughs).
>
> Interviewer: No?
>
> Leticia: (Pauses) No, never. Well, because I never really went to school, there wasn't ever a time about my future because I was working in the fields. I already knew I was going to work in the fields.
>
> Interviewer: So, from a young age, you already knew that you were going to work in the fields?
>
> Leticia: Yes, because I worked since I was eight years old. I already knew that I was going to work (in the fields) my entire life.

Leticia explained that she never really had any dreams or any thoughts of her future because she already knew that she would be working in the fields her entire life. In my earlier conversations with Leticia, she expressed that she needed to work alongside her mother to help support the family while they were moving around in search of jobs. Although her mother never forced her to work, Leticia carried a sense of responsibility to help her family. She never really had the opportunity to think about schooling or anything else because of her time in the fields. Leticia's perception of her life trajectory ran parallel to the notion that she would always be working in the fields. She never completed third grade, which only strengthened her perception that she would spend the rest of her life working in the fields. This was the story of many youth in the community who know all too well the reality of the strenuous working conditions in the fields and restricted labor market in San Telmo. Although the story for everyone was different, as Verónica mentioned in several of my conversations with her, there were very few who end up obtaining a job outside of the fields; so few, that most migrant youth assumed that the end of their own stories will all be the same.

Even when presented with the opportunity to continue schooling, most migrant youth expressed there wasn't really a point in continuing their schooling if it doesn't get you anywhere outside of the fields. Lucas dropped out of primary school in fourth grade despite his mother's continuous protests that he should finish. In one of our conversations, he expressed how whether you work in the fields or go to school, you don't gain anything.

> Andrea: When you work in the fields, do you make a lot of money?
>
> Lucas: (Shakes his head no) Maybe 150 pesos a day.[5]
>
> Andrea: I've noticed that a lot of your friends aren't in school or working. Why do you think a lot of youth in the community don't really like to do either?
>
> Lucas: It's because they don't like studying or working because you don't get anywhere from work or school. It's just work, work, work. We're in the same place the whole year.

---

[5] 150 pesos a day is equivalent to about $10 a day. An average workday could range anywhere from 8-12 hours a day depending on the season and availability of work.

Interviewer: But do you still think school is important?

Lucas: I don't know. (Pauses) It doesn't help you get anywhere. I guess it's important because it can help you get a better job but I don't know. It's not for me.

From Lucas' perspective, he perceived that whether he worked in the fields or went to school, it would not matter in the end because they were in the same place all year round. There wasn't any motivation to either continue with schooling or dedicatedly work in the fields because all the workers are paid the same and never really given opportunities to obtain higher positions. This explanation was a reflection of Lucas' perception of his life trajectory. No matter how hard he worked in school or in the fields, he knew that he would end up in the same place – in the fields working in strenuous circumstances only to earn low wages just like everyone else. Consequently, Lucas expressed that he never thought about his future or aspired to obtain a job outside of the fields. He preferred to spend his time with his friends who offered him more security than schooling or work ever could. It was evident that this was a perspective that several of my migrant youth held as they often replied to my questions about their occupational aspirations and futures with, "nothing" or "who knows." Such responses again brought to light the reality that endless fields that surround their community leaves with very few options to aspire to obtain.

The narratives of migrant youth described above illustrate the ways in which social reproduction continues to contribute to social inequality in San Telmo. In MacLeod's (1997) ethnography, *Ain't No Makin' It*, he describes how the Hallway Hangers, male youth from working class families, were often hesitant when asked about their aspirations. He explains that the hesitancy results not from indecision but rather because the boys see little choice involved in getting a job. Because Lucas and The Callejeros did not see much of a *choice* in the jobs that they could or would obtain, they often responded with “nothing” or “who knows” when asked about their own occupational aspirations. The experiences of their community and family members have taught them that no matter how hard they work or go to school, they will end up in the fields just like everyone else in the fields. While some younger migrant youth have never worked in the fields, their exposure to the labor market has largely been through their parents who have worked in the fields all their lives; some for generations. In fact, their entire community is comprised of farmers in the fields; as Verónica explained above, there aren’t very many people who attain a “carrera” [career], even after continuing their education well into high school.

Accordingly, the youth had internalized a pessimistic perspective on life, as they perceive there are little opportunities for them in the labor market and their life trajectories. Furthermore, MacLeod (2008) argues that expectations are not merely moderated by perceptions by of the opportunity structure, but even aspirations are crushed by their assessment of the job market. There was an expressed uncertainty and seeming ambivalence about their futures when migrant youth were asked about their future life trajectories or occupational aspirations. In reality, the ambivalence was not apathy, but rather a realistic calculation of what jobs and options they perceived were available to them. Migrant youth such as Leticia, made it clear that was it not their capabilities or abilities that rationalize their low level occupational aspirations, but rather their perceptions of the jobs that were available to them. Attending school and working hard in the fields has proven not to yield any rewards for those around them. Consequently, children and youth in the community saw little value in continuing their schooling further than they needed to and aspiring to obtain jobs outside of the labor market.

## Chapter Summary

The first half of this chapter discussed the labor experiences of migrant youth including their first day working in the fields and working conditions. Although the youth I interviewed shared varying stories of their first time working in the fields, it is evident that their experiences in the fields shaped their occupational aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories. In the second half of this chapter, I endeavored to unravel what migrant youth mean when they say, "*There's nothing here*." I specifically focused on what such perceptions reveal about the restricted labor market in San Telmo. I continued by focusing on the ways in which work experiences in the fields and the labor market in San Telmo have shaped their occupational aspirations and the perceptions of life trajectories. Finally, I concluded by discussing how occupational aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories communicate a echoing message that resonates that most migrant youth – they will always be in the same place.

MacLeod (2008) states, "The regulation of aspirations is the most significant of all the mechanisms contributing to social reproduction; however, aspirations themselves are largely a function of structural mechanisms that should be considered when possible" (p. 113). In this case, the insignificant rewards of schooling and restricted labor market contribute to the regulation of aspirations amongst youth I that interviewed; and consequently, social reproduction in the wider community. An important component of social reproduction is the process by which individuals in a stratified social order come to accept their position and inequalities of the social order as legitimate (MacLeod, 2008). Amongst the migrant youth that I interviewed, although there are clearly processes of social reproduction at work in San Telmo, I have found that they have not entirely accepted their position and inequalities of the social order as legitimate – or valid. Rather than accepting their assigned position in society, migrant youth contest the dichotomous reality they find themselves in by aspiring to find work outside of San Telmo; namely, in the United States. In the following chapter, I discuss "*The American Dream*" and how such aspirations reveal the ways in which migrant youth resist the structural constraints in their everyday lives, which are primarily manifested in the restricted labor market dominated by the agroindustry.

# CHAPTER 6

# THE AMERICAN DREAM

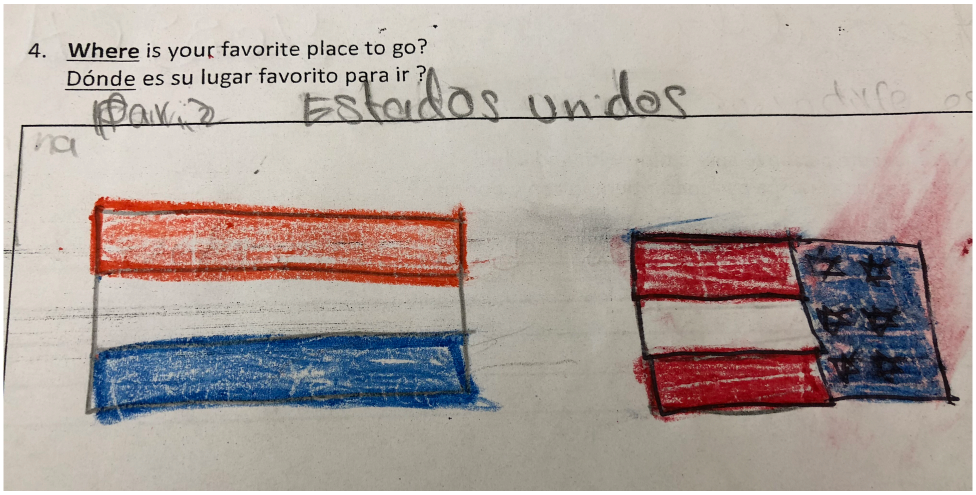
*There on the other side is our future. (Javier, Interview, 10/02/2016)*

As described in the previous chapters, the restricted labor market in San Telmo shaped the occupational aspirations of youth and children. Accordingly, a prevalent theme that emerged during my fieldwork was their desire to work in the United States that evidently influenced their decisions and perceptions of their future life trajectories. This chapter will focus on the narratives of the Soñadores, a group of four migrant youth who have aspirations to work in the United States: Javier, Verónica, Gerardo and Emmanuel. In particular, they frequently described "The American Dream"; simply put, as their desires to cross the border to work in the United States. In the words of Emmanuel, "There is a dream that all Mexicans have – To move to the United States to work." For Emmanuel, the American Dream was to go the United States, make as much money as possible and eventually return to San Telmo. The "American Dream" expressed by the Soñadores is important to understand, as they are representative of many migrant youth in San Telmo. Although the Soñadores primary motivation to work in the United States was the opportunity to earn higher wages, our conversations revealed that earning money was actually a means to achieve material aspirations and return back home to their communities of origin. My conversations with the Soñadores revealed that their material aspirations were ways in which they culturally resisted and contested structures of power and domination in their everyday lives.

In this chapter, I begin by describing the Soñadores conceptions of crossing the border to work in the United States. Such accounts reveal just how real the possibility of working in the United States was to migrant youth, who live only five hours south of the U.S.-Mexico border. I then describe their varying motivations to work in the United States including higher wages, their immediate needs and material aspirations. I conclude the chapter by providing a brief discussion of the apparent distinction between occupational aspirations and material aspirations amongst migrant youth in San Telmo. While migrant youth were uncertain and pessimistic when expressing their occupational aspirations, there was a determined excitement when voicing their desires to cross the border to work in the United States to obtain their material aspirations of building a home, owning a car and iPhone. The shifting aspirations amongst migrant youth throughout their childhoods reveal the ways in which mechanisms of social reproduction and cultural resistance unfolded in their everyday lives.

## Crossing the Border – "It's right there!"

Immigration to the United States has become a global phenomenon as rising numbers of families around the world leave their country in pursuit of a "better life" elsewhere (Hagelskamp, Suárez-Orozco, & Hughes, 2010). The specific motivations the underlie people's migration are diverse as some are drawn by a promising labor market, opportunity of education advancement or earning a better living; while others escape prosecution in their country of origin and seek freedom and safety (Hagelskamp, Suárez-Orozco, & Hughes, 2010). Recent literature focusing on migration in Mexico has found that many youth, particularly over the age of 13, particularly migrate to seek employment in the United States (Chavez & Menjívar, 2010). Castro (2007) describes how there is a "migration habitus" that is formed amongst Mexican youth as they learn about migration through their family members, classmates at school, friends from the street and those who have been deported. The individuals are important actors in the shaping of ideas of migration and the imaginary life of what life is like across the border (Castro, 2007).



4. **Where** is your favorite place to go?
Dónde es su lugar favorito para ir ?

~~Paris~~ Estados unidos

*Figure 6.1* A photo of one of my student's activities where they were asked to write where their favorite place to go is. The student responded with the United States although she herself has never been there.

We can see this the "migration habitus" amongst the Soñadores shaping their aspirations as pursuing the "American Dream" could most easily turn into a reality for them. In fact, their dream was only 300 miles away. In one of my conversations with three working adolescents, they explained how people cross the border.

> Andrea: But Verónica, you want to go to the United States as well?
>
> Gerardo: You're going to get mojado [wet]!
>
> Andrea: What do you mean?
>
> Verónica: When you are crossing…
>
> Gerardo: (Interrupts) The border.
>
> Javier: Illegal!
>
> Andrea: Oh, is this a phrase? "Mojado" [wet]?
>
> Javier: Yup.
>
> Verónica: When you cross through the rivers.
>
> Andrea: Oh yes, but that's dangerous.
>
> Verónica: Yes. Others pass through Nogales, Sonora. And they get on trains.

Javier: Or from Tijuana. Getting across is easy. It's right there!

Throughout our conversation, the Soñadores continued to remind me how close the border was. They repeatedly recounted stories of individuals, both young and old, who have crossed the border through the mountains, jumped on trains or swam through rivers. In reality, it was quite obvious that any of these journeys to cross the border was not as easy as they described; however, their vivid description of border crossing revealed how real the possibility was to them. Castro (2007) observes that the stories of migration and the United States Mexican youth hear from their friends, neighbors and family members form ideas about migration and the imaginary life of what life is like in the North. For adolescents living in other parts of the globe, while their desire to move to the United States can be authentic, the distant geographic location makes their dream a far-fetched reality. Contrastingly, although the Soñadores have never been to the United States or even attempted to cross the border, they were convinced that it was possible.

The certainty of their plans to work in the United States became increasingly apparent as the four of them explained that crossing the border illegally was not the plan they had to get to the United States.

Andrea: So, as you guys get older, you want to go to the United States.

Javier: Oh, yes. There are many of us who are waiting to go when we're 18. We have to get our papers.

Andrea: And you need to be 18?

Gerardo: Yes.

Javier: Yes, 18, 19, 20… (pauses) But you have to make sure that you don't have a record. Because if you go through the mountains and the police or immigration catch you, you won't be allowed to get your papers.

Andrea: Oh, so with visas you can go legally?

Javier: Yes, through the process.

