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Transnational identity, food and community: The role of women in cultural continuity and resistance

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**Transnational identity, food and community: The role of women in cultural
continuity and resistance**

by

Claudia Marcela Prado Meza

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Los quiere re montones

kaya

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined the ways transmigrant women exercise resistance to maintain cultural continuity through food. Transnational migrants from Villachuato to Marshalltown, Iowa, U.S., partially changed their food ways to adapt to the pressures of their work regimes. Transmigrant Villachuatán women used a number of food-related mechanisms to resist cultural pressures for an unhealthy, but easily accessible, diet. The towns of Marshalltown, Iowa and Villachuato, Michoacán, México provided a context for understanding the central role of transmigrant women in the food system and how transnational extended family dynamics intersect with food habits and the food system.

Villachuatán women, as subjects, were the center of my investigation. I sought to use food ways to understand how these women construct and reconstruct their local and national identities in a transnational community and to understand how food helps them to identify themselves as Villachuatans. I conducted multi-sited participant observation field work, where I utilized in-depth interviews, informal interviews, participant observations, and photographs of women with different migration histories, ages, and current residences to identify those food habits Villachuatán women try to maintain, the importance of their legacy, and the lengths they are willing to go to retain these habits.

Keywords: agriculture, cultural continuity, food, resistance, transmigrants, transnational identity.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD IN TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY

This dissertation examines the ways transmigrant women exercise resistance to maintain cultural continuity through food. I analyze the degree to which transnational migration of Villachuatans to Marshalltown, Iowa, U.S., has changed their food ways and the mechanisms transmigrant Villachuatan women use to resist cultural pressures for an unhealthy, but easily accessible, diet. The towns of Marshalltown, Iowa and Villahuato, Michoacán, México provide a context for understanding the central role of transmigrant women in the household food system and how transnational extended family dynamics intersect with food habits and the food system.

Villachuatan women as subjects are the center of my investigation. I use food to understand how these women construct and reconstruct their local and national identities when in a transnational community (Nützenadel & Trentmann, 2008, p. 9) and to understand how food helps them to identify themselves as Villachuatans. I conducted multi-site participant observation field work, utilizing in-depth interviews, informal interviews, participant observations, and photographs with women with different migration histories, ages, and current residences to identify those food habits Villachuatan women try to maintain, the importance of their legacy, and the lengths they are willing to go to retain these habits and their legacy.

The stories that Villachuatan women shared with me were analyzed using the Community Capitals Framework (CCF), which allowed me to understand how the multiple resources the women can access work and change when using food for resistance and cultural continuity.

International migration has changed Villachuatans' food systems in both Marshalltown and Villahuato. Remittances are a source of international development and at the same time, negatively affect local cultures through the introduction of consumerism into traditional communities. Financial capital from the earnings generated by migration facilitates the purchase of highly processed food, changing food habits in both Villahuato and Marshalltown. Yet, food security and food sovereignty of the sending transnational community are eroded, as the families with remittances become

dependent on them, and those without remittances find their ability to gather and grow their own food reduced.

Thesis Outline

Cuando voy a La Fiesta, diario quiero cenar enchiladas, allá [en Villachuato] las enchiladas las hallo más buenas.

When I go to La Fiesta, I like to have enchiladas for dinner almost daily; there [in Villachuato] the enchiladas [sold at La Fiesta] are tastier.

- Manuel, male gate opener in Marshalltown

Chapter 2 describes the formation of a transnational community, a review of the literature, the relationship of transnationalism, gender and food, and finally why I decided to use the Community Capital Framework (CCF) as an analytical tool in transnational research.

Chapter 3 explains the historical and cultural context of the transnational processes. It is an account of some of the main historical, economic, and geo-political processes that took place at the local, regional, national and international levels in both México and the United States. These complicated processes resulted in the development of a transnational community of Villachuatans living in Marshalltown, and, consequently, these processes shaped the food ways of Villachuatans both in Iowa and México today.

