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Leaving Michoacán

My Family's Migration Ahead of the Mexican Revolution

Abstract: The author reflects on her great-grandmother's migration from a hacienda in Michoacán, Mexico, in the early 1900s to an ethnically segregated Mexican American community within the city of Colton, California, in relation to broader sociopolitical events of the time. Drawing from US census data, Mexican church records, newspaper archives, family interviews, photographs, writings, and correspondences with historians in Mexico and France, she considers the economic and social forces that drove her family to exchange one form of labor extraction in Mexico (the hacienda) for another in the US (the cement plant and citrus industry). The author reflects on how her great-great-grandfather, a hacienda teacher, attempted to shield his family from the violence leading up to the Mexican Revolution by bringing them north. Like millions of other Mexicans, his family, ultimately, was caught up in its devastating aftermath. The essay ends by briefly considering the role that her great-grandmother's war-related trauma played in shaping the educational attainment of subsequent generations of women in the family. Her story highlights how excelling educationally is one way that children of immigrants attempt to negotiate the sacrifices of their parents in segregated spaces.

Introduction

It was at a family gathering at my parent's house in 2017 that my uncle Mario, my mother's brother, arrived bringing gifts. Two decades into my career as a scientist and professor, I learned of my great-grandmother's journey from Mexico, of the death of her first-born child, of her father's corrido about migrants and their plights.



Figure 1. Trinidad Hernández (left), great-grandmother of the author, and her daughter Dolores Valero (right) ca. 1910. Photo courtesy of the author.

In one hand, my uncle held a bottle of tequila; in another, a thumb drive of scanned photographs that belonged to my grandmother. While my uncle wandered off to pour shots for the men on the patio, I gathered the women, keepers of our family's oral history, around a computer. A photograph flashed on screen of a brown-eyed, brown-skinned woman looking warily at the camera (fig. 1). She wore an old-fashioned, black, high-collared blouse with a skirt.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"She is your great-grandmother, Trinidad Hernández, who came to the United States from Mexico," I was told at that party, although I can't now remember who said this. Trinidad held the hand of a little girl who stood on a wooden chair, the hair on top of her head held tightly back with a white ribbon. The girl had a furrowed brow and quivering lips.

The worried little girl was her daughter, Dolores.

My mother told me that Dolores Valero (1907–14) was buried in the Agua Mansa cemetery, near Colton, California, where our family lived at the time.¹ Her death opened a crack in my great-grandmother's life through which my grandmother slid into existence. A year and a half after Dolores

died, my great-grandmother, twice a widow already, met and married my great-grandfather, Manuel Lozano (1885–1956). Would I be alive if this little girl and her father hadn't died? I wondered. Cathy Park Hong's (2020: 200–201) words in *Minor Feelings* reevoked that feeling: "At what cost do I have this life? At what toll have I been granted this safety? . . . I didn't live through any of it, but I'm still a descendant of those who had no time, nor permission, to reflect."

Excavating the story of my great-grandmother's migration to the United States helps me to reflect on the meaning of my own journey as a woman scientist. In the television programs of my youth, Jacques Cousteau embodied a masculine ideal of the explorer-scientist that seemed impossibly out of reach for a young girl curious about the natural world. Like Trinidad, I had to learn to navigate unknown and sometimes hostile terrain.

Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s in land-locked Southern California, the only stories I learned in school about California's history involved European men: Spanish friars building missions and "converting" the Indians, pioneers driving wagons over deserts and the Sierra Nevada mountains, or miners lusting after gold. The Mexican and Indigenous Mexican women who crossed the border, like Trinidad, were invisible, the threats they endured of rape or violence or starvation unacknowledged.

Zurumuato, Michoacán

Seventeen years before emigrating to Colton, a town in a valley southwest of the San Bernardino mountains, Trinidad was born in 1888 (d. 1964) on a hacienda, according to family, north of the town of Puruándiro, in a district of the same name in the Mexican state of Michoacán.² That state is rich in butterflies, harboring more than two hundred and fifty species of skippers (Hesperiidae) alone (Salinas-Gutiérrez et al. 2015: 789). By contrast, in the entire state of California, where I run a butterfly research lab, only five to six dozen species of skippers fly.³ Established by the Spanish as large estates during Mexico's colonial period for farming or ranching, haciendas had been transformed by the time of Trinidad's birth. The system of tenancy farming that had emerged in the postcolonial period whereby laborers tilled and planted in lieu of rent was showing signs of instability (Tutino 1998: 405, 413–14).