Andrea: But without papers, how do coyotes…

Javier: (Interrupts) If they catch you, you won't be able to get papers. You won't be able to go to the United States.

Andrea: Because it's going to go on your record.

Javier: Yes, it's better to get your visa and passport.

Verónica: Yes, it's more secure.

Javier: You can go for a month and a half. Or eight months. You can go and come back.

Although they were not yet 18 years old, they recognized the importance of crossing the border legally so that they could guarantee a secure crossing. Although they have heard countless stories of people illegally crossing the border successfully, they understand that they will have a higher chance of getting across the border and working in the United States without fears of deportation if they are able to secure a visa and their papers. Depending on their contract, day laborers from Mexico could work in the United States anywhere from one month to eight months depending on the season and availability of jobs in the agroindustry. It was clear that they had taken into consideration a long-term plan to cross the border and come back overtime. The mere possibility that they can cross back and forth shaped the ways in which they perceived their future plans to continuously work in the United States.

As the conversation continued, the four of them took turns explaining the process of obtaining their papers, passport and a visa to work in the United States.

Andrea: Ah, so many youth want to go to the United States. But what is the process? Is it hard?

Lupita: Not for everyone (pauses). Everyone who has a visa.

Andrea: Everyone?

Felix: Not all.

Andrea: How can you guys get a visa to cross?

Felix: First, you need to save money because you need your passport. Getting the passport is easy. But if your passport works and your visa doesn't, there are problems. They ask you many questions in the interview but ultimately, they want to know if you are thinking about working there or if you are planning on living there.

Lupita: (Interrupts) Yes, they only want you to go and return.

Andrea: Yes.

Felix: Yes, go and come back. But there are many people who want to stay because there is so much there.

Andrea: Yes and if you stay past your time…

Felix: (Interrupts) Illegal.

Andrea: Yup.

Felix: So, it's easy to get a tourist visa. But to get a contract to work there, it's difficult.

Andrea: But for the people who want to work, how can the companies decide who can receive visas? Do you need to be a certain age?

Felix: (Interrupts) 18 and older.

Andrea: Oh and do you need to pay the businesses?

Felix: Yes, pay $170 to the bank. (Repeats) $170.

Andrea: For the visa?

Felix: Yes, for the visa.

Their determination of pursuing the "American Dream" could be grasped in their step-by-step calculations. Their aspirations could be realized in three steps: "guarder dinero" [save money], "sacar una pasaporte" [get a passport] and "obtener una" visa [obtain a visa]. In reality, I was not entirely sure if the information they provided was accurate, but it did illustrate to me that they were well aware of importance of obtaining a visa and passport and the costs associated with it. The tone of their voices communicated a sense of certainty that their plans were actually possible. They have seen and spoken with countless individuals from San Telmo who have crossed the border. Most of them have returned with savings, while they were others who were able to secure longer contracts to send remittances back to their families. There was no doubt in their minds that it was possible for them to do the same. Crossing the border to work in the United States was not a momentary thought, but a very real possibility that can be realized if they are able to save enough money to obtain a passport and visa.

## Motivations to Work in The United States

Castro (2007) puts forth that the "migration habitus" amongst Mexican youth is formed and reproduced in places where migration may not even be an option, but still remains to be a part of the identity formation of many. While migrant youth held a pessimistic attitude towards their futures in terms of occupational aspirations, they were clearly confident of the tangible possibility to cross the border and work in the United States. Because many migrant youth have heard stories of crossing the border and work in the United States from their childhood, it was evident that their identities were formed around the "American Dream" rather than seemingly unattainable occupational aspirations. At the time of my study, while none of the Soñadores had ever been to the United States, they described in great detail why they aspire to work there. While the stories of every Soñador were different, their reasons for wanting to work in the United States essentially came down to three reasons: 1) higher wages, 2) "necesidades" [needs] and 3) material aspirations.

## Higher Wages

In almost all of our conversations, the primary motivation behind aspiring to go to the United States was the higher wages offered in the United States. Several times throughout our conversations, the Soñadores would ask me how much workers get paid in the United States. They would then trail off into side conversations comparing their wages in San Telmo. Not surprisingly, every single one of the migrant youth that I interviewed have family members who either live or work in the United States and have consequently heard of the existing opportunities to make more money than they ever would in San Telmo. In one of my conversations with Javier, he explained that he has an uncle who lives in Washington who works in the agroindustry.

Javier: And I have another uncle who lives in Washington.

Andrea: Oh, in Washington?

Javier: Oh, yes. Over there they earn more money.

Andrea: More than California?

Javier: Than here (San Telmo). Over there, they make $2,500 a month.

I wasn't sure if Javier was misinformed about the amount of money that his uncle makes every month, but it was obvious that he knew his uncle makes significantly more in a week than he can make in a month. Other migrant youth shared similar stories where they have heard from family members how they are able to make a great amount of money in the United States. Some migrant youth are also recipients of remittances sent from family members working or living in the United States.

The reality of the sharp wage differences between San Telmo and the United States was illustrated when Javier and his friends pointed at my iPhone and plainly told me that he would have to save one year of wages to even think about purchasing one. In the United States, he said he would be able to purchase one after one week of working.

Andrea: How much is it here for an iPhone?

Emmanuel: 15,000 pesos!

Javier: You have to work almost two months? Three months? No, almost the whole year?

Andrea: Yes, one year.

Javier: Yes, almost a whole year. And in the United States, I would be able to make that in on week?

Gerardo: (Laughs)

Javier: Yeah, over there they pay you $600 a week.

Andrea: For one week? Or one month?

Javier: Biweekly. Yup, $600 but it's hard work.

During this conversation, it was apparent that the steep wage difference was a huge motivation for migrant youth to want to work in the United States. They expressed that saving money to work in the United States was worth the investment because they knew that they would be able to make significantly more in the United States than they would ever be able to make in the fields in San Telmo. While agro-companies have raised wages after the labor protest in 2015, the increase did not benefit workers and their families since stores also increased the costs their products. Consequently, migrant youth did not rely on increasing wages in their own community, but rather aspired to work in the United States where they believe they will receive higher wages regardless.

### “Necesidades” – The Necessities

Another reason why migrant youth expressed they wanted to work in the United States was because of their being able to fulfill their immediate material and financial needs. The word they often used was “necesidades”, which literally translates to “necessities”. Their description of necessities interestingly did not comprise of basic living needs such as food, water, housing but rather materials desires. Literature exploring the relationship between power and money amongst youth, highlights the reality that young adolescents use the accumulation of material goods to “level the playing field” by presenting an image of higher socioeconomic status than they truly possess (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). In one of our conversations, Javier, Gerardo and Verónica particularly described why they desired to work in the United States apart from the higher wages offered.

> Andrea: Why do a lot of your friends want to go to the United States?
>
> Javier: Because they don’t have money to continue studying. And there are needs to have money. In order to have better shoes and clothes, you need to have money. And well, in the United States, they give more money.
>
> Andrea: Okay, well what about you Gerardo? Why do you want to go the United States?
>
> Gerardo: The same. The needs. I can’t make much money if I stay here. I can’t buy the things I need. Shoes, clothes and a car.

It is clear that basic needs do indeed include clothes, shoes and other material needs, however it was interesting that Gerardo and Javier both emphasized that in order to have *better* shoes, clothes and even a car, they would have to work in the United States where they earn higher wages. Initially, it was easy to assume that the Soñadores were simply expressing their desire to have nicer shoes and clothes, but such conversations actually highlighted that they realized they could not significantly improve their living standards if they stayed in San Telmo. In reality, Gerardo and Javier did have shoes and clothing, but in order to obtain better possessions they perceived they would have to work in the United States. They way that they saw it, they were in constant need; they are working to buy everyday necessities and pay rent. If they stayed in San Telmo, there are no opportunities to get themselves out of their needs-based lifestyles and improve their overall living standards.

Youth's market-related aspirations are only moderately related to their family's socioeconomic status, as they often perceive consumption as a means of moving out of social classes and gaining respect (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010). Although the Soñadores described their material aspirations as "needs", in reality they were expressing that they would not be able to move out of their lower-class position as migrant farmers unless they were able to increase their purchase power by making more money in the United States. Being able to purchase material goods associated with upper-class lifestyles for many youth may signal increased status and position in society (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010). For the Soñadores, being able to purchase better clothes and even a car, were visible markers of their increased status to themselves and the larger community.

### Material Aspirations – "Get Rich, Go Home"

In the same light described above, the Soñadores repeatedly described their material aspirations. As our conversations deepened, it was evident that moving to the United States was not only based on higher wages and their immediate needs, but also material aspirations that have been heavily influenced by globalization and technology. A great deal of time was spent discussing what they plan to do with the money they make in the United States. Surprisingly, each of them voiced that they do not intend to stay the United States but rather move back to San Telmo.

> Andrea: Do you think that everyone who goes to the United States wants to stay there?
>
> Javier: Some want to stay and some want to come back.
>
> Andrea: How about you Javier? What do you want to do?
>
> Javier: I'm going to get rich and come back. I want to buy a land here and make a big house. Big (repeats in English)!
>
> Andrea: Big house? (laughs] So you like it better here?
>
> Javier: Yes. Everything is here. My family, friends…
>
> Andrea: Are you sure you want to move to the United States? Is this a thought or are you serious?
>
> Javier: I'm serious. I need to go because I make so little here. Over there, I can make money and buy blocks to construct my house.

Javier's desire to move back from the United States after making enough money is repeatedly expressed amongst other migrant youth I interviewed. It was clear that they did not intend to settle down and live in the United States. Working in the United States was essentially a means to achieve their material aspirations, which are described in detail in the sections below.

Castro (2007) observed in his research that the return of Mexican working youth to their communities of origin is expected and to a certain extent, the transnationalization of these youths contributes to the cultural, social, material and ideological identity of many in the community. Javier, like many youth in the community, have witnessed his family members, neighbors and friends returning from the United States with a car, cellphones and savings. The stories that he heard from various actors throughout his childhood acted as a form of social capital that shaped his very own aspirations to “get rich” and “return home”.

**Own Land and Build a Home.** The primary material aspiration that the Soñadores expressed was their desire to build a home. As described in the conversation above with Javier, he voiced that he was absolutely serious about working in the United States to buy a piece of land and build a home. Gerardo also voiced that he hopes to own land, build two homes and continue to work in the United States so that he can support his family. Interestingly, despite that fact that she’s in school, Verónica also expressed her desire to move to the United States with the end goal of building a home.

Andrea: Verónica, why do you want to move to the United States?

Verónica: To help my family.

Andrea: So, you want to make money and return here too?

Verónica: Yes, I want to build a large house so that my entire family can live with me. And especially for my aunts because they don’t want to live alone in the future.

In my earlier conversations with Verónica, she was not able to confidently express her perceptions of her future or her occupational aspirations despite the fact that she was in high school; in fact Verónica communicated that she was unsure if she even wanted to finish her schooling. However, in this particular conversation about her desire to build a home, she offered a descriptive explanation of what she hopes to do with the money that she makes in the United States. As the conversation continued, Verónica expanded her thoughts on what would happen if she did quit school. She explained that her father would be disappointed because they have worked so hard to send her to school; however, when she is with her friends, she is recognizes that working in the United States would give her opportunities to make enough money to help secure her family with land ownership and a house of their own. Her weighing of options conveys her serious attitude towards possibly working in the United States instead of continuing her schooling.

**Purchase iPhone or "S"**. Another material aspiration that the Soñadores frequently addressed was their desire to buy an iPhone. After several conversations with them, I began to understand that they were not simply referring to purchasing an iPhone but accessing technology and Internet in general. Differences in access to technology are referred to as the "digital divide", which refers to the possible tendency of new technologies to exacerbate differences between the rich and the poor (Horst & Miller, 2006). Horst and Miller (2006) observed in their research in Jamaica amongst poor students and young people that cellphones were a status of symbol and often used for self-display rather than functional purposes. Cellphones were used much more like clothing, where there is discourse about competitive display and "hype" (Horst & Miller, 2006). In Cape Town, South Africa, Powell (2014) observed that as residents have learned the social value and significance of cell phones, they have "appeared to have conformed to behaviors of shopping for expensive phones and other objects that upon visual acknowledgement by other residents, distinguishes the haves and have-notes… and influences social positions within the township" (p. 120). Increasing contact with technology served a similar purpose in San Telmo as access to Internet and cellphones became markers of status amongst migrant youth.

As families have been able to settle down, there was a visible emergence of television satellite dishes on the roofs of homes throughout San Telmo. Not having to migrate seasonally has allowed migrant farming families to lay their roots down in San Telmo, save money and enjoy stability that they were not able to before. In the past decade, several of my conversations with youth and children in the community comprised of them asking me about U.S. news stories, food and fashion trends and celebrity news that they saw in their homes on their television sets. Hill and Gaines (2007) in an ethnographic study exploring consumer culture of poverty found that the media has a critical role in communicating the standards material accumulation in our consumer culture. They further state, "As children in low-income communities learn from the media what is available in the larger material world, they develop a sense of need or desire for a wide variety of goods and services" (Hill & Gaines, 2007, p. 88). For many youth in San Telmo, they have seen U.S. reality shows and television shows that display the wealthy living styles of Americans. Although what migrant youth see on television is not a reality for most Americans, their perception of wealth has been shaped by what they have repeatedly seen on television in their homes.