Chapter 4 details the importance of hearing the stories of Villachuatans women, both those living in Villachuato and in Marshalltown. I wanted to learn what meals are important for them and why and to understand how they pass on their traditions and their indigenous knowledge through food, not only by cooking, but also by eating together, and sharing this food with their loved ones. I used a purposive snowball sample in which I interviewed 10 women in each community. Influenced by a typology developed by Michael Barajas (2009) and using a transnationalism over the life course approach (Lauer & Wong, 2010), I divided the participants into three cohorts consisting of 1) *Hijas*, women aged 18 to 29 years, 2) *Madres*, women aged 30 to 59 years, and 3) *Abuelitas*, women aged 60 and older. Research in the life course framework does not hold a static view of each life stage, but rather emphasizes the historically unique cultural and

contextual forces with which individuals interact as they live through these life stages, such as childhood or parenting (White & Klein, 2002, as cited in Lauer & Wong, 2010, p. 1055).

Chapter 5 describes two events that are part of the main traditions for Villachuatans: *La Fiesta* (the town festival) and *Levantamientos* (lifting of the baby Jesus from the nativity). I had the opportunity to participate in *La Fiesta* in Villachuato and in three *Levantamientos* in Marshalltown. This allowed me to understand what food traditions are important for Villachuatans and which of these are passed to the new generations, as well as what new knowledge they share with family and friends in Villachuato and in Marshalltown. Both events, *La Fiesta* and the *Levantamiento*, provide insight into the community relationships that span borders and are supported through remittances, visits, and symbolic commitments to transnational identities, regardless of residential location or immigrant status (Lauer & Wong, 2010, p. 1054).

Chapter 6 details the daily activities around food in which Villachuatan women living in Villachuato engage—including buying ingredients and deciding what to cook, who helps to cook, and who cleans the house afterwards. I analyze the impact of remittances on Villachuatan built capital, and the ways food is prepared, consumed, grown, and stored. Daily lives of Villachuatans who have relatives in the U.S. who send them remittances are detailed and compared with those who do not receive remittances.

Chapter 7 includes a similar discussion of the daily activities around food of Villachuatan women living in Marshalltown, which illustrates significant differences between those who have migrated and can return to their hometown and those who cannot return home due to a lack of documents. For those without documents, returning home would either be permanent or until proper documents allowed them to return to the U.S., which could take years or not occur at all. Differences in the food ways of the *Hijas* born in the U.S. and the *Abuelitas*, who were born and lived in Villachuato most of their lives and are now living in Marshalltown to reunite with their children, are examined.

Chapter 8 discusses the conclusions of the research and describes key traditions that continue in both communities. Using the Community Capitals Framework, I attempt to explain how each community has adapted and maintains these traditions and continues them with future generations.

CHAPTER 2. TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY, FOOD, AND THE VILLACHUATAN WOMEN

I feel like during La Fiesta there is food everywhere and there is like a lady on the corner that will sell food like a half block away from where we live, like she lived there and everything and...people would go buy food from her. It wasn't like a restaurant, you just take your plate and they give it to you full of food. That's where we would go and usually get in trouble for going. My aunt would be like, "I could make that for you," or something. But I love tortas. I love tortas down there. I do not know. I do not know why, I just think that they are like
amazing from there.

- Magdalena, *Nieta*, Marshalltown

The Formation of a Transnational Community – A Review of the Literature

Discourse in current transnational theory recognizes immigrants as agents, who provide an impact to both the sending and hosting community, creating translocal spaces of community, affiliation, and political action (Nelson & Hiemstra, 2008; Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton 1992). Much of the supporting research was undertaken in areas of established migration streams—large cities, the Southwest and West of the U.S., and the states of Florida and Michigan. New immigrant destinations in the Midwest and South of the United States may have different patterns of emergence of transnational spaces and their impact on the immigrants. New destinations provide year round factory work, rather than the seasonal fieldwork of the established regions of immigration. Thus, Iowa, with its large number of meatpacking plants and other light manufacturing, is a good site to determine how transnationalism is produced and reproduced among relatively recent migration streams.