My great-grandmother Trinidad was the youngest girl in a family with two brothers and a sister. She lived in a hacienda named Zurumuato, a Spanish word meaning "straw hill," derived from two words, *sirumu* and

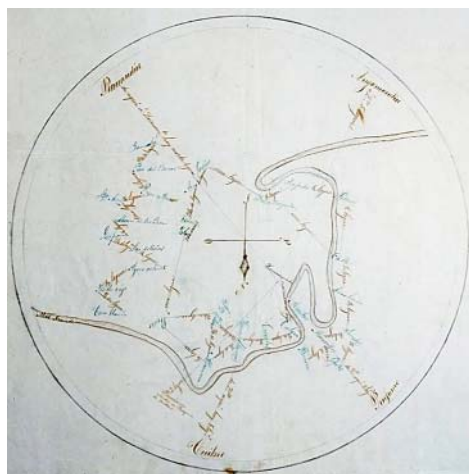


Figure 2. Nineteenth-century map of the *Municipalidad de Zorumbato*. Mapoteca del Archivo Histórico Casa de Morelos. Colección de Mapas Antiguos. Photo courtesy of Sergio Monjarraz.

uata, in the language of the Indigenous Purépecha people on whose ancestral land the hacienda stood.⁴ Zorumbato was situated along the border of the states of Michoacán and Guanajuato on a floodplain covered by fields of wheat and maize, adjacent to the Río Lerma, in the fertile basin known as El Bajío that lay north and west of Mexico City (fig. 2). El Bajío was the region where Mexico's War of Independence (1810–21) from Spain had begun.

Separated by thickets of small, squat, thorny trees, Zorumbato's fields were plowed by men in wide-brimmed straw hats driving oxen or mules (Çuburu-Ithorotz 2009a: 183–86). The parish church records bore witness to some of the hardships my ancestors endured there. In the Zorumbato cemetery five years after my great-grandmother was born, her parents, Luis Hernández (d. 1937) and Petra Mosqueda (d. 1926), buried a three-month-old boy, felled by whooping cough, then a highly contagious bacterial disease.⁵

Studying my great-grandmother's features in photographs, I wondered if she was descended from the Purépecha of Michoacán or from one of the other Indigenous groups of the region. Maybe the Otomi, the Mazahua, or the Nahuas. Perhaps among her ancestors too there were enslaved Black people, who in the seventeenth century worked alongside these Indians in the mines of nearby Guanajuato (Wolf 1973: 76). (In 2024, my mother's DNA test confirmed her Nahua and Otomi ancestry.⁶)

A single photograph suggests that she grew up in an adobe house made of straw and mud bricks surrounded by nasturtiums. With the roof, door, and simple furniture made of wood, the house resembled many that dotted

the landscape. Her father, Luis Hernández, was, according to family, the hacienda teacher; but teaching in Zurumuato meant he taught the children of the hacienda administrator or other trusted employees of the hacienda owner, as the hacienda owner had no children.⁷ Like other exploited workers, his labor as a teacher, and as an occasional scribe, did not pay enough to spare him from the field.⁸ Like other children of the hacienda, Trinidad would have followed her father and mother in working the land and helping with the harvest.⁹ Rabbits, opossums, and coyotes shared this bountiful landscape with my family. Doves and magpies flew overhead. Lower down, within her reach, fluttered butterflies.

Years later, after studying the neurobiology of butterfly migration, and learning about my great-grandmother's life on the hacienda, I imagined her as a young girl chasing butterflies. She would have seen seasonally abundant butterflies flitting across the wheat and corn fields, between the bean and chili plants, in the cabbage patch of the hacienda garden. Looking up one day from the wood fire where her mother prepared corn tortillas, pulling them off the hot comal with her bare fingers, there might have been a blur of the orange and black wings of monarch butterflies. She might have noticed that the arrival of monarchs in the fall signaled the time of harvest. She would not have known that about one hundred and ten miles southeast at a mountainous site, more than fifty-five thousand feet higher than the hacienda, millions of migratory monarch butterflies spend their winters huddled in oyamel fir trees (Urquhart 1976: 162). In the spring, after mating, the female butterflies fly north to lay eggs, while a majority of males remain behind to die.