More recently, youth have been able to buy used mobile phones and purchase Internet data cards that give them the ability to access Facebook and listen to U.S. mainstream artists mainly through YouTube. There were several instances during my fieldwork when neighborhood youth and parents at the school I was teaching at would stop and show me their Facebook profiles and how even their schools now have their own Facebook pages. Wyche and Baumer (2017) found in rural Zambia that Facebook was associated with spatial expansion or connecting to a wider world. Unlike other forms of technology, Facebook supported new forms of visual communication, which included posting and exchanging pictures with other people (Wyche &

Baumer, 2017). In the same light, it became increasingly evident that social media and technology is a part of everyday life for families in San Telmo. Migrant youth would often show me pictures they posted on Facebook and profiles of their friends, who lived in the same community. Interestingly, although youth lived in the physical vicinity, they would comment and "like" each other's posts actively throughout the week. It was apparent that migrant youth particularly liked being able to be "seen" and see the profiles of people inside and outside of the community.

During the time of my study, the most recent development in the community was the emergence of Internet spaces. To be exact, there were two stores that charged 10 pesos an hour for Internet use. The neighborhood youth would often tell me that they're going to "Internet", which I later discovered actually meant a store that offers public Internet use. I visited these stores a few times during my fieldwork and observed that these spaces were particularly a popular spot for youth and young adults in the community. There was not a particular profile of Internet users; day laborers, students, teenagers and parents were frequent visitors. In one store, I walked in to find a small dusty wooden table with three aged flat-screened PC computers lined side by side. The storeowner smiled at me and pointed at a clipboard with a list of names next to his register. It occurred to me that the list of names was the order of people waiting to use the Internet. When I asked them what they do during their time on the Internet, the three popular responses were Facebook, YouTube and videogames. Many youth expressed that they especially enjoy using Facebook because they can upload new pictures, connect with new people and see updates on their newsfeeds. I observed that the interactive nature of Facebook generated a frequent traffic to the Internet spaces in the community as users wanted to update their profiles and interact with other users outside of San Telmo.

Interestingly, there were several migrant youth that carried around cellphones despite their broken screens because they still had the ability to play mp3 music and take pictures. They would often proudly show me their beat up mobile devices and would tell me where they bought it and how much they paid for it. Over time, it occurred to me that phones were a marker of status and even belonging in the community. Because technology, particularly mobile devices, has materialized quickly in the community, daily interactions and relationships revolved around newly downloaded music, uploaded pictures and other online activities. During my fieldwork, youth would often take out their cellphones and show me "selfies" they took of themselves, pictures of their families and friends and new music that they downloaded. We would laugh as they recounted the stories behind each photo they would show me. Individuals that did not have a cellphone would laugh and ask their friends to take pictures of them they can use for their Facebook profile pictures.

In one of my conversations with Javier, he stopped talking abruptly and pointed at my iPhone and asked, "How much is that?" I paused and slowly explained to him how we can get free phones if we sign a phone contract with certain companies or sometimes they are provided with a discount. "Well, okay but how much?", Felix asked interrupting my long-winded explanation. I replied with a low estimate of $600. After few minutes into our conversation, Felix looked at me and pointed at my iPhone. I handed it to him. He picked it up and held it up to his friends and said with a smile, "I want one of these." For Javier in particular, he explained that working in the United States and obtaining an iPhone is a "dream" that everyone in Mexico has.

> Emmanuel: Yes, every Mexican. It's the dream of every Mexico to go to the United States to find work. The American Dream (says in English).
>
> Javier: And have an iPhone (points to my phone).

Andrea: How much is an iPhone here?

Emmanuel: 15,000 pesos!

Javier: I would have to work three months. No, (pauses) almost an entire year?

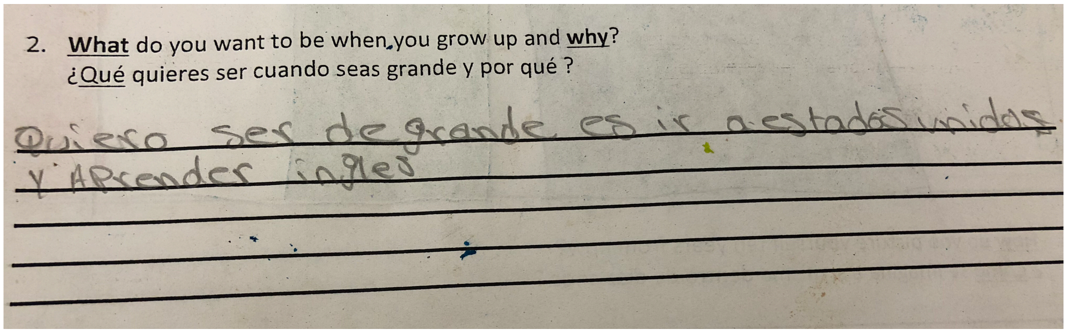
Emmanuel: Yes, that's a full year of work.

Javier: Yes, almost one year. In the United States, I would only have to work one week.

Emmanuel: (Laughs) Yes, that's why we want to go to the United States.

For this group of friends, it was apparent that their goal is not to go to the United States in order to literally buy an iPhone. On the contrary, it is *what* the iPhone represents. As discussed earlier in this section, the increased exposure to television and emergence of technology in the community inevitably shaped the everyday lives of community members. On television screens, celebrities and the average American lifestyle are seen with iPhones, nice cars and large houses. Through Facebook newsfeeds, the latest social trends and technology gadgets are accessible for anyone with Internet. For Javier and his friends, being able to purchase an iPhone represents an overall improved standard of living. Although Emmanuel and Javier frequently shared they want to work in the United States to "get rich", their articulation of desiring an iPhone has a deeper implication. Being able to purchase an iPhone represents that they *made it*. They are no longer living in needs-based conditions ("necesidades") as they described but they are able to own something nice of their own. Although they were living in the same rural community, being able to own an iPhone, the same expensive product that Americans possess, proved to them that they could have the same possessions as their wealthy neighbors just across the border.

Deutsch and Theodorou (2010) explain how consumerism can build up an illusion of equality as technically, everyone can buy what is being advertised; however, in reality, not everyone has the same purchase capacity to do so. The Soñadores perceived that being able to purchase an iPhone gave them the impression that they can enjoy the same spending power as Americans, the representation of wealth that they see on their television sets and social media feeds. Pattillo-McCoy's (1999) research found that for low-income African Americans, consumption signifies to Whites that they have equal access to purchase power and therefore can have the same luxurious goods as the white middle class. In the same light, being able to purchase an iPhone, along with their other material aspirations, represented a movement out of their lower social class and into an equal playing field with their American counterparts. While much of their living conditions might not change, being able to own an iPhone, purchase a car and build a home represented upward social mobility for the Soñadores.



2. **What** do you want to be when you grow up and **why**?
¿**Qué** quieres ser cuando seas grande y por qué ?

Quiero ser de grande es ir a estados unidos
y Aprender ingles

*Figure 6.2* A photo of one of my student's activities where they were asked to write what they want to be when they grow up. The student responded with, "When I grow up, I want to go to the United States to learn English."

### Occupational Aspirations vs. Material Aspirations

Throughout my fieldwork, I observed that migrant youth were not able to confidently voice their childhood occupational aspirations, if at all. While some youth shared that they wanted to be police officers or teachers, their responses were vague and uncertain. It grew increasingly evident that they did not truly believe that their childhood occupational aspirations could be realized. MacLeod (2008) addresses the stark reality that the Hallways Hangers had a deeply entrenched cynicism about their futures because their expectations were not merely tempered by perceptions of the opportunity structure, but even their aspirations were quelled by their estimation of the job market. In a similar light, migrant youth often referred to their childhood aspirations with sarcasm that conveyed their former naivety as a child. In one of my conversations with Javier, he explains that he *wanted* to work in the hospital but it was a passing thought that he thought would never transpire.

Andrea: When you were younger, what did you want to be when you grow up?

Javier: To have money.

Andrea: Was there a job that you wanted to have?

Javier: Sort of.  I wanted to work in the hospital. *Wanted* (emphasizes).

Andrea: Why not anymore?

Javier: I don't know. It didn't really matter (laughs).

Javier's responses to my question about his childhood aspirations were representative of the responses that I received from other migrant youth. When asked to elaborate on their occupational aspirations, they often gave one word responses, shoulder shrugs or would make change the conversation topic by joking around with their friends. As MacLeod (2008) observed with the Hallway Hangers, migrant youth I interviewed expressed a similar hesitancy that did not stem from indecision but rather that they saw little choice involved in getting a job. The restricted labor market and seemingly invaluable rewards of going to school leave youth in San Telmo with bleak perceptions of their life trajectories and prospective job opportunities.

On the surface, it was easy to assume that the lack of occupational aspirations indicated an absence of aspirations entirely; it would appear that their attitudes towards their futures were completely cynical and despondent. However, as discussed above, neighborhood youth and migrant youth were able to clearly and assertively articulate their material aspirations, which were fundamentally centered on working in the United States and building a house, and owning other consumer goods such as a car and an iPhone. Despite their impoverished circumstances and low-wage job opportunities in the fields, they had aspirations to better their lives in a manner that is not readily available to them. It was evident that there was an ongoing tension between the cynical attitudes they hold towards their occupational futures and yet the hopeful outlook they have to work in the United States to achieve their material aspirations. While their immediate circumstances presented them with unpromising options in life, they did not passively accept these conditions but actively contested them by aspiring to work in the United States, where they could earn higher wages and afford a lifestyle that was not an existing option for them in San Telmo.

## Shifting Aspirations – Social Reproduction and Resistance in San Telmo

Central to understanding the process through which youth in San Telmo resist the structural constraints in their everyday lives is Henry Giroux's theories of resistance. Structures of power and domination operate through the agroindustry as day laborers are paid low-wages in restricted market. Youth in San Telmo have grown up in generations of migrant farmers who have survived on low-wages in extreme conditions of poverty. My conversations and time spent with migrant youth revealed that their perceptions of their life trajectories and low aspirations have been shaped through their lived experiences seeing their parents toil in the fields and working in the fields themselves. Almost everyone around them have worked in the fields, including those who have completed higher levels of education; from their perspectives, essentially everyone in the community ends up in the fields. While structural determinist theorists might assume that youth in San Telmo will end up working in the fields as their parents have, the material aspirations and plans they have to work in the United State illustrates the complex ways in which they mediate and respond to such constraints. While their childhood aspirations were expressed as just a thought, their desire to work in the United States was definite. The certainty in their responses and active plans of obtaining a passport and visa convey the resoluteness in their aspirations to work in the United States.

Giroux's (1983) theories of resistance provide a framework to understand how the mechanisms of social and cultural reproduction are never complete. There was an ongoing relationship between macro structures and individual agency as youth in San Telmo attempted to resist and contest their immediate circumstances. The restricted labor market, low-wages and low-returns of going to school operated together to act as structural constraints in the everyday lives of youth in San Telmo. Yet, the Soñadores opted to aspire towards an option that was not readily available to them. Their plans to cross the border and work in the United States were another channel through which they hope to achieve their material aspirations. Their active planning to cross the border and articulating their desires to own land, build a home and purchase consumer goods was a form of resistance in itself. Their immediate circumstances denied them the possibility of ever being able to better their living conditions and their reality of living on a day-by-day basis earning such low-wages. However, they actively contested the structural forces in their everyday lives by not accepting the working and living conditions that they found themselves in.

While it was evident that migrant youth actively resisted and contested structures of power in their everyday lives, Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" helps make sense of how the working and schooling experiences of youth in San Telmo have actively shaped their aspirations and perceptions of their futures. Their past experiences and ongoing interactions while working in the fields have contributed to the internalization of relations of power in San Telmo. Over time, they have arrived at the understanding that "there is no going up" in the fields; they will always find themselves in the same place, working the same strenuous jobs only to earn meager wages. Consequently, their childhood dreams were essentially passing thoughts that they recognized early on would not be realized. Through my fieldwork however, I have found it increasingly important to recognize the shifting aspirations evident in the lives of migrant youth. Their shifting aspirations help capture the unique ways in which they resist and contest structures of power at a cultural level. The shift from hesitant childhood occupational aspirations to determined material aspirations depict the ways in which migrant youth resist and contest structures of power and domination in their everyday lives. While the low-wages offered in the fields do not offer a means for migrant youth to better their lives, they have found alternative ways to obtain their material aspirations.

## Chapter Summary

I began this chapter by describing the palpable reality of how close the United States is to Mexico. The close proximity of the border presents youth in San Telmo with the very real possibility that they can cross over to work. Throughout several conversations with migrant youth who are working, they have expressed their desire to cross the border and work in the United States and return to San Telmo. They described their desire to work in the United States as the “American Dream”. Their motivations for wanting to work in the United States were essentially to earn higher wages and achieve their material aspirations, which were essentially to get rich, buy land, build a house and purchase consumer goods such as a car or an iPhone. In the second half of the chapter, I discuss the ways in which the shifting aspirations of migrant youth from their childhood occupational aspirations to present material aspirations capture the ways in which they resist and contest structures of power and domination in their everyday lives. While migrant youth have recognized early on in their childhood that their occupational aspirations may not be realized, they do not readily accept their circumstances but rather find alternative means to achieve their material goals, which were markers of progress that they were able to better their living conditions. In many ways, migrant youth are no different from youth in other countries that desire to be connected through technology in the larger global community.

# CHAPTER 7

# DRUGS, GANGS AND RESPECT

*Don't think about your future. Live in the Present. (Lucas, Interview, 10/16/2016)*

While previous chapters have addressed the restricted labor market and "The American Dream," this chapter will focus on how peer relationships and gang culture have shaped the aspirations and perceptions of life trajectories of migrant youth. This chapter specifically highlights the narratives of "Los Callejeros" (Street Roamers). Los Callejeros are a group of four youth boys who have proudly given themselves that nickname: Lucas, Martín, Juan and Carlos. The stories of each of the boys are interwoven throughout the chapter as I describe the various themes that emerged during my time with them. The Callejeros are in a gang called "Vatos Locos" and are neither consistently working or in school. Throughout my conversations and time spent with Los Callejeros, it became apparent that gang culture has deeply shaped their aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories.

