

SINGLE MOTHERHOOD

Lily was raised by a single mother who utilized sex work as a way to create economic security for her and her daughter. Lily also has been a single mother off and on for her early adulthood herself. The cultural context of single motherhood is a crucial element of her relationship to the world and the overlapping cultural relationships that she exists within. Mexico has been a strongly Catholic country after its colonization by the Spanish. Catholicism places a strong emphasis on the virginal, motherly figure of womanhood. Catholicism centers the need for a strong, though distant father figure.

There is a strong cultural emphasis that women should bear children, that children should be born within the sanctity of marriage, and that the children are to be raised in that marriage unit. By having a child out of wedlock at 16, and not marrying the father, Lily committed cultural taboo under Catholicism.

Single motherhood is not exceptionally rare in larger cities in Mexico like Guadalajara, but it still carries a cultural and economic stigma and burden. Single mothers earn much less in the workplace as women. These women face continual gender-based discrimination, and have historically lacked any government assistance in terms of life insurance coverage, and childcare.

This economic insecurity influenced both Lily's mother and Lily herself in their attempts to find better opportunities. They both explored alternatives to daily wage earning in a society which culturally enforced subordination of women.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

Lily first came to the United States in the mid 2000s after decades of escalated immigration policy directed at the Southern Border. In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was passed, which allowed for amnesty for residing immigrants, as well as created an enhanced system for enforcement of the legal parameters of residency. In 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA) was implemented. IIRAIRA expanded the powers of border patrol and immigration enforcement. This act allowed the creation of metal fencing across the US/Mexico border. In 2002, following the Patriot Act, the "Enhanced Border Security Enforcement and Visa Entry Reform Act", which was another sweeping move towards militarization and enhancement of border security. This act set up information sharing networks between different agencies of law enforcement. Following the EBSEVERA, the then president George W Bush passed the Homeland Security Act, creating the notorious Immigration Customs Enforcement agency, and a highly militarized, paranoid governmental response to immigration. One of the most important laws in the story of Lily's entrance into the United States is Section 319(a) of The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which allows for the "naturalization" of the spouses of US citizens. Without this addition to the act, Lily would have had a much harder time coming to the US legally. She would have been facing continuous visa checks and scrutiny over her status.

VISA STATUS

Lily is currently a permanent resident, working towards her citizenship. As a permanent resident, Lily is able to live and work in the United States permanently. Permanent Residency requires having what is known as a "green card." The status expires after ten years, and must be reapplied for immediately when it does. To apply for a green card, the individual must first be sponsored by a relative, or their spouse. Because of the limited amount of permanent resident status allocated to each country, there is a preference hierarchy and wait time for the relationship of the sponsor to the applicant, as well as the country of origin of the applicant. The sponsor must fill out an immigrant petition and a Green Card application for the applicant. After the submission of these two application documents, there is a scheduled interview, and biometrics appointment which costs a fee. After this long process, the applicant will receive the decision regarding their application.

Permanent Residency allows for the ability to vote where citizenship is not required, as well as the protection under all laws. Section 237 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, legal residency can be revoked, and the individual can be deported if they commit a large variety of crimes. Some of these restrictions are aiding illegal immigration, having married for only immigration purposes, being considered a "drug abuser" at the time of applying, and many others. All of these laws call for an increase in policing in immigrant communities.

FOREIGN POLICY

The border between the United States and Mexico had been porous for a long time. A culture of "circular migration" for seasonal farm work, was heavily present in life in border towns. With the expansion of agriculture and labor industries at the turn of the 20th century, as well as the fallout from the Mexican Revolution, the annual rate of migration, and permanent residency expanded. Large farm lobbies who argued that they would be unable to successfully maintain and harvest their crops, and made it possible for Mexico to be exempt from the 1924 Immigration Act quotas. When the Great Depression hit 1929, and agricultural businesses dried up, supposed Mexican immigrants were then forced to return either by need or by deportation to Mexico. 40% of people deported were actually citizens.

In 1942 the Bracero Program was created by the United States to stabilize the US economy by supplying emergency labor from Mexico during WWII. After it became apparent how profitable this cheap exploited labor was for the US, similar labor programs and work visas became fixtures of the US economy until 1962. In 1952 the Walter-McCarran Immigration Act created preferences for skilled workers, denying the majority of people to immigrate legally. Today, many apply for temporary work through the H-2A Visa Program. 57% of all agricultural workers in the United States are from Mexico, or are described as being from Mexico.