A Frenchman of Basque origin, Carlos Markassuza, owned Zurumuato (Çuburu-Ithorotz 2008b: 54). After leaving France to avoid army service and establishing himself in mines, he married into a landed Spanish-descended family, receiving Hacienda Zurumuato as part of the dowry. After Markassuza took over the property, eleven years before Trinidad's birth, the treatment of the local tenants got worse (Robledo 2012).

Over time, Carlos grew exceedingly wealthy, eventually owning six haciendas in the states of Guanajuato and Michoacán and more than thirty houses in Mexico City and in the city of Guanajuato. He also owned a gold mine and shares worth more than one million pesos (Çuburu-Ithorotz 2009b). When the estate administrator for the Zurumuato hacienda, Charles Markassuza (Carlos's nephew), saw the seventeen servants who worked in just one of his uncle's Mexico City houses he expressed shock.

Later, in a letter home, he wrote, “Godfather, if he made money, it was because he liked to receive a lot and give nothing and that has not changed” (Çuburu-Ithorotz 2009a: 192; 2009b).

While Trinidad was growing up on Carlos’s Zurumuato hacienda, conditions were changing in rural Mexico in a way that deeply affected my family’s life. Tenant farming gave way to commercial production, and newly built railroads transported farm products and destitute farmers north to the United States (Tutino 1998: 413). Meanwhile, US investors greatly expanded the Mexican railroad system.¹⁰ During the 1880s, the Mexican dictator, Porfirio Díaz, gave subsidies paid for by Mexican taxpayers—the lower classes (the rich were frequently exempt)—to United States and European businessmen who had backed his armed ascent to power. These investors grabbed land and built railroads throughout Mexico, accelerating the mass movement of agricultural goods and laborers to the insatiable US and European markets (Gutierrez De Lara 1914: 299–304).¹¹

However long and tirelessly Trinidad’s family worked in the hacienda, like most landless people, the rents and costs they paid kept them mired in poverty (Tutino 1998: 405).¹² Each Sunday after Mass, the hacienda manager took hours to call the laborers forward, hats in hand, to collect their wages. Many hacienda owners, including Carlos Markassuza, printed their own paper money, claiming it was too burdensome to keep enough small-note pesos on hand to pay workers their wages. This system permitted Markassuza to issue vouchers to workers in denominations of “half a job,”¹³ an arbitrary value to be decided by his overseers (fig. 3).

His workers would then have little choice but to shop at his hacienda store with these notes (“exclusivo para peones”).¹⁴ These stores were known as *las tiendas de raya*, referring to the fact that most adults were illiterate, only able to sign their name with a line. The store’s elevated prices ensured their wages returned to Carlos Markassuza, the owner of Hacienda Zurumuato, where they lived and worked (Çuburu-Ithorotz 2008a: 107–8).

In 1896, the parish priest wrote in a letter to his superiors, “The poor suffer a little from usury, and a lot from the injustice of masters and landowners who do not pay them fairly in work.”¹⁵ Tenant farmers were evicted from their rented land if they failed to meet the quotas of the hacienda administrator. Even in death, their children were forced to take on their parents’ debts. I imagine a similar impossible situation might have driven Trinidad’s father, Luis Hernández, to emigrate to Colton, California, in 1898. Perhaps it was some macro-centripetal force of US imperialism during and



Figure 3. Paper money used to pay Zurumutato workers, ca. 1911. Hacienda Zurumutato was one of three haciendas controlled by the *Compañía Agrícola Franco-Mexicana*, owned by Carlos Markassuza. Photo courtesy of US Mexican Numismatic Association.

after the US–Spanish War (April 21–December 10, 1898), which pulled many people, plants, and processes to the Pacific. In any case, my great-great-grandfather's decision was not unusual. To support their families, many men from Michoacán became migrant farm workers in California (González 1994: 54; Serrano 1998: 16, 35–36). There were so many of these migrants from Puruándiro, Michoacán—considered the best Mexican braceros of the early twentieth century—they had a name, Zurumutos (Serrano 2015: 37).¹⁶ In Colton, even the Anglos knew how bad conditions were in Mexico for poor arriving immigrants. In 1896, the *Colton Daily Courier* simultaneously sympathized with and pathologized how “there are really no wages in Mexico. All working people take what they can get—that is, what the employer chooses to pay. Wageworkers make so little that there is no incentive to thrift, no stimulation of energy. The classes are the rich and the poor. There is no middle class.”¹⁷