Membership in the gang offered the boys a sense of security and belonging that schooling, work and even their families could not offer. Their oppositional behavior as a group gave them a sense of meaning in their everyday lives and helped established a cultural identity for the boys. Understanding the experiences of Los Callejeros is critical to recognizing how youth in the wider San Telmo community continue to resist structures of power in their everyday lives in a region that is rampant with drugs and gang activity; particularly through the forging of new cultural identities amongst their peers and the larger community.

I begin this chapter by discussing the community's localized meaning of "las calles" [the streets] and the social meanings attached to those they call "callejeros" [callejeros]. I describe the localized meanings of "cholo" and "calles" particular to San Telmo and how such expressions embody oppositional meanings in the larger community. I continue the chapter by describing the gang culture prevalent amongst migrant youth in San Telmo. For the Callejeros, gang membership also offered respect and a social identity amongst their peers and the larger community. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how gang culture and evidently shaped their aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories. Their interactions and experiences in gang activity heavily shaped their attitudes towards their futures and occupational aspirations. The oppositional culture in gang activity validated the lived experiences of the Callejeros as they perceived that education and work did not hold any promises for their future. Consequently, the expression "live in the present and not tomorrow" was the mantra adopted by the boys and ultimately gave meaning to their everyday activities and gang membership.

## "Las Calles" – The Streets

In this community, "las calles" [the streets] had a particular connotation that was commonly associated with oppositional culture. Outside of my conversations with Los Callejeros, parents, community members and other migrant youth referred to "callejeros" on the streets as those who are "up to no good", roamed around at night and are involved with gang activity. In particular, this community would refer to street roamers as "cholos". There was clearly a stereotype attached to being "cholo" and roaming around on the streets. While the word "cholo" had a variety of meanings in different contexts, this community used this word as both a noun and adjective to refer to people who were associated with drugs, gangs and other forms of oppositional behavior such as foul language, pierced ears, baggy clothing and graffiti. In one of my conversations with Los Callejeros, I asked them to describe a "cholo" in their own words.

Andrea: In your own words, what is a cholo?

Martín: Someone who curses more than other people.

Carlos: Someone like Juan. He’s very cholo.[6]

Juan: Not in school. Someone dumb. (laughs)

Carlos: Gang. (makes gun noises)

Martín: Machísmo [manly]. Very Machísmo [manly].

Although they all playfully provided varying responses, their portrayal of a “cholo” clearly described someone who engages in oppositional behavior whether it is someone who uses foul language or someone who is “machismo” or manly. In regards to schooling, the boys would often joke around with each other by calling each other “cholo” and pointing out who dropped out of school earliest or who was considered the dumbest in their group. While it would appear that the word “cholo” referred exclusively to males, I observed that community members would use the feminine form of the word, “chol-a” for girls who were also involved in gang or drug activity. Regardless, the localized use of the word “cholo” in both it’s feminine and masculine forms were used to describe a deviant individual engaged in gang and drug activity regardless of how heavily they are actually involved.

When I asked Los Callejeros to describe their daily activities on the streets, they would often offer a general response such as “en las calles” [in the streets], biking around or hanging out with “muchachas” [young girls] or with their other gang members. It was clear that there wasn’t an agenda set for their activities on the streets. Almost everyday, the boys could be found on a street corner gathered together with their bikes thrown off to the side. Rap music blasting. Laughing at each other’s jokes with their bats in their hands signaling to local community members that they are in a gang. This was a normal day for Los Callejeros. There weren’t any expectations for what will happen that day. They would often say “lo que será” [whatever happens, happens]. As I will describe in depth below, this perspective was a reflection of their attitudes towards their futures. Throughout my time spent with the Callejeros, it became increasingly apparent that the low aspirations and perceptions of life trajectories of Los Callejeros were heavily shaped by their interactions with each other and the gang culture they were immersed in.

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[6] While the word “cholo” was associated with gang activity, drugs and oppositional behavior in the larger community, the Callejeros would often playfully use the word to make fun of each other in front of outsiders (people not in their group of friends).

## Gang Culture – Belonging, Rap and Respect

While many people associate negative connotations with gangs, they often serve a number of important psychological purposes, including self-esteem, emotional support, status, and a sense of belonging for their members. (Omizo, Omizo, & Honda, 1997; Wang, 1994). Accordingly, it is critical to understand the dynamics of gangs the role they play in the lives of their members (Omizo, Omizo, & Honda, 1997). Virgil (1988) emphasizes that adolescence is "characterized as a period of life in which a person's identity undergoes marked changes to adjust to new body appearance and societal expectations" (p. 421). For many "barrio" [neighborhood] youth with challenging backgrounds, street gangs have arisen as a competitor of other institutions, such as family and schools, to shape the formation of identity (Virgil, 1988). For the Callejeros, membership in a gang offered a sense of security that was not found in their families, schools or occupational aspirations – namely, the labor market. Although the boys expressed an uncertainty about what tomorrow holds for them, they were able to establish a social identity founded upon their friendships with each other and membership in a larger local gang.

### Sense of Belonging

It was evident that gang membership provided the Callejeros with a deep sense of belonging. Loyalty, responsibility and conforming to group norms represent values that are valued by youth gangs and mainstream culture (Virgil, 1988). Omizo, Omizo, and Honda (1997) found that gang membership offered young adolescents a sense of belonging as they expressed that they can count on their friends to always be there for them and help them in any and every situation. Often times, youth's self-identity in inspired and affirmed by commitment to and identification with the gang as they learn what to think about themselves and how to act (Virgil, 1988). The Callerjeros commitment to each other and the larger gang they were a part of was expressed in the way that they dressed and referred to their group as a "family".

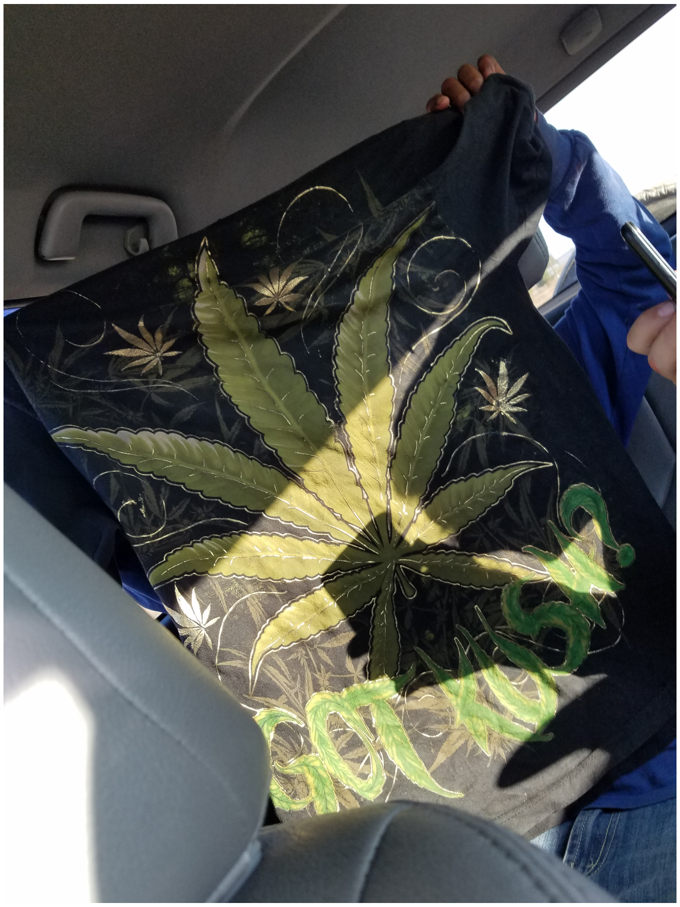

*Figure 7.1.* Juan's t-shirt that he bought from the local "segunda" store and redecorated with a marijuana leaf.

Being a part of Vatos Locos, a local gang, was not just about the title. It was about the group of people that you belong to. In order to belong, the way that you carry yourself is important; the way that you dress, music you listen to and people that you are surrounded by. Although they always complained about their poor living conditions, the way that they dressed was an important expression of their cultural identities and the group that they belonged to. Every time that I spent time with the boys or saw them in passing, they were wearing blue, which is the color of the gang that they a part of. It also wasn't just about the color but the style of clothing they wore. Juan would often show up with a blue beanie, large baggy shirt with a marijuana leaf painted across, and baggy jeans. Martín loved wearing his blue baseball cap with painted letters "S13", baggy black shorts and white converses. Lucas wore a variation of a blue flannel shirt with the same black jeans almost everyday. Carlos would frequently wear a loose blue dodgers t-shirt that he bought at a "segunda"[7] or a used clothing store. Each of them would wear an mp3 player around their necks that would blast rap music wherever they were hanging out. It was obvious that the boys wanted to make their presence known to local community members. Located in a small rural region, there was a face-to-face dynamic present in the community that highlighted group membership, as most community members knew each other or recognized new faces right away. Evidently, all of these details were intentional expressions of their identities as Los Callejeros and their membership in Vatos Locos.

Throughout my conversations with Los Callejeros, it was obvious that although there was not much certainty about what tomorrow offers, there was an assurance of whom you can count on. When asked what "pandillas" [gangs] mean, the boys would quickly yell "familia" [family] or "amigos" [friends].

Andrea: In your words, what is a "pandilla"?

Martín: Many, many friends.

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[7] "Segundas" are clothing stores, which carry second-hand clothing. Most "segundas" were started by local community members with social networks in the United States. They would resell clothing that their friends or family members would bring them from the United states.

Carlos: Like a family.

Lucas: A family (repeats). They support you in the good times. They support you in the bad times.

While “pandilla” literally translates to gang, for these boys “pandilla” symbolized family, or a group of people who were there for each other no matter what happens. According to Los Callejeros, most of the boys who were involved in gang activity came from broken families characterized by abuse or neglect. Many times, gangs serve as “surrogate families” as families of gang youth are often socially disorganized and living in impoverished conditions (Omizo, Omizo, & Honda, 1997; Clark, 1992). Ruptures in family life generally lead to frequent and lengthy exposure to street activities as lack of parental supervision come with feelings of rejection by one’s family; such feelings appeal to the readiness of older street youths to recruit and socialize youngers to gang life (Virgil, 1988). The families of the Callejeros were marked with single mother households, limited supervision and in a few cases domestic violence. In fact, many of the boys would not return to their homes for days at a time and opt to stay with older gang members, who made themselves readily available to the youngsters.

One of the Callejeros, Lucas, described how he ended up roaming the streets and getting involved with gang activity. As described in my previous chapters, the first time I met Luis six years ago. He was sitting on the side of the road with some of his friends talking and laughing. He stood out to me as the leader of the group since most of the boys followed his motions. As soon as he saw me approaching them, he stopped laughing and kept his eyes fixed in my direction. The boys followed suit as they hushed down and looked at him. As he got up to talk to me, the boys slowly got up, dusted off their pants and stood around him. Their eyes were locked on him to see what he would say to me — someone who is obviously not from the community.

Without hesitation, Luis reached out and shook my hand, smiled at me and asked me where I was from. Since our first meeting, Lucas and I have shared several profound conversations that shed light how the decisions he has made were in response to the unpromising conditions of his everyday life.

Andrea: How long did you work for?

Lucas: No too long because I started hanging out on the streets.

Andrea: How did you end up on the streets?

Lucas: First, my mom told me she wanted me to leave the house. She wanted me to move.

Andrea: Your mom said that to you?

Lucas: Yes, she was always angry with me and always told me that. That I should leave the house. And that's how it was like.

Andrea: Oh, I see...

Lucas: And I was crying for a week in my house. And yeah, I began to do drugs and hangout on the streets. I don't put all the blame on her. It was my decision.

Andrea: Wow, you've been through a lot Lucas.

Lucas: But I feel that (pauses). She always said these things to me. That I should move. That's just how it was. I would be in my house crying. I started to go out by myself. I would sit alone remembering what she said to me. I always felt like she didn't really love me.

Andrea: I never knew you felt this way Lucas. I mean, then how did you end up using drugs?

Lucas: With my friends. At first, I would watch them. But one older guy was smoking and dropped the cigarette on the ground. I picked it up and smoked it.

Andrea: (Laughs) Lucas! How did you start hanging out with your friends?

Lucas: We started hanging out on the streets. We started getting into trouble together.

Andrea: What's more important? Pandilla or family?

Lucas: Pandilla because my family always says things to me.

As a single mother, Lucas' mother placed heavy expectations on Lucas to be a man of the household. Because they only migrated from Oaxaca only six years ago, the stress of working the fields and raising six children by herself weighed heavily on her. Lucas often expressed that his mother would press him to work with her in the fields and grew increasingly frustrated with him when he started to get involved with gang and drug activity. He would return home late at night and would consequently fight with his mother almost everyday. The rising conflict eventually resulted in her kicking him out of the house several times a month. This was the story for all the Callejeros. They either had conflict-ridden relationships with their parents or their families were torn apart by drug or gang activity. Juan had a similar story with his mother, who also struggled to support her family as a single mother. As the oldest son, Juan grew up seeing his mother in and out of relationships with boyfriends, who were at times physically abusive towards his mother and siblings. After several years of fighting with his mother on a daily basis about her relationships, he grew increasingly quiet at home and eventually stopped going home for days at a time. Despite his mother's protests for him to stay at home to take care of his siblings, he would often leave and stay with older boys from Vatos Locos.