TRADE POLICY

Trade Policy between the US and Mexico has had a long and complex history. By the 1890s the US relied heavily on Mexico's resources to sustain its economy. Notably, the US was purchasing up to 75% of Mexico's exports. In the early 1900's, economic tensions rose. Because oil companies, and other corporations were so invested and controlling of the Mexican economy, there rose significant anti-American sentiment. Oil was nationalized in 1938 after a decade of tension. Mexico borrowed heavily against the price of its oil. In 1973, the world price of oil dropped, causing an economic crisis. Mexico was unable to pay back its debt owed to foreign investors. This crisis coincided with the rise of the individualist competition based free trade principles of neoliberalism. In 1992, The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was created. This agreement promoted free trade among the Western Hemisphere. NAFTA created Maquiladoras. Maquiladoras are massive factories which create tariffless goods for the US consumer market with very limited environmental regulations and worker protections. As they supply a large portion of jobs for Mexico's working population, people migrate from across the country towards them. When another financial debt crisis hit Mexico, dubbed the "Peso Crisis" in 1994, the US facilitated Mexico's economic recovery on the world market. The US currently imports billions of dollars in goods from Mexico every year. Main exports are vehicles, computer technology, and produce. The stabilization of this trade agreement is incredibly important to the US economy and the corporate interests of Mexico.

GENDER & FAMILY

Spain colonized much of North and South America in the 15th century. The legacy of colonialism has had extraordinary influence on patriarchal gender roles in Mexico. Some argue that though structural divisions among gender, and high rates of femicide, can be attributed partially to *machismo*. In reality the conditions created by the methods of colonialism framed all current concepts and interactions of gender, rather than an expression of masculinity itself. Spanish men including priests, conquistadors, and soldiers raped and brutalized indigenous women as a methodology of fear mongering, as well as a way to eviscerate family structures.

There is a divide between smaller cities that are more influenced by the Catholic Church. There, women are more likely to be taught to be more subordinate to men. In major metropolitan cities like Mexico City, there are social expectations for women to be able to fend for themselves. Guadalajara is a metropolitan hub where context exists for women to experience more equitable rearing in some very specific ways. Though this is true, Lily's grandfather was acting in a way that challenged structural patriarchy when he decided to teach his youth how to be able to take care of themselves and by giving them tools that are prominently bestowed only to men.

MARRIAGE & MIGRATION

Focusing on Lily's story, a component that is very striking is the two different relationships that she had with privileged white men. These sorts of relationships can often function as a part of a greater trend of exotification of Latina women, and the misguided understanding of white saviorhood - a complex heavily ingrained into white men. Movies, TV shows, advertisements, and cultural iconography of White American media have long perpetuated negative as well as sexual stereotypes of non-white people in attempts to create cultural divisions, reinforce white supremacy and to sell product.

The exotification of Latina women by America works to sexualize, as well as characterize Latina women as figures who are inherently disposed to white male gaze and subjects that depend on the graciousness of white men to be saved from the economic and social strife of their countries. Marriage here, functions as a sort of ownership ritual, as many would agree is the foundation of western forms of marriage.

Lily's first husband, whose family was very wealthy, asked Lily to marry him soon after after a relationship that consisted of brief visits, which began online. Lily stated that she was shocked, but because of her economic instability and other factors of instability, she said yes. It is important to note that Lily's second husband is an older white man with similar class background as her first husband. This kind of interaction is very common, there is a plethora of similar stories within this oral history project, as there are in the community at large.

WOMEN & MIGRATION

Much of the narrative around immigration from Mexico in the United States is centered around men's experience, though nearly half of all documented immigrants are women. When looking at immigration policy, specifically deportations, it is necessary to look at gendered labor. Women make up much of the "invisible" labor in the United States. From janitorial services, the service industry, domestic work, textiles and factory work, Women of color and specifically immigrant women are overrepresented in these workforces. With the rise of women-headed households in Mexico, women are becoming both breadwinners and caretakers. This shift is a large contributor to migration. Migration is at its root an attempt to find more equitable economic opportunities and social services, than what are available. In terms of women in farm labor, women suffer from pesticide poisoning at twice the rate as men. In the private sector workforce, unionization is extremely rare, and working conditions often meet minimal standards for worker health and safety.

After 9/11, non-European immigration became cloaked under National Defense. Militarized ICE raids sweep sites that employ undocumented people, and force family separation through deportation of mothers and fathers and care takers. These oppressive policies affect women at a very high rate, and deportation often serves as a severe threat to women's safety and well being.