Or my great-great-grandfather might have left because he experienced first-hand that the hacienda was becoming more dangerous. Cruelty was everywhere, and increasingly so. Owners forced laborers to work as long as fourteen-hour days, so workers ran away. Other workers, pressed into service as armed henchmen, brought them back to the hacienda. Against this

unfair system a resistance developed among the campesinos (Romero 2017). In 1896, there were reports that “evildoers” or robbers from Godino, one of Zurumuato’s small pueblos of about 240 people, had targeted the hacienda administrators and women living on the estate (Serrano 1990: 19; Robledo 2012). While Luis might have preferred to stay in Mexico to teach if it had afforded him a reasonable livelihood, he might have perceived through his reading of newspapers that the US could provide his family, his wife and daughters, a refuge from the impending violence. Like the migratory monarch butterflies of Michoacán, he may have conceived of his own human and family migration as a strategy for escape.

Peering through a microscope in 2008, I observed with awe a glowing string of blue oblong pearls, stretched out inside the light-sensing cells of a monarch butterfly eye. I was at the time trying to understand how migratory monarch butterflies use visual cues from the sky to navigate (Sauman et al. 2005: 457). And also, to understand what genetic factors, if any, separate monarch butterflies that migrate from those that do not. Only later did I realize these anomalous pearls were the blue-stained nuclei of parasites, which had infected my butterfly’s eyes. With a parasite gene as a marker, the deep, fingerlike protrusions of infection in the butterfly’s eyes and brain shocked me. The ability of the butterfly to still live while carrying this body-burden was astounding. Scientists speculate that monarch butterflies migrate, among other reasons, to escape from locally abundant parasites (“migratory escape”), which attach themselves to their wings, burrow into their bodies, and hijack their energy. Resident monarchs have higher parasite loads than those that migrate, and in that sense are more burdened by ill-health and disease (Altizer, Bartel, and Han 2011: 300). Had my family’s decision to leave Mexico been an adaptive response to unbearable conditions? Had the ruling class’s relentless extraction of mineral, organismal, and spiritual resources of the land and its people created a crisis—and the ecological conditions for migration? This question, partly drawn from my work as a scientist studying the biological basis of migration in butterflies, has motivated my investigations of my family’s life on the hacienda.

Colton, California

In search of safety and a viable life, and in an act of resistance against the institution of the hacienda with its tendencies toward parasitism of its workers, my great-great-grandfather Luis eventually rode north on a train, connecting up with the Southern Pacific railway to California.¹⁸ He most

likely put his feet on the ground again in Colton at the railyard junction where the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific railroads meet.

Oranges were a booming business in Southern California. Heavy frosts in Florida in 1894–95 had killed not only most of that state’s orange crop but the trees as well, causing an orange shortage in the United States. Orange dealers increased their imports from Mexico, which had a different season than California or Florida, and built new facilities to handle the Mexican oranges.¹⁹

Stepping off the boxcar, perhaps one hauling citrus, Luis might have seen other Mexicans from Michoacán unloading the crates, to be repacked and shipped around the United States. Taking in the majestic San Bernardino mountains in the background and the acres of orchards and farms in the valley, my great-great-grandfather must have decided to stay in Colton, home to Mexicans since the time of Spanish rule.²⁰

Luis settled in the Mexican part of Colton less than a mile from the Slover Mountain cement plant and three miles from the Agua Mansa cemetery.²¹ Due to a flood, the cemetery was all that was left of the town of Agua Mansa that had been established by New Mexican *genízaros*, of mixed Pueblo Indian and Spanish ancestry, at the behest of Spanish Californios, in 1845 along the Santa Ana River (Vickery 1977: 29–32).²² By settling in Colton, he moved himself—and later his sons, Francisco (d. 1970) and Raymundo (d. 1957)—from one system of labor extraction (the hacienda) to another (the citrus industry and cement plant). As Carey McWilliams (2016: 171) notes in *North from Mexico*, most jobs available to Mexicans were “undesirable by location (such as section-hand jobs on the desert section of the rail lines or unskilled labor in desert mines and cement plants)” or were dead-end, seasonal, or casual types of employment. The deck was stacked against immigrant workers in California.