Because all of the Callejeros avoided being at home and dropped out of school in their early years, they spent most of their time together. Interestingly, although the boys were not in school, they did not consistently work and rather prioritized spending time on streets with their group of friends. In fact, the days that they did work, they opted to work together because they wanted to buy new clothes or travel to the next town together to meet other members in their "pandilla". The boys would even call other gang members they see less frequently, "carnales" or brothers. Virgil (1988) describes the family dynamic among gangs as, "individuals who share a similar background identify with one another under the group label, and begin to treat one another as close friends because of the identification" (p. 434). I observed this dynamic of "familia" amongst the Callejeros as they would often refer to each other as "karnal" or "karnalito". Although the boys did not know other gang members closely, their similar backgrounds gave them a sense of collectivity as the Vatos Locos.

It became evident that being a part of Vatos Locos offered the boys a sense of belonging; in many ways, they were able to forge a new identity that was not found in school, work or even their families. As discussed in previous chapters, the Callejeros always made it clear that school just wasn't for people "like them", who are "burro" [dumb]. Similarly, working in the fields did not offer them any security of a promising future due to the restricted labor market and low-wages. Finally, their households were often sites of conflict and pain, as they did not find acceptance or security in their families. Consequently, the priorities of the Callejeros reveal the ways in which they preferred spending time with their friends on the streets where they were able forge new identities and have a sense of a belonging that they did not find anywhere else.

### Rap Music

Another central characteristic of being a part of the Vatos Locos is listening to rap music. It was effortless to locate the boys in the community because they would often hangout on the corner of a street blasting their rap music at a booming volume. Because of the small size of the community, their blasting music could be heard from blocks away. Every single one of the Callejero boys owned an mp3 music player that they would proudly wear around their necks or hang on their bicycles. It was apparent that listening to rap music and even being able to rap the lyrics was an important marker of being a part of the Vatos Locos. They would often mouth the words when I would hangout with them and mimic body movements that they saw in the rap videos. On a few occasions, the boys spent time showing me videos and pictures of rappers that they admired. On the surface, it would appear that the boys enjoyed listening to rap because that's what "cholos" or people in "pandillas" do, but in one of my conversations with Lucas, he explained why rap was meaningful to him personally.

> Andrea: What do you like about rap music?
>
> Lucas: The words are true.
>
> Andrea: Hmm. What do you mean?
>
> Lucas: It's true to our reality. There will always be problems in life, but you can count on your friends. Don't think about the future, live in the present.
>
> Andrea: Interesting…
>
> Lucas: There is rap for everyone and for every situation.

In this particular conversation, it was apparent that Lucas was describing the ways in which rap expresses his perception of reality in San Telmo. He explained that the lyrics addressed the uncertainties of life, yet you can live in the present and enjoy the relationships you have with friends who will never leave your side. Recent literature discusses the therapeutic uses of rap to empower today's youth as the lyrics often reflect the lived experiences of young people who find themselves marginalized and silenced (Travis, 2013; Hadley & Yancey, 2002; Tyson, 2002). The origins of gangsta rap come primarily from impoverished communities that are plagued with higher rates of violence, crime and higher mortality rates (Keyes, 2002). As a consequence of living in these communities, many young rappers perceive adolescence as a shortened period and communicate that their music simply reflects the reality of the circumstances they have witnessed growing up or continue to witness in their communities (Hadley & Yancey, 2002). In the same light, the themes addressed in rap music are plainly relatable to the lived experiences of Lucas and his friends.

Martín's story in particular sheds light on how growing up in an impoverished neighborhood rampant with violence, drugs and instability made rap lyrics relatable to his everyday experiences. Martín's family migrated from Guerrero, a southern state in Mexico, just seven years ago. Different from Lucas and Carlos, Martín was the middle child of his family, which had both a mother and father. Upon moving to Baja California, both his older and sister got heavily involved with the Vatos Locos gang. During my fieldwork, the influence of the older siblings was clearly seen as Martín and his younger siblings often wore the same colors and handkerchiefs associated with the Vatos Locos they older siblings did. Martín would often show me pictures of he and his older brother, Armando, posing with blue baseball caps and pistol hand gestures. Although Armando encouraged Martín to stay at home with their younger siblings, he would sneak out with his bicycle follow them to their local hangout spots, which was typically an abandoned house and local park with rundown slides and swing sets.

During my fieldwork, I witnessed the devastating upshots of Martín's older siblings involvement with the Vatos Locos. One day, Martín knocked on the door to the house that I was staying at. I opened the door to find him, along with the Callejeros, with a serious face. After a few minutes of gently asking him if everything was okay, Martín broke down in tears and loud sobs. With the help of the Callejeros, Martín shared that Armando suffered from a head injury and unexpectedly passed only a few hours later. I later discovered that the head injury was from a fight with a rival gang that his brother was involved in. With a heavy heart, I attended the funeral, which took place the following day. Upon arriving at Martin's house, where the funeral was taking place, I immediately saw a large group of boys and girls dressed completely in blue gathered near the casket. It was clear that they were a part of the Vatos Locos and were wearing blue to pay respects to Armando, a fellow member of their gang. The picture of Armando that was placed in the front of his casket, along with vigil candle, was one of him staring into the camera, wearing a blue handkerchief on his head and blue t- shirt. I silently sat with Martín and his younger siblings throughout the night as neighbors and family members arrived to pay their respects to Armando and his family.

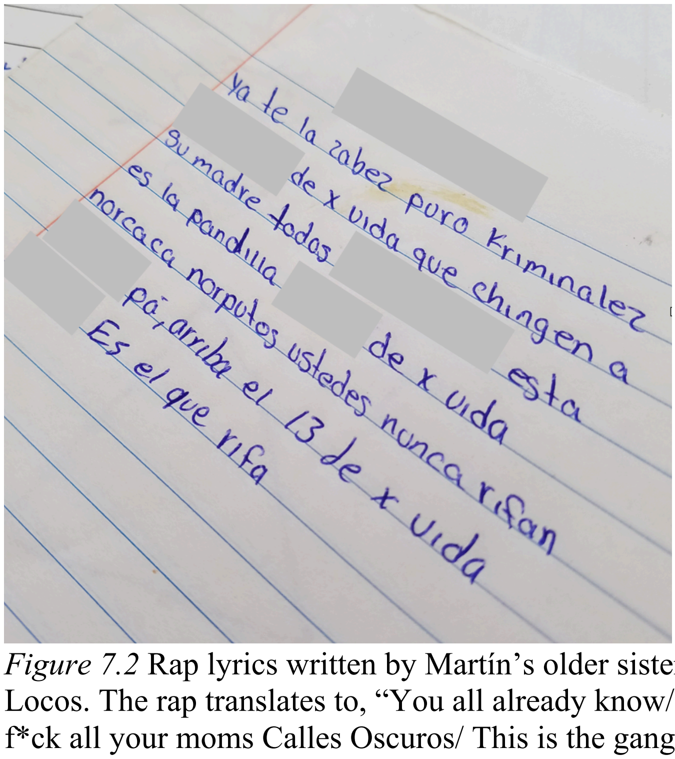
Only a few weeks after the funeral, a neighbor told me that Martín's older sister was arrested by police in another town for selling marijuana. After not hearing from Martín for almost two weeks, he showed up at my door one day, along with the Callejeros, with a somber look on his face. He calmly explained that after a week of trying to bail his sister out, Martín's family was told that she would not be allowed to leave for six months. With a confused expression, I asked Martín why she was being held for so long if drug use was so common in the community. In response, he shrugged his shoulders and told me that apparently "drug use" and "drug selling" was different. Even though Martín was clearly in pain from the devastating incidents that took place in the few weeks, he maintained a solemn expression. The only time that I saw an uncontrolled emotional outburst was at the funeral when perhaps the pain was too deep to conceal. The next few times that I spent time with Callejeros, Martín would blast his rap music and stare off into the distance. Given my knowledge of the machísmo and gang culture that the boys were immersed in, I gathered that it was not "manly" or respectable to express emotions. As his rap music often alluded to how violence, death and pain are a part of everyday life, it was clear that Martín adopted this same attitude to make sense of his own life experiences.

In several other conversations, the boys expressed a deep cynicism about their everyday realities that were embodied in the rap lyrics that they listened to. From one perspective, the death and crime referenced in rap lyrics reflected the experiences of the Callejeros who have grown up seeing their neighbors victimized by gang violence and drug crimes. From another standpoint, rap music reflected the uncertainty of tomorrow experienced by the Callejeros; the stark reality of living in San Telmo, a place where working in the fields and finishing school does not hold any promises for their futures. The tone of these conversations was often one of disappointment and resentment; it doesn't matter if they work or finish school, they were going to be in the same place in life no matter what they did. While rap was an expression and a marker of their identities as Vatos Locos, it was also a means through which they were able to convey their perspectives of life in San Telmo; and ultimately, perceptions of their life trajectories. The lyrics that they boys heavily repeated were, “You gotta live in the present and not tomorrow”. For the boys, these lyrics were a fitting reflection of how they view their futures with such uncertainty. It was more meaningful to live in the moment, get into trouble with friends and make memories in the present rather than trying to plan out their futures.

### Respect

With the Vatos Locos, everyday life was about getting respect from your peers around you and the larger community. Literature addressing motivations for youth to join gangs highlight the desire for respect as a major influence (Anderson, 1999; Vigil, 1988). Earning respect provides youth with a sense of acceptance, which can be especially appealing among children who have low self-esteem, come from broken homes or lack a sense of community

(Goldman, Giles & Hogg, 2014). Respect is largely centered on "proving" oneself within one's gang or with another gang, toughness and willingness to participate in violence is a chief means for commanding respect from gang peers (Goldman, Giles & Hogg, 2014). Acting violently sends the message that a person is not be messed with and is capable of anything (Goldman, Giles & Hogg, 2014). With regards to territory, gang youth will typically proclaim their "barrio" [neighborhood] with pride despite the danger they are in with rival gangs (Virgil, 1988). Building a reputation of being willing and able to fight is to gain respect among peers (Anderson, 1999). Anderson's (1999) ethnographic research on youth violence in the inner-city highlights that in street code the high value and practical implications of respect as it is fought for, held and challenged, "as much as honor was in the age of chivalry" (p. 66). In public, the individual's clothing, demeanor, way of moving, as well as "the crowd" he or she runs with are important measures of respect for by others and his or herself (Anderson, 1999).



[redacted]
Ya te la zabez puro Kriminalez
[redacted] de x vida que chingen a
Su madre todos [redacted] esta
es la pandilla [redacted] de x vida
[redacted] norcaca norputos ustedes nunca rifan
[redacted] pa' arriba el 13 de x vida
Es el que rifa

*Figure 7.2* Rap lyrics written by Martín's older sister, who is also involved with the Vatos Locos. The rap translates to, "You all already know/ Purely criminals/ Vatos Locos living life/ f*ck all your moms Calles Oscuros/ This is the gang V13 living life/ Calles Oscuros you guys will never be the baddest/ V13 everyone get up/ V13 is the baddest."

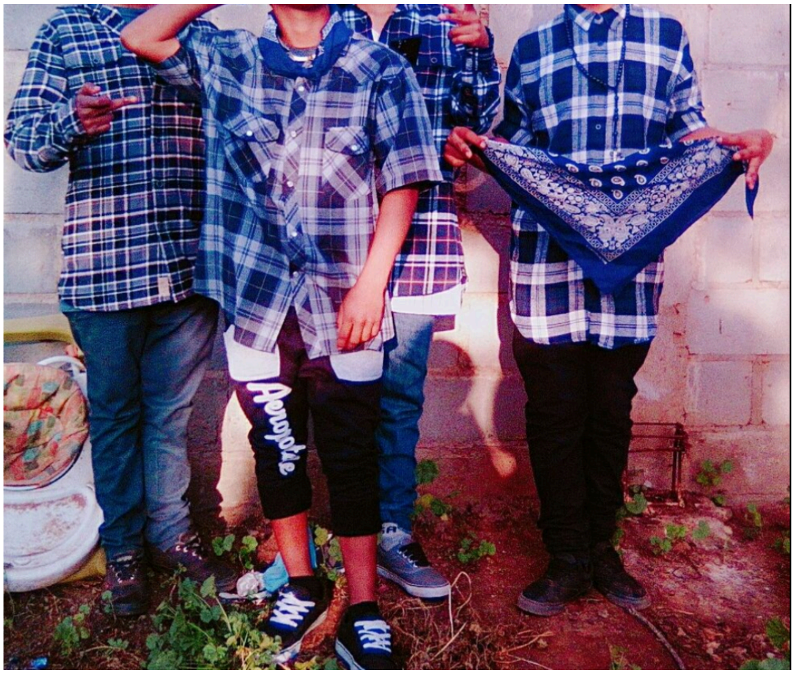


*Figure 7.3* The Callejeros wearing blue clothing on a particular day they were going to fight youth from their rival gang, Calles Oscuros.

The principle of respect by which the Callejeros abided by was evident in their daily activities and interactions with each other. Evidently, the boys were aware that their gang membership was associate with the “barrio” [neighborhood] they were living in which was often represented with the letters “SV13”. Interestingly, these letters did not represent the name of the literal community they lived in, but the wider region their community was located in. The color of their barrio was blue, which was proudly represented in the everyday outfits of the boys. Physical appearance, including clothes, jewelry, and grooming play in an important part in how a person is viewed; consequently, it is critical to have the appropriate appearance to be respected (Anderson, 1999). Amongst the Callejeros, there was a staple article of clothing that each of the boy swore to represent their membership in the Vatos Locos. For Martín, it was his worn out blue hat with the letters “SV13” painted across the top, while for Carlos it was his blue beanie with the letters “V13” written with permanent marker. For Lucas, he always sported a navy clue varsity jacket he bought at the “segunda” with the letters “V13” marked on the back. Juan had a signature set of blue converses with the same letters “V13” written along the sides of his shoes.

Perhaps most the most potent message of their gang membership were the days they would walk on the streets with bats in their hands, which were clearly accessorized with a blue handkerchief near the top. Such gestures were clear messages to rival gangs and members in the larger community that they boys are willing and ready to fight anyone on the street who challenged them. On a few occasions during my fieldwork, I ran into the boys, each of them on a bike, holding bats in their hands with blue handkerchiefs. When asked where they were going, Martín would be the first to speak up and make noises, “psh psh” (punching noises) with punching noises and point towards the road hinting that they were on their way to a fight. Throughout my fieldwork, I learned that there was a local store called “Yessica” in San Telmo that the boys would go hangout at with older gang members. “Yessica” acted as a “staging area” as described by Anderson (1999), at which a wide mix of people gathered for various reasons; it is in such areas that campaigns for respect was often waged. There were a few occasions where rival gangs, dressed in red, would appear; such an act of disrespect was not tolerated by the Vatos Locos. Consequently, a fight would either take place at the store or they boys would arrange to fight in the streets between two individuals or even groups from each gang.

“Staging areas” were not the only places that the Callejeros demonstrated their willingness to fight. Next to Lucas, Martín was second in command in the Vatos Locos. He carried himself in a serious manner, hardly ever smiling or laughing — even with his friends. Martín took pride in his group of friends and being a part of the Vatos Locos. There was one day when I was sitting in the shade with the Callejeros on a basketball court in our community. During our conversation, a group of teenagers with red bandanas were walking on the road in front of us. As they were walking by, they suddenly stopped and looked through the fence towards us. Martín quickly stood up, picked up some rocks and proceeded to swiftly throw them at the group. In confusion, I quickly told Martín to stop as I looked back and forth between the two groups of youth. His friends followed suit and yelled, "Show some respect!" and "Only blues here!" Martín mumbled under his breath, "They look like girls. They smell." As the group started to walk away, they sat down and laughed together giving each other fist bumps. I later found out that the group of teenagers wearing red were a rival gang, Calles Oscuros that they fight against frequently. Miguel explained that in this "barrio" [neighborhood] it is all about respect.

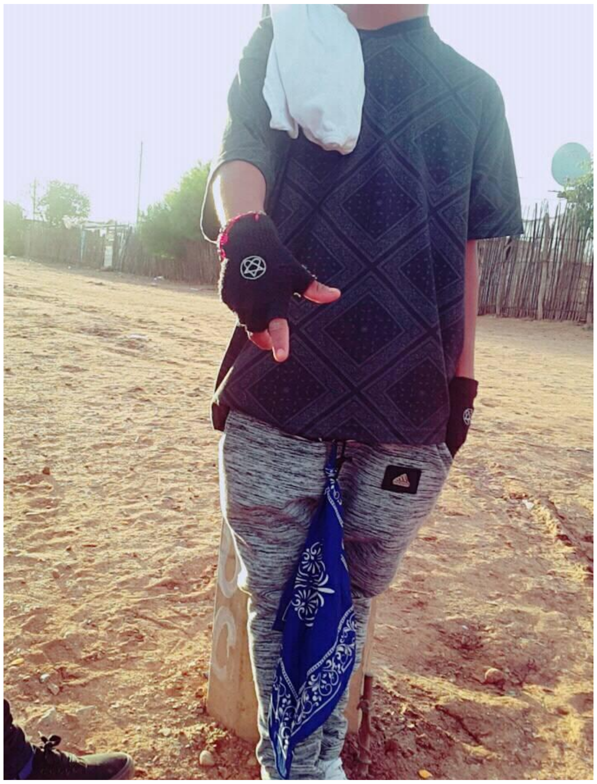


*Figure 7.4* Martín with his blue handkerchief representing his membership in the gang Vatos Locos. The Callejeros always made sure they were wearing one article of blue clothing everyday.

In one of my conversations with the Callejeros, they explained in their own words that "barrios" are bad places where "cholos" are. For the Callejeros, their descriptions of "barrios" and "pandillas" were largely centered on respect.

Andrea: Martín, what is a barrio?

Juan: Many friends!

Carlos: They are blocks…

Juan: (Interrupts) Barrios are bad.

Andrea: What about us? Are we considered a barrio?

Martín: No, barrios are where cholos are. They bring bats to fight other people.

Juan: Yes, blue handkerchiefs!

Martín, Yes, blue handkerchiefs!

Andrea: What is the difference between pandillas and cholos?

Martín: It's the same thing!

Juan: Well, barrios have a lot of cholos…

As members in the Vatos Locos, they demanded respect from rival gangs and were proud of their affiliation with their own gang. In the incident described above, one of the first things they yelled at the rival gang was, "Show respect!" For these boys, they associated barrios with territory, fighting and gang representation. While membership in the Vatos Locos gave them an individual sense of identity, Vatos Locos occurrences enabled them to reaffirm their collective belonging by gaining recognition as the Vatos Locos. In their conversation above, their mention of blue handkerchiefs represented their membership in the Vatos Locos and what they brought when they fight other rival gangs. Accordingly, gaining respect from rival gangs in the form of recognition was an affirmation of their cultural identities as the Vatos Locos.

In addition to recognition, another form of respect was recognition; namely, how one was perceived by his peers and the larger community. In one of my conversations with Martín, he closely linked together respect and recognition and when he described how people in the community recognized him because his friends had guns.

Andrea: Do you guys want to be in gangs when you're older?

Martín: For me, no.

Juan: No!

Andrea: But why...

Juan: (Interrupts) It's just for now!

Carlos: It's because we like it.

Andrea: Why would you want to be in gangs now but not when you're older?

Martín: Because the girls look at us more.

Juan: Yes, the beautiful and new girls.

Martín: And the cholos with their rocks "clank clank" (makes noise).

Andrea: Oh yeah? Do you guys fight a lot?

Martín: Yes.

Andrea: But not with guns, right?

Martín: One of my friends has a gun.

Andrea: In San Telmo?

Martín: A big one.

Juan: Yes, here!

Martín: Everyone respects me. I arrive and everyone looks at me.

Juan: Yes, he's very recognized.

> Martín: Everyone knows me because everyone is always looking at me. When I go down there to the other barrio, no one hits me. Over there it's north, over here it's south.

In this conversation, it was apparent that recognition was of great importance to the boys. Throughout much of the conversation, they emphasized recognition in various contexts. In particular, they associated girls, guns and fighting with respect. Martín in particular makes it very clear that people in the community recognized him because they knew that he has a friend who owns a gun. In fact, rival gang members in other barrios did not fight him because they knew who he was; they were afraid of him. Throughout this conversation it was evident that being recognized by others is likened with respect. Gaining respect by means of recognition of others in the community was again an affirmation of their identities as the Vatos Locos. Being recognized as part of the Vatos Locos offered a sense of importance and belonging, which is largely a process of the boys forging their cultural identities.

From a cultural perspective, respect was very much tied in to the machismo culture that is prevalent in Mexico and most Latin American countries. In the same conversation, the Callejeros addressed from their perspectives why boys in the community wanted to be involved in gang activity.

> Andrea: Why do the boys here want to be cholos?
>
> Carlos: They want to act machismo.
>
> Martín: Yeah, machismo.
>
> Andrea: But I mean, isn't it dangerous?
>
> Martín: Yes, it is. I'm machismo. (laughs)

Although we didn't continue our conversation of what it means to be machismo on this particular day, the term surfaced several times throughout my fieldwork in San Telmo. Studies on being “machismo” have largely focused on differing gender attitudes and have ranged from pro-social and anti-social attitudes. According to Ingoldsby (1991), two of the defining “machismo” characteristics are associated with aggressiveness and hyper-sexuality. Each macho must demonstrate that he is masculine, physically strong and powerful, as the culturally preferred goal of “being machismo” is being dominant over women, which proves your masculinity (Ingoldsby, 1991). In the conversations above, Martín’s mention of girls, guns and respect are markers of his masculinity. He explained that they wanted to be in the Vatos Locos because girls will look at them, they get to fight rival gang members and everyone recognizes them. There were also several instances the boys would call each other “women” as insults or taunt each other to do daring deeds, such as steal from a local store. If any of the boys refused to put themselves in harms way, the other boys would provokingly yell, “You’re scared!” or “You’re a girl!” It was evident that being brave, strong and aggressive was respectable amongst the Callejeros.

Gaining respect and ultimately recognition amongst rival gangs, girls and the wider community was important to the Callejeros because it gave them a sense of identity and importance. As discussed above, the restricted labor market and lack of acceptance from their households and schools led the Callejeros to forge an identity in a space that was not readily available to them. From their perspectives, working in the fields and going to school yielded little benefits for them. In a community that widely maintains *machismo* values, they were able to gain respect because of their involvement with the Vatos Locos. Being a part of the Vatos Locos enabled them to forge new cultural identities that ultimately rewarded them recognition and a sense of importance in the wider community.

## Aspirations – "Don't think about your future. Live in the Present."

During the first month of my fieldwork, there was one particular day when the boys were sitting under a shaded area near the school basketball court, which was right across the house I was staying at. They were sweaty and worn out from playing soccer for much of the afternoon. After seeing them sitting outside through my window, I walked outside to join them. As I approached the boys, I saw them making gun motions at each other and making shooting noises. They looked at me and yelled, "I am a narco! Chapo is my uncle!" and all started laughing hysterically. I laughed with them and joined their conversation by asking them questions about being a "narco" [drug dealer] and their future aspirations.

Andrea: What do you want to be when you grow up?

Martín: Narco! Like El Chapo.

Andrea: There is a lot of news about Chapo in the news in the United States. Martín, why do you want to be a narco?

Martín: Because Chapo is my uncle. (laughs hysterically)

Juan: To kill women!

Andrea: Juan, what do you want to do when you get older?

Juan: Nothing.

(Boys laugh)

Andrea: But why a narco? For money or power?

Martín: To kill women!

Andrea: To kill women?

(Martín and Juan start laughing hysterically. They both are acting as if they have guns in their hands and are shooting each other.)

Andrea: Okay, Juan what do you want to be when you get older?

Juan: Nothing.

Martín: No, a narco!

In this particular conversation, it can be assumed that the boys are not entirely serious about their desires to literally be "narcos" when they grow up; at the same time, it is important to consider what such responses reveal about their perceptions of their present realities. As discussed above, respect, girls and power were important to the boys due to the machismo culture they live in. Drugs, violence and hyper-sexuality were markers of how respectable a male is amongst their peers and larger community. In their community, El Chapo, one of the most renowned drug dealers, was an iconic figure known for his power and influence locally and globally. Their references to El Chapo and "killing women" are responses that reflect the larger gang and drug activity that they are surrounded by. Although it was evident that they boys did not really have a goal to "kill women", it was important for them to assert their masculinity through such comments. As young adolescents, the boys were well aware of what is considered respectable responses in the presence of their peers. In this conversation, Martín clearly continued to respond with "narco" and makes jokes about Chapo because he was able to elicit reactions from the rest of the boys. Their laughs and responses to his comments reasserted Martín's authority as one of the dominant leaders of the Callejeros.

Furthermore, their aspirations and perceptions of their futures were unsurprisingly shaped through their experiences and interactions in the gang. In the conversation above, Martín and Juan both responded with "nothing" when they were asked what they wanted to be when they grow up. Initially, I assumed these responses were absentminded jokes; however, with time I began to understand that their responses were very much honest reactions to their present realities. Faced with a restricted labor market and seemingly irrelevant educational experiences, the boys did not see much of a choice in their future career choice. It frankly did not matter if the boys worked in the fields now or finished their schooling because the odds of them avoiding work in the fields were clearly against them. In the gang community however, the boys have a chance at forging a new cultural identity that yielded palpable and immediate rewards in the form of respect, recognition and a sense of belonging. In such a setting, thinking about your future is not fostered. Instead, rap music and your day-to-day time spent with peers on the streets establishes a perspective in which you "live in the present and not in the future."

One of the Callejeros, Lucas, explains that his time spent with the Vatos Locos has taught him not to think about the future, but to live in the present.

> Andrea: Wow, Lucas. So you think about your future?
>
> Lucas: No.
>
> Andrea: No? How about what you want to have or do?
>
> Lucas: No.
>
> Andrea: Why not?
>
> Lucas: Because our gang says that you have to live in the present and not the future.
>
> Andrea: Is this a saying?
>
> Lucas: Mmhmm.
>
> Andrea: Can you say it again?
>
> Lucas: You have to live in the present and whatever the future brings (pauses). You think about it then.

In this conversation, Lucas describes that his time with the Vatos Locos has led to adopt a perspective in which he values living in the present and not the future. In the same conversation, he pulled out his beat-up cellphone and played his favorite rap songs with lyrics that underscore importance of living in the present because you don’t know what tomorrow will bring. For Lucas, the mantra that the Vatos Locos lived by influenced his perceptions of his future as he didn’t think it was important to think about his future in terms of what he wanted to do or have. For the Callejeros, their time spent on the streets together fostered a day-to-day mentality. They never knew what tomorrow had in store for them since they aren’t in school or working in the fields consistently. Consequently, they would spend each day looking for “trouble” or doing whatever activity presented itself in front of them. Some days, they would spend time working for the local grocery market moving boxes or venturing to the next town to fight rival gang members; other days they would play soccer with other neighborhood youth.