While Luis’s son Raymundo worked in the cement plant, it is unclear what odd jobs Luis did for work when he arrived in California; perhaps in exchange for a small fee he wrote letters back to Mexico in his careful looping cursive script on behalf of illiterate comigrants pining for home. Eager to learn more about Luis once my mother’s primas told me that he was a poet and writer, I queried them until one day in 2021 a thin Manila envelope arrived in my mailbox. From the few existing sheets of his writing handed down through my family, I was dumbfounded to read Luis’s written preoccupations with the experience of Mexican immigrants.

A few years before he died, around 1932, Luis wrote a corrido, a narrative ballad (partly excerpted here), in Spanish titled “Despedida” (translated as

“Leave Taking” by my mother) about a shameful period in US history between 1929 and 1939 in which 350,000 to half a million Mexicans, and Mexican American US citizens, were forcibly repatriated and deported to Mexico (Hoffman 1974: 126; Balderrama and Rodriguez 2006: 151; Gratton and Merchant 2013: 945).²³

His corrido seemed to be a gift, a kind of transgenerational message for our family (Briscoe 2025). It was important to him that we knew—that I knew—of their desperation in leaving Mexico:

He wrote,

La suma necesidad
Nos hizo venir aquí
No ha sido por ambición
Solo por casualidad

The utmost necessity
Made us come here
It was not by ambition
Just by chance

Most of these desperate people’s stories remain untold. In 2019, asked to speak at a San Bernardino County museum fundraiser, I previewed an exhibit of the California citrus industry that all but erased the labor contributions of thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans from the exhibit’s narrative²⁴—and the lived experience of two generations of my family. Stumbling on stage, shocked by this omission, I began improvising my speech while dealing with a strange reverberating delay in the sound system that made me feel stoned, “As the grand-daughter of Mexican immigrant orange pickers who grew up in the San Bernardino valley . . .” A local marijuana dispensary owner bounded up to me afterward, beaming, wanting to shake my hand, delighted that I had mentioned the contributions of Mexican farm workers to the region’s wealth.

Nearly one hundred years later I, too, pondered the conditions that drove my family to come to the US while struggling to put my own professional attainment—as one of a handful of public school-educated scientists of Mexican descent—into context. People of Mexican origin are the largest ethnic minority group in the US (Noe-Bustamante, Flores, and Shah 2019). Across all ranks nationally, only 2 to 5 percent of science, mathematics, and engineering faculty are Latinos, while in California more than 55 percent of K–12 students are Hispanic/Latino (Jimenez et al.



Figure 4. Trinidad (left) and Magdalena Hernández (right) in Mexico. Photo courtesy of the author.

2019: supplemental table 1; Briscoe 2021: 119; Briscoe 2022: 331). How I had arrived in this place I now occupy as a scientist and as a writer I suspected lay partly in my family's decision to leave Mexico, for reasons that I will never know. As Cristina García (1993: 138) writes in *Dreaming in Cuban*, "There is only imagination where our history should be."

Whatever his motive, working in California provided Luis with enough money to send his wife and his daughters Trinidad and Magdalena to buy fabric in Pénjamo—a town near Hacienda Zurumutato where their extended family lived. His daughters knew how to design a pattern and cut fabric, and they could sew themselves the dresses of white eyelet, cotton, and lace that would make them presentable to potential suitors. He must have also sent them enough money to purchase the fancy hats they wore with wide dark ribbons and silk flowers for the portraits they sat for when they came of marriageable age. Luis's hard-earned income may have also shaped Trinidad's and her sister Magdalena's ideas about their own prospects in life. Perhaps Trinidad could marry a man who could afford to give her beautiful clothes and hats. She was, after all, a woman who enjoyed dressing up and being fashionable (fig. 4).

At the age of fifteen, Trinidad could crochet and embroider, could do her sums, and could read and write.²⁵ With her father and brothers away in the north, and with the hacienda increasingly under attack by exploited laborers, marriage was the obvious answer. Trinidad must have sought protection, stability, and economic mobility when she married—triumphantly, according to family—a red-headed military officer, who supplied her with a lady in waiting for her wedding. Mexican taxpayers heavily subsidized the salaries and pensions of military officers, so marrying an army officer would have been a step up.

Whatever her hopes were for her marriage, a series of tragedies befell Trinidad in short order. In 1905, her husband put her on a train to the United States to protect her from increasing violence in the region. He told her he would soon join her. Instead, he was killed and we still don't know how.