Goldman, Giles and Hogg (2014) put forth that the future may seem bleak and uncertain for youth who have few social ties, live in poverty and struggle with broken families. Such youth are susceptible to getting involved in gang activity as turning to a group reduces uncertainty by providing a better conception of one’s social world (Hogg, 2007). In many ways, the day-to-day mentality that the Vatos Locos fostered validated the lived experiences of the boys. As discussed in previous chapters, the restricted labor market and schooling experiences offered little security for their futures. For the boys, it was evident there was no promise of upward mobility for completing schooling or working the fields. As Lucas mentioned in previous chapters, “there is not going up here.” There was little certainty about what schooling or work could offer them because they have already cognized they are going to end up working in the fields as their families have for generations. Subsequently, the day-to-day perspective held by the Vatos Locos was a larger reflection of their own life experiences. Given their present circumstances, living in the present and not giving much thought about their future made perfect sense to the Callejeros.

Their pursuit of respect and recognition as gang members were sensible endeavors as there were immediate rewards for their efforts. Through engaging in oppositional behavior, the boys were able to forge cultural identities that were accepted in the machismo culture present in gang communities.

## Chapter Summary

I began this chapter by describing the street and gang culture that the Callejeros are immersed in. I specifically addressed how gang membership allows the boys offered the boys a sense of security that is not readily offered to them through schooling and the labor market. Being a part of the Vatos Locos largely offered the boys a sense of belonging that they did not find in their immediate opportunities or even families. Central to being recognized as a Vatos Locos was respect. For the boys, respect was closely tied into recognition in machismo culture. In particular, the boys emphasized that being respected is important because they get the attention of *muchachas* [young ladies] and recognition from rival gangs and the larger community. Distinct facets of gang culture such as fighting and rap were critical to empowering the boys to forge cultural identities through oppositional behavior. I concluded the chapter by addressing the ways in which the boys' involvement with the Vatos Locos reflects their perspectives of their everyday realities and has shaped their perceptions of their futures. The mantra that the Vatos Locos live by, "live in the present and not the future" fostered a day-to-day outlook amongst the boys that was representative of their life experiences. While working in the fields and schooling did not guarantee any rewards for their efforts, their involvement in oppositional activities with the Vatos Locos offered them immediate rewards and most importantly meaningful cultural identities.

## CHAPTER 8

## CONCLUSION
## “ECHALE GANAS” – GIVE IT YOUR ALL

*Yes, I tell my family to study until they can’t anymore. I don’t want them to go to the fields. But I also tell them, “Give it your best. Give it your best.” (Leticia, Interview, 09/22/2016)*

I began this dissertation with my personal story. Since I was 10 years old, I have enjoyed visits to the community for extended periods of time. Over the years, my time in the community has resulted in friendships, memories and tears on several occasions as I have too often heard the stories of migrant youth and their families affected by the heavy burdens of the living and working conditions in their everyday lives. The purpose of my study was to document the lived experiences of migrant youth as I explore their shifting aspirations in school and work settings. I particularly endeavored to understand the ways in which exploitative working conditions and schooling experiences shaped the aspirations and perceptions of life trajectories amongst migrant youth. My fieldwork and extended time in the community shed light on the stark reality of how migrant youth were profoundly affected by the uncertainty of their futures and hopeless life circumstances which were manifested in the limited labor market opportunities, conditions of poverty and gangs and drugs rampant in the community. I found migrant youth actively resisted and contested structural constraints in their lives by dropping out of school, pursuing the “American Dream” and gaining respect through membership in local gangs. Despite this contestation, the harsh reality of the limits of agency and resistance were evident as migrant youth ended up working in the fields with somber attitudes towards their futures only a year later.

The weight of hopelessness and the uncertainty of tomorrow is embodied in the phrase that I frequently heard in the community, “echale ganas*”*, which bears a profound meaning of "give it your best" or "give it your all." This was often the answer I received when I asked migrant youth about thoughts on their futures whether it was regarding education, work or even their present relationships with friends and family. My conversations with migrant youth and their families were often sobering narratives filled troubling accounts of labor exploitation, dropping out of school, drugs and gang violence and domestic abuse. Despite their despondent life experiences, migrant youth would answer with "echale ganas" in response to questions their futures. Such responses powerfully illustrated the optimism that they continued to hold onto despite the uncertainty of tomorrow and the pessimistic attitudes they projected towards their futures. Although schooling and work did not hold any promises for their futures, they expressed that they would "give it their best" to the support themselves and their families until they cannot anymore. Despite their expressed optimism, it is critical to consider the ways in which structural constraints in an era of globalization continue to reproduce tragic outcomes in migrant youth that result in dropping out of school, labor exploitation in the agroindustry, gang and drug involvement and even death.

## Epilogue

Upon returning from my fieldwork to the United States, I reflected on my experiences in the community and the poignant narratives of migrant youth I was able to personally hear. I often did not know how to make sense of stark reality that their lives were filled with suffering, exploitation and seeming contradictions that further highlighted the somber perceptions of their futures they internalized through their lived experiences. My visits back to the community served as sobering reminders of how despite migrant youth often expressed optimism by saying "echale ganas", the limits of such resiliency were evident as I reconnected with the migrant youth on several occasions over a period of two years after my study.

Only three months after my study, I returned to San Telmo eager to see how the youth were doing. Upon driving into the community, I immediately saw Gerardo and Javier walking alongside the road. I excitedly honked and waved at them from my car. They quickly turned around and flashed a quick smile at me as they started walking to my car. We agreed to reconvene near the local basketball courts that we always spent time at. I parked my car near the basketball courts and after 15 minutes, saw the Soñadores, Verónica, Gerardo, Javier and Emmanuel, walking over. I started walking over to them and started laughing as I explained they already looked different after only three months of not seeing them. Their initial shy smiles turned into noisy laughs as they caught me up on the latest gossip in the community. When I asked them about their plans to go the United States, they looked at each other and shrugged. Gerardo told me that he wasn't sure he would be able to go anymore since his mother is sick, while Verónica and Emmanuel told me that they weren't sure about going to the United States since they haven't been able to save any money. Perhaps most surprising was that Javier shared that his girlfriend was pregnant and he decided to stay to work and make sure that he would be able to support her. I was surprised Javier, who was the most adamant about moving to the United States, made a firm decision to stay in San Telmo.

It occurred to me that perhaps they were never certain about moving to the United States to work, but the simple undertaking of aspiring to move to the United States was their way of resisting the seeming determined fate ahead of them. Instead of merely accepting that they would one day work in the fields as they parents have, their vivid discussions of how they would move to the United States and what they would do after they got rich provided them with a space to hope that they would be able to choose a different life trajectory outside of the fields. The limits of their hope and aspirations were made clear that each of the Soñadores openly shared the uncertainty of their plans or capabilities to truly cross the border to work in the United States. I nodded my head and as they shrugged and looked at each other. Verónica looked at me and said, "Nothing really changed around here." Our conversation quickly transitioned into another topic about their work. It was clear to me that perhaps that is the harsh reality of hope in San Telmo – it is a powerful form of resistance but is often quelled by their lived experiences that was painted with disappointment, suffering and uncertainty.

As I continued my stay in San Telmo, I found the Callejeros have also maintained their somber and doubtful attitudes towards their futures. Each of the boys has continued their involvement with Los Vatos and they have continued to work in the fields to afford new clothes and other desired articles such as a mobile phone and bicycle. While Juan and Carlos were their usual quiet selves, it was evident that Martín in particular immersed himself deeper in gang activity as he told me stories about his recent fights with their rival gang and his frequent visits to the next town to spend time with the older boys. After not seeing Lucas with the boys a few times, I asked them why he wasn't with them. It was clear that something had happened to Lucas as each of them looked at each other and waited for someone to speak up. Finally, Carlos slowly explained that because Lucas had used drugs so much, lost so much weight and even started selling drugs, his mother and him started fighting more than they have before. She eventually finally decided that it would be best for their entire family to move back to Oaxaca where he did not know anyone and they can restart their lives. Martín looked up at me and said, "I'm happy for him. There's nothing here." Martín's response reaffirms the bleak perspective of their life trajectories that the Callejeros internalized through their lived experiences. Despite the sense of belonging and identity the Callejeros found the Vatos Locos, one thing that has not changed is their uncertainty of tomorrow and perception of San Telmo as a place where there is "nothing."

Overtime, I found the Guanajuato family in a slightly different situation than the Soñadores and Callejeros. Araceli gave birth to a son and already began to talk about how she wanted him to have a "different" life. She excitedly explained that she hopes to send him to an early childhood care facility so that he can start his education earlier and go to school. Her sister Leticia, also seemed to be in high spirits as she shared that her husband was able to make enough money for them to purchase a piece of land. While a smile, she explained that they could finally own land and build a home for her family, which was something she never dreamed of doing since she was always migrating from a young age. For the Guanajato family, their expressed excitement appeared to be from their sense of progress. It was evident that Araceli was increasingly hopeful about her own future, as she happily talked about being able to consider educational options for her son. Leticia shared a similar hopeful sentiment as she shared that she hopes to build their home soon. While none of their expressed desires have come transpired, their ability to hope, plan and prepare as they look towards their perceived futures gave them a sense of expectation for what is ahead of them.

While the Callejeros and Soñadores maintained their somber perspectives of their futures, it was interesting to see the ways in which the Guanajuato family contrastingly experienced a shift in their perspectives of their futures because of the changes in their present circumstances. Having a baby and purchasing a piece of land offered the Guanajuato family offered them an opportunity to re-envision their immediate outlooks on what tomorrow can offer them. Interestingly, the more that I conversed with the Guanajuato family about their plans for building the house and sending the baby to school, they continued to use the phrase "echale ganas*"* [give it your best]. Again, there was irony in that while they optimistically expressed their plans, their expectations were revealed by their response "echale ganas". It was in such moments that I realized that while migrant youth might find spaces to hope and re-imagine their futures, the common thread of uncertainty deeply remained. I would often drive home deeply unsettled by the reality that the lives of migrant youth are embedded in larger economic and social structures of power that places serious limits of their agency and resistance. While migrant youth might resist such constraints in their lives, phrases such as "echale ganas", revealed the deeply entrenched uncertainty and doubt of their futures that weigh heavily on their aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories.

## Confronting the Limits of Resistance – Structural Constraints, Agency and Suffering

The purpose of my study was to document the ways in which structural constraints such as labor, exploitation and a restricted labor market in the agroindustry *actually unfold* in the lives of migrant youth. During my fieldwork, migrant youth's narratives of shifting aspirations from their childhood to when they started working in the fields, shed light on the processes through which relations of power and structural constraints were internalized. While I found that migrant youth actively resisted structural constraints in their lives by dropping out of school, pursuing the "American Dream" and forging a new cultural identity in local gangs, the limits of such contestation were evident as migrant youth often ended up working in the fields. I began this study with the desire to unravel a paradox that I kept running into during my time in the community. While migrant families have been able to settle down in the San Quintín Valley due to the availability of jobs in the agroindustry, it was widely apparent that migrant children and youth continued to drop out of school or not attend altogether. Many of the children and youth that I shared friendships with during my childhood, ended up working the in fields alongside their parents despite their expressed childhood aspirations for occupations outside of the fields. As MacLeod (2008) states, "Leveled aspirations are a powerful mechanism by which class inequality is reproduced from one generation to another." The shifting aspirations of migrant youth from their childhood to adolescences as they started working helped shed light on how process of social reproduction unfolded in their lives. Consequently, my study focused on understanding how the labor market in the community affected youth's schooling experiences and consequently their aspirations and perceptions of life trajectories.

In San Telmo, the restricted labor market opportunities had serious implications on the schooling experiences and educational attainment of migrant children and youth. While education is broadly discussed as a critical instrument to eliminate social inequality (Gibbs & Heaton, 2014), migrant youth in San Telmo perceived that schooling was not relevant to their life experiences and immediate needs living in an impoverished farming community. Because many migrant youth worked alongside their parents from a young age, they perceived sitting in a classroom, doing homework and paying for schooling materials and uniforms as taxing burdens. Consequently, migrant youth dropped out of school to help support their families by working in the fields or staying at home to take care of their younger siblings. In the same light, there were migrant youth, such as the Callejeros, who have seen their peers complete their schooling through high school and still end up working in the fields. They have also seen their parents and family members work in the fields for generations under exploitative and laborious conditions. While they were socialized to believe that education is critical to their futures by their parents and the wider society, phrases such as "school isn't for me" revealed the perceived disconnect between their aspirations and opportunities available to them (MacLeod, 2008).

Willis' concept of *cultural production* emphasizes the importance of understanding "how structures become sources of meaning and determinants on behavior in the cultural milieu at its own level" (Willis, 1977, p.171). For the migrant youth, especially the Callejeros, schools acted as sites of contestation as they perceived schooling did not offer any value for their immediate needs. While dropping out of school is a form of resistance amongst migrant youth in San Telmo, there are limits to their agency. Not finishing their schooling and working in the fields, sadly restricted their job prospects to the fields, where their families have worked for generations. It is a reality that higher levels of education are needed in order to access higher paying jobs (Gibbs & Heaton, 2014); in San Telmo, higher levels of education is clearly needed in order to access jobs outside of the fields. Unfortunately for the migrant youth in my study, their low educational attainment limited their accessibility to higher paying jobs and consequently acted as a structural constraint weighing down aspirations and perceptions of their futures.

Another way in which migrant youth resisted structural constraints in their lives was their conception of the "American Dream." While the restricted labor market in San Telmo limited jobs to working in the fields, migrant youth aspired to work in the United States to achieve material aspirations to "get rich and go home." Migrant youth resisted their seemingly determined fates of working for low-wages in exploitative conditions in the fields in San Telmo by pursuing the "American Dream." They often expressed that the low-wages and restricted labor market in San Telmo would never enable them to attain their material aspirations. Consequently, migrant youth, namely the Soñadores, actively made plans to save money to obtain a visa and work in the United States so they can return to San Telmo. Their aspirations to work in the United States illustrate how migrant youth resisted the seeming determined outcomes of working in the fields and living in poverty. They keenly envisioned purchasing a land and building a home, maybe even two for their families and eventually being able to own other material goods such as a car and iPhones. While depleted occupational aspirations shaped their educational experiences and consequently weighed down on perceptions of their life trajectories, material aspirations acted as a means through which migrant youth resisted the larger economic and social structural constraints in their everyday lives.

Sadly, the limits of such resistance are evident as the Soñadores ended up working in the fields a year later with doubtful attitudes about going to the United States. While the Soñadores resisted and contested working in the fields, the bureaucratic and economic challenges of actually saving enough money to obtain their visas and passport weight heavily on the prospect of working in the United States. Despite how desperately the Soñadores wanted to cross the border to work in the United States, their immediate conditions of poverty limited their abilities to save enough money to obtain a visa and passport. It was apparent that working in the fields in San Telmo with low-wages, tiring labor conditions and increasing food and rent costs in the community made it nearly impossible for migrant youth to realistically save any money. For the Soñadores, their depleted aspirations to pursue the "American Dream" resulted in them working in the fields due to their immediate needs. The narratives of the Soñadores clearly illustrate the ways in which processes of social inequality continues to reproduce itself in San Telmo. Migrant farmers who are exploited under laborious working conditions and low-wages are very few options to look for work outside the fields as they struggle to make ends meet in their conditions of poverty.

Another poignant finding of my study was the stark reality that gang and drug activities heavily shaped the lived experiences of migrant youth who often come from broken families. My study particularly endeavored to understand how social networks shape the aspirations of migrant youth. For migrant youth in this study, social networks widely included family members, teachers, peers and gang members. Their interactions and experiences with different social actors undoubtedly shaped their aspirations and consequently perceptions of their life trajectories. For the Callejeros, their initial interactions with teachers made it difficult for them to see the importance of continuing their schooling; especially given the restricted labor market in their community. After dropping out of school, the Callejeros started spending time on the streets where their relationships with peers were strengthened and they grew increasingly connected with other gang members in the Vatos Locos.

Getting in involved with drug and gang activity illustrates the ways in which the Callejeros struggled to resist and contest structural constraints in their lives. They made a resolute decision not to work in the fields everyday and attend school, which was the dichotomous outlook on life that most migrant youth held in the community described in Chapter Four. While the Callejeros were not able to find the acceptance and sense of identity they were looking for in their studies, work and families, they were able to forge new cultural identities at "Callejeros" (Street Roamers) and their involvement with the Vatos Locos. Central to understanding theories of resistance is the emphasis on tensions and conflicts that mediate home, school and workplace (Giroux, 1983). In light of Giroux's (1973) conception of resistance theories, the oppositional behavior in the lives of the Callejeros illustrates the ways in which their actions were informed by counter logic that pointed to a more convincing reality. Migrant youth were able to find a sense of belonging and self-validation through respect and close friendships they found as members in the Vatos Locos. The Callejeros' gang involvement and experiences in the streets shaped their aspirations as consequently perceptions of their life trajectories as they learned to embrace the uncertainty of tomorrow. Phrases such as lo que sera [whatever happens, happens] and rap lyrics helped the Callejeros make sense of their lived experiences, which was filled with disappointments and uncertainty.

Despite such acts of resistance, the limits of their contestation were painfully apparent as the Callejeros were all too often faced with painful experiences of death and violence. For migrant youth such as Martín, his siblings' active involvement with the Vatos Locos resulted in his sister being arrested for selling drugs and his brother passing away as a result of gang violence. Such tragic narratives are not uncommon in San Telmo as countless families have been affected by the death and violence of local drug and gang activity. As Bourgois (1996) addresses the need to for ethnographers to address the blood, sweat, and tears of peoples, suffering real oppressions, I found that the lived experiences of migrant youth could not solely be understood from their work and schooling experiences, but the larger social and political conditions that directly affected their everyday lives. While gang involvement provided the Callejeros with a new cultural identity as they resisted the dichotomous constraints of work and schooling, the limits of their agency was clear as violence, death and pain forced them to confront the harsh reality of the dangers and risks of gang and drug activities.

## Implications

### Human Rights Violations – Right to Education

In 2000, the United Nations passed the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), which put forth that primary school education as a human right, and more recently the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) with goal number four, which guarantees a right to a quality education for all children (United Nations, 2015). Since the 2000s, while Mexico has been able to increase the primary school enrollment rates to 95-99% (UNICEF, 2010), a sharp drop in enrollment rates at the secondary school level still exists as students leave for various reasons (Gibbs & Heaton, 2014). Gibbs and Heaton (2014) describe the ways in which rural residence matters most in the transition into secondary school. This reality was evident in the lives of migrant youth as limited secondary school options, costs of schooling, a restricted labor market discouraged students and their families from continuing their schooling. The narratives of migrant youth describing their labor experiences in the fields and decisions to drop out of school illustrated the low expectations in life they have internalized through their lived experiences. There was a clear relationship between migrant youth's aspirations and perceptions of their life trajectories. As migrant youth worked in the fields, the harsh reality of a restricted labor market and exploitative working conditions weighed heavily on perceptions of their life trajectories and consequently their decisions to drop out of school. As the right to a free education in elementary and fundamental stages is regarded as a human right in the MDG's (United Nations, 2015), it is evident that are countless migrant children in San Telmo who are being denied their basic rights.

Accordingly, it is critical that policymakers and government organizations consider the particular educational needs of migrant children and youth in rural communities. It is necessary to reevaluate the curriculums and teacher training offered in schools that are serving farming families with distinct lived experiences and life circumstances of working in the fields. Curriculums should reflect the particular needs of migrant children and youth, who are often from economically disadvantaged families and rural communities with limited job opportunities and impoverished living conditions. Furthermore, government organizations must also consider the ways in which a lack of access to educational resources, such as scholarships and knowledge concerning legal documentation and requirements, act as serious obstacles to migrant children and youth continuing their education. State and government organizations should make concerted local outreach efforts to disseminate educational information and resources to migrant farming families. While schools and social networks have been the main sources of information for most neighborhood families, there are language barriers and countless migrant families who lack the social networks and experiences with school personnel to access pertinent information to enrolling and maintaining their children in school.

### Labor Exploitation and Worker's Rights

Previous studies on the living and working conditions of migrant farmers in Baja California have denounced the violation of human rights that is rampant in the San Quintín Valley (Kearney, 2000; Nagengast & Kearney, 1990; Wright, 2005). In addition to the right to an education, the MDG's also address the rights of all humans "to work, to have a free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment" (United Nations, 2015, p. 48). Such human rights have been deplorably violated in the lives of migrant farmers in San Telmo. The findings of my study highlight the ways in which processes of social reproduction take place in the lives of migrant families as low-wages, laborious working conditions and unlawful labor practices weight heavily in their lives. Agro-corporations and small ranches continue to hire migrant children and youth despite and pay their farmers a non-livable working wages that make it impossible to families to save enough money to meaningfully improve their living standards. Such injustices contribute to generational poverty amongst migrant farmers as they continue to make up the largest percentage of the poorest populations in Mexico (Tarcena, 2003).

In order to meaningfully improve the lives of migrant children and youth, agro-corporations and ranches must be held accountable to their unfair labor practices. Migrant farming families must be given livable wages, health and social benefits and fair working conditions in order for them to significantly improve their living standards and quality of life. It is evident that the deteriorating health of farmers, deplorable working conditions and low-wages leave migrant farmers and their families with no other options than to live with a day-to-day perspective and consequently, low expectations for their futures and wellbeing. Such consequences contribute to the transmission of social inequality amongst generations of migrant farming families as they continue to have low-levels of education and little social and cultural capital. Lastly, it is critical for agribusinesses to consider ways in which they can provide financial support for the children and youth of migrant families working in their fields. Because many migrant families were uprooted from their communities of origin, they have few family members who can help them take care of their children and consequently leave their young children at home with older siblings. Agribusinesses should consider how they could help migrant families with childcare, early childhood education and other schooling costs that would alleviate the financial burden of migrant families to send their children to school.

## Conclusion

It is my hope moving forward, that my study would not simply be an ethnography for understanding diverse lives but also a tool for social change (Hymes, 2003). My time in the field and writing this dissertation has profoundly transformed my perception of myself as a researcher and as an individual, who is part of larger moral community. I was confronted with the reality that my writing must avoid "totalizing representations" and "partial truths" (Bourgois, 1996) that has all too often watered down the suffering of people.

The moving narratives of migrant youth and their lived experiences shed light on the ways in which social inequality is reproduced generationally amongst migrant farming families. Existing literature makes the disastrous mistake of making the assumption that migrant children *want* or *prefer* to work in the fields than being in the fields. There are also misguided beliefs that it is a cultural practice for migrant farmers to take their children to the fields (Zlolniski, 2010). Agro-corporations and rancheros have long justified hiring of migrant youth and children with such erroneous assumptions. The narratives of migrant youth in this study point to a different reality in which it is quite obvious that their lives are filled with suffering, seeming contradictions and leveled aspirations that shape their lived experiences. The tragic outcomes of migrant youth who end up working in the fields under exploitative conditions, dropping out of school and getting involved in drug violence cannot simply be understand from one aspect of their lives, whether it is family, work or school. All of these spaces and social actors interact to shape the aspirations and perceptions of futures of migrant youth. It is critical to for future policymakers, NGO's and local to the narratives of migrant youth from their own perspectives in order to create meaningful and sustainable changes in their lives and the larger community.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Description of Research Activities During Fieldwork

| Research Activities During Fieldwork | |
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| Month | Activities |
| July | – Moved into the community and settled in. Introduced myself to neighbors whenever opportunities presented themselves.<br>– Began speaking with teachers and school director at Hope Elementary School about teaching English.<br>– Met with several students and their families during registration before the official start of school. |
| August | – Attended school events (registration meetings, school assemblies, etc.), and staff meetings.<br>– Introduced myself to students and families at a school-wide assembly. Explained the purpose of my study and the option for them to participate. |
| September | – Started to reach out to individual students about interviewing them about their aspirations and experiences working.<br>– Conducted semi-structured interviews in the afternoon with students based on their willingness to participate.<br>– Began spending more time with migrant youth who were not in school or working in the fields. Played soccer with them almost everyday after school until sundown.<br>– Attended community meeting with "Alianza De Organizaciones por la Justicia Social." |
| October | – Started shifting research focus to three groups of migrant youth I spent the most time with: Guanajuato Family, Los Soñadores, and the Callejeros.<br>– Started conducting and recording naturalistic group interviews with migrant youth as opportunities presented themselves.<br>– Began interviews with teachers and staff at Hope Elementary School. Continued interviewing students and their families. |
| November | – Continued focusing on the experiences of Guanajuato Family, Los Soñadores, and the Callejeros.<br>– Continued interviewing students and their families at Hope Elementary School.<br>– Began coding fieldnotes to look for interpretation, meaning and themes emerging from my fieldnotes, analytic memos and recorded interviews. |
| December | – Conducted member checks with study participants including school families, school staff and migrant youth. Shared my findings and emerging themes with them to discuss their thoughts and interpretations.<br>– Presented my preliminary findings to school staff to update them on my research activities and progress during my time in the community. |

## Appendix B: Structured Activities for English Class with Students

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| Structured Activities for English Class with Students<br>*Note: Activities will most likely take place at the beginning of the class as “warm up” activity or at the end of class as a reflection activity. | |
| Drawing activities | Personal:<br>• Portrait of yourself<br>• Portrait of your family<br>• Map of the community<br>• Drawing of what you hope to be when you grow up<br>• Happiest memory<br>• Challenge that you overcame<br>• Person that has influenced you<br>• Day in your home<br>• Favorite thing to do |
| | School-related:<br>• Typical day in school<br>• Picture of friends at school<br>• Picture of school/classroom<br>• Favorite memory of school<br>• What you learned in school today<br>• Favorite teacher |
| | Work-related:<br>• Typical day at work<br>• Favorite part of work<br>• Least favorite part of work<br>• Hardest task you have done at work<br>• People from your work |
| Daily Journal topics (drawing and writing) | Personal:<br>• If you had three wishes, what would they be?<br>• What are you most grateful for in your life?<br>• Describe what you want to be when you grow up and why.<br>• If there was an invention you can create, what would it be and why?<br>• What is one thing that you should change in this community? |
| | School-related:<br>• What does “education” mean to you?<br>• What is one of your favorite memories in school? What happened? Who was involved?<br>• If you were a teacher for one day, what would you teach? What would you do with the students?<br>• If there was one thing you can change about this school, |

| | |
|---|---|
| | what would it be?<br>• What do you hope to accomplish after you finish school?<br>• Describe three things you like *most* about school.<br>• Describe three things you like *least* about school. |
| | Work-related:<br>• What was challenging for you when you first started working?<br>• Describe your first day at work. What were you feeling?<br>• What is a typical day at work like? |

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