Trinidad arrived in south Colton a teenage widow, after a journey of more than 1,700 miles, like a female monarch butterfly flying north, leaving her dead mate behind. According to my mother, many decades later, Trinidad woke up one afternoon, ran into the alley pleading, “No lo mates! No lo mates! Por favor!” begging ghostly men not to kill her husband. Having once visited the monarch overwintering site in the mountains of Michoacán, with millions of butterflies huddling together on tree branches and on the ground, the two images entwined in my mind—that of my great-grandmother and fertile monarch butterflies on the wing—leaving me to wonder if female butterflies register all that male death, carrying that body memory with them, passing it down to their offspring.

Two years after Trinidad's traumatic arrival in Colton, she married Alejandro Valero, another Mexican immigrant, and soon gave birth to her beloved Dolores.²⁶ Tragically, her second husband also died at the start of the Mexican Revolution, less than a year later, when the train he was riding to visit family exploded. After the death of two husbands, my great-grandmother did not return to Mexico. She and Dolores moved in with her parents and brother living in south Colton. The photograph of Trinidad and Dolores wearing black clothing (fig. 1) was taken some time after this. As if my great-grandmother had not suffered enough, Dolores died of scarlet fever, aged seven, at a time when no one could cure it. Trinidad fell into a deep depression. She would tell my mother years later that she had wanted to throw herself into the dirt hole, to be buried with Dolores in the Agua Mansa cemetery. After Trinidad had married for a third time, and had given birth to my grandmother, Consuelo Lozano



Figure 5. Dolores Valero's image (right) inserted posthumously into a portrait of her younger half-siblings, Consuelo (1916–97) (left), Romulo (1918–2011) (second from left), and Adrian Lozano (1920–2007) (second from right). Photo courtesy of Marian Sosa.

(1917–97), she had a photographer insert Dolores's spectral image in the background of a portrait of her new family (fig. 5). Even in death, Dolores was always with her mother.

Conclusion

As I thought about the violence and untimely death surrounding Trinidad's migration—a level of suffering I find hard to imagine—I wondered about its impact on her daughter (my grandmother) and granddaughter (my mother), living in Colton, California. The town they settled in had segregated schools and swimming pools: a Mexican pool in south Colton and a pool for whites in north Colton (Griswold del Castillo 2008: 87–88; Duncan 2018; *Press-Enterprise* 2015).²⁷ My great-grandmother had journeyed across a continent to survive, to pursue life, to safely have a family, only to be met with exclusion and rejection in a California sundown town (Ruiz 2008: 68).

But in the lives of my grandmother and mother the family fortunes began to improve, and represent, in their own way, my family's strength, determination, and resilience. Luis lived out his days in Colton writing speeches and a corrido. He died in 1937, the same year his granddaughter,

my grandmother, Consuelo Lozano, attained distinction, as the only Spanish-surnamed woman to graduate in a class of 110 students at Colton High School.²⁸ In 1965, my mother was also the first in my family to go to university and was one of only three Spanish-surnamed undergraduates—and the only woman—out of seventy-six from San Bernardino County, the largest county in the United States, to graduate from the University of California, Riverside.²⁹ Both Consuelo and my mother became bilingual teachers in Colton and San Bernardino (Briscoe 2021: 121). My family of Mexican American teachers role-modeled educational success for me (Briscoe 2023: 335), giving me the courage to study science at a time when Latina scientists were, and to a large degree, still are, invisible.

Was my grandmother Consuelo driven to succeed partly to console her mother for the loss of Dolores, or to make her grandfather Luis, the hacienda teacher, proud, I wondered? In what sociologists call the immigrant bargain, immigrant parents, motivated to leave their home country to improve their children's lives, are paid back by their children who perform well in school (Louie 2012: 6; Gaytan 2021: 24). Was my grandmother better equipped to graduate high school when nearly all other Mexican teenagers in her school dropped out due to poverty, in part because her grandfather was a writer and a poet? Unquestionably. I wish I could go back in time and ask her what her relationship was like with her mother and grandfather; what her struggles were growing up in a town where Mexicans were not supposed to venture north of the railroad tracks at night.

As a child, I did not know my great-grandmother's hidden history, or that my great-great-grandfather was a hacienda teacher. I wish I had. It would have helped me to know that history as I navigated my way through high school and university in a country that is profoundly anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican, and anti-Indigenous. As I was growing up, my grandmother often seemed a bit tired, a bit sad, and a bit burdened by diabetes, that scourge of poverty. I now have a better idea why, of what trauma her mother suffered coming to the US from Mexico, in her attempt to escape from the displacement and the violence of the Mexican Revolution. Yet my grandmother is also the person with whom I associate some of my earliest memories of butterflies, symbols of transformation, transcendence, and the natural right to migrate. I instinctively followed her around her yard in the afternoons of my childhood as she hunted for tiny caterpillars that drilled holes into her prized flower blossoms, fragmenting them into strips of pink.

Visiting Agua Mansa one bright, windy morning not long ago, I looked for the grave of the almost forgotten little girl Dolores, my grandmother's

half-sister, whose fate is linked to my own existence. But her marker, like so many others in the badly vandalized cemetery, has disappeared, as ephemeral as the migratory monarch butterflies of Mexico.

“At what cost do I have this life?” (Hong 2020: 200–201). Trinidad could have never imagined that her great-granddaughter would one day become a scientist who would study how monarch butterflies navigate long distances using the sun, butterflies now threatened by pesticides, illegal logging, and climate change: and beneath all, the same insatiable greed of humans that drove my great-grandmother, her father, and countless other migrants, north.

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Notes

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- 1 “Dolores Valero, 1907–1914,” Agua Mansa Cemetery, Colton, San Bernardino County, California, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/42330881/dolores-valero>.
- 2 Trinidad Hernández’s US Social Security record lists “Purvandido M [sic], Mexico” as place of birth and her birth date as November 17, 1889, while her grave-stone gives 1888 as her birth year, the latter of which is consistent with the 1930 and the 1940 US Census. Puruándiro is a district and a town in Michoacán, Mexico. Puruándiro the town is located twenty-four miles from Hacienda Zurumuato, now known as Pastor Ortiz. U.S. Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936–2007, <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/14117044:60901>; <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/194978190/trinidad-lozano>.
- 3 Ken Davenport in an email to the author, February 3, 2021.
- 4 “Pastor Ortiz,” <https://amp.es.what-this.com/3666647/1/pastor-ortiz.html>.

- 5 A three-month-old infant, José Eleuterio Hernández, son of Luis Hernández and Petra Mosqueda, born in Hacienda Zurumutato, died of whooping cough May 16, 1893, and was buried in the Zurumutato cemetery. Puruándiro, Michoacán, Mexico, Civil Registration Deaths, 1859–1935, https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/60465/images/004872229_00261.
- 6 My family's 23andMe results (accessed January 4, 2024) indicate that in addition to Anglo-Irish ancestry on my father's side, I have Spanish and Indigenous ancestry on both sides of my family. My father's maternally inherited mitochondrial mtDNA B2 haplogroup suggests I am descended from ancestral Pueblo Indians of the Southwestern US (Kennett et al. 2017: 3), which if verified with a broader sampling of Native American mtDNA sequences, would be consistent with family property documents dating to the 1800s situating my family in Arroyo Hondo, New Mexico, about twelve miles from Taos Pueblo. My father's nuclear genome also contains traces of Indigenous ancestry from western Mexico (Sonoran Desert region). On my mother's side, my Indigenous ancestry derives genetically from three different regions in Mexico (the plains of northeastern Mexico, the Upper Santiago River Basin, and Central Mexico) and four Indigenous groups, the Nahuas and the Otomi (Central Mexico) and unnamed Indigenous peoples from northeast Mexico and the Upper Santiago River Basin. Purépecha ancestry is ruled out for my parents and me on 23andMe's latest chip and the Mazahua are not represented at all. According to 23andMe's coalescent calculations of January 4, 2025, my mother's most recent ancestor with 100 percent Indigenous ancestry is estimated to have lived between 1820 and 1880, and her most recent ancestor with 100 percent African ancestry is estimated to have lived between 1760 and 1850. The reality is likely more complex with traces of Indigenous DNA in both my parent's genomes from Indigenous people who inhabited different parts of the southwestern US and western and northeastern Mexico at different times. As an evolutionary biologist, I view DNA analysis as one tool to investigate the history of life on earth. I also acknowledge the rights of Native American nations on both sides of the US-Mexico border to self-governance and sovereignty, including the right to decide who is or is not a member of their communities. With no lived experience with any of the Indigenous groups from which I am descended—as a result of colonialization, displacement, and genocide—I identify as Latina but do not identify as Native American.
- 7 José Napoleón Vargas Robledo, email message to the author, November 7, 2021.
- 8 The parish priest, José Villar, wrote in an 1896 report to his superiors that there were two church-owned schools in the diocese that included Zurumutato, which taught both sexes, and which were supported by a farm. Casa de Morelos Archive, Parish Statistics, Puruándiro, 1896, XII, 16; and interrogation form 1896, XII, 19, Álvaro Ochoa Serrano, email message to the author, November 10, 2021.
- 9 Çuburu-Ithorotz (2009b) writes, "In the photos of the Zurumutato estate sent by Carlos Felix Markassuza, we see hundreds of pawns, including children, working in the fields."

- 10 “Points of Mexican Business,” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, November 12, 1898.
- 11 “A Mexican Paradise,” *Tennessean*, August 11, 1881.
- 12 “He lamented how poverty forced most tenants to sell crops at low prices and thus remain poor” (Tutino 1998: 405).
- 13 “Paper Money of Mexico,” US Mexican Numismatic Association, <https://papermoneyofmexico.com/history/michoacan/private-issues/haciendas-2>.
- 14 Hacienda de San Simón, Ixtlán de los Hervores in northern Michoacán had tokens which, on one side, the phrase “Exclusivo para Peones” was printed and on the other side, fifty or one hundred centavos. See note 13.
- 15 “Los pobres sufren algo por la usura, y mucho por la injusticia de los amos y hacendados que no les retribuyen con equidad en trabajo,” wrote José Villar in 1896. Álvaro Ochoa Serrano, email message to the author, November 10, 2021.
- 16 Álvaro Ochoa Serrano, email message to the author, October 21, 2020.
- 17 “Wages in Mexico,” *Colton Daily Courier*, May 16, 1896.
- 18 *Colton Daily Courier*, September 11, 1896.
- 19 “Export Orange Trade,” *Colton Daily Courier*, November 21, 1896.
- 20 Kelly Lytle Hernández (2010): Mexican border crossers were not considered illegal in the US until 1917 during World War I.
- 21 Luis Hernández lived at 370 M St. in south Colton, the Mexican part of town. He was coded as racially ambiguous by US census takers: as “other” in 1910 and as “Indian (Native American)” in 1930. 1910 US Federal Census, https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/7884/images/31111_4327296-01087; 1930 US Federal Census, https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/6224/images/4531843_01025.
- 22 According to Joyce Carter Vickery (1977: 18), “many of the settlers classified as *genízaros* were Pueblo Indians who had become Hispanized and were no longer welcome in their original pueblos.”
- 23 Gratton and Merchant (2013) estimate 350,000 people were deported; Balderama and Rodríguez estimate that one million were deported. Hoffmann (1974) estimates more than four hundred thousand were repatriated.
- 24 The only caption in the *Pulp Culture: A Juicy Tale in the Inland Empire* exhibit at the San Bernardino County Museum, which described the labor force working in the Inland Empire citrus industry, did not name Mexicans or Mexican Americans as workers. From a placard 1, photographed May 18, 2019: “Local indigenous peoples, resident people of color, and Asian and Latino immigrants were paid considerably less than white laborers and were forced to live in segregated and underdeveloped areas.”
- 25 Trinidad is recorded as being able to read and write in Spanish and to speak English in the 1920 US Census onward, and, in the 1940 US Census, as having a sixth-grade education. 1920 U.S. Federal Census, <https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/6061/images/4293834:00860>; 1940 U.S. Federal Census, <https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/2442/images/m-t0627-00288-00686>. Also according to Loretta O. Mejía Briscoe (b. 1942), granddaughter of Trinidad Hernández, in an interview with the author, November 3, 2021.

- 26 "Vital Record. Valero—Hernandez," *San Bernardino Daily Sun*, June 7, 1907.
- 27 Dr. Thomas 'Tom' Rivera (1939–2022), my mother's paternal cousin, founded the South Colton Oral History Project at Cal State San Bernardino, along with Frank Acosta and Henry J. Vásquez. Interviewee Rudy Contreras shared with Dr. Rivera that a community member, Juan Caldera, built a pool in south Colton in 1929 because Mexicans were prohibited from using the city's community swimming pool known as the Plunge. <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/colton-history/>.
- 28 "Program Will Feature Four Senior Talks: Details of Colton High School Commencement Announcement," *San Bernardino Daily Sun*, June 11, 1937, 17.
- 29 "76 S. B. County Students to Receive UCR Degrees," *San Bernardino Daily Sun*, June 4, 1965, B3.

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