In order to locate transnational streams with consistent origin and destination points, I looked for places that had regular migration streams, which the literature on migration has shown to be important within the U.S. (West Virginia and Kentucky to Detroit, for example). While a number of meatpacking cities in Iowa (Storm Lake, Columbus Junction, West Liberty, Denison, Postville, and Marshalltown) have large

numbers of immigrants from México and Central America, Marshalltown and Postville have the most direct migrations routes from a rural sending area to the meatpacking towns. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raided Marshalltown in 2006 and Postville in 2008. The Postville plant filed for bankruptcy soon afterwards, and the migration streams from rural Guatemala were permanently broken (Grey, Devlin, & Goldsmith, 2009). Marshalltown, on the other hand, continued processing meat and also continued relations with its sister town—Villachuato, Michoacán, México. These two small towns provided a context for understanding transnational extended family dynamics and how these dynamics intersect with food habits and the food system. As my mentor, Dr. Katherine R. Bruna, of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Iowa State University, began working in the two towns around 2006, a level of institutional trust was already present.

Villachuatans have formed a transnational community in Villachuato, Michoacán, México, and in Marshalltown, Iowa, U.S. (see Figure 2.1) with extensive and fluid connections (economic, familial, social, and cultural) across borders (Barajas, 2009; p. 147). Villachuatans began settling in Marshalltown at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, as meatpacking moved from highly unionized cities to rural areas to be closer to the raw material. This spatial shift was at the same time as the general assault on the labor movement in the United States and in combination with the destruction of the traditional meatpacking unions that defended high wages and safe labor conditions. At this time, the national origins of the workers also changed (Chapa, Saenz, Rochín, & McConnell, 2004, p. 47). Jobs at meatpacking plants were attractive to immigrants because they did not require English skills or previous experience and provided a stable, year round source of income (Grey, 1996). There were few alternative opportunities for immigrants and not much competition from locals for these dangerous jobs. Shift in national origin of the workers in Marshalltown was further encouraged when Swift¹ began to bus Latino men to Marshalltown from Waterloo, Iowa to work at the plant in 1989 (Griffith et al., 2004). The Latino population of Marshalltown grew from 291 in 1990, or 1% of the town's population, to 3,265 in 2000, representing 12.6% of the population (Flora, Prado-Meza, Lewis, Montalvo, & Dunn, 2011). According to

¹ Now called JBS Swift and owned by a Brazilian meatpacking conglomerate.

the U.S. Census, by 2010, the number of Latinos had grown to 6,632, or 24% of the total population. According to estimates by Grey and Woodrick (2006), about 67% of all the Mexican newcomers are from Villachuato, Michoacán, México.

Manuel, one of the people who facilitated my access to respondents (gate opener) in Marshalltown, explained that he, along with three childhood friends, was among the first Villachuatans who arrived in Marshalltown in the 1980s. They were male migrant workers following seasonal jobs and came to work in corn detasseling. They had received legal migration status with the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) under the Special Agricultural Worker (SAW) program. When they realized Marshalltown offered year round employment at the local meatpacking plant, not only for themselves, but also for their friends and relatives, as well as access to affordable housing, they decided to make Marshalltown their new home.

According to Mexican Census records, the 2010 population of Villachuato was 3,986 people (Unidad de Microrregiones Dirección General Adjunta de Planeación Microrregional, 2012). It is interesting to note that when this figure is compared with the population total of 3,926 from the 1990 census, Villachuato appears to have maintained a steady population (Unidad de Microrregiones Dirección General Adjunta de Planeación Microrregional, 2012). Truly, though, the population has fluctuated quite a bit during those 20 years, growing to 4,577 by 1995, and then decreasing to 4,199 in 2000 and even further diminishing to 3,120 by the 2005 census before climbing back to the 2010 population total of 3,986 residents (Unidad de Microrregiones Dirección General Adjunta de Planeación Microrregional, 2012).

These two communities, Marshalltown and Villachuato, are transnational migrant labor communities, defined as communities consisting of immigrant grouping who participate on a routine basis in a field of relationships, practices, and norms that include both places of origin and places of destination (Grey & Woodrick, 2002; Richardson Bruna, 2007; Schiller et al., 1992; Woodrick, 2006). These two communities are unofficial “sister cities,” exchanging visits of official delegations. “Villachuato needs Marshalltown for jobs, incomes and opportunities for children. Marshalltown needs Villachuato for its labor in local plants and to invigorate the local economy and population” (Grey & Baker, 2002, p. 8).

Villachuatans living in Marshalltown describe themselves as Villachuatan in origin, regardless of where they were born. Two specific cases are Magalí and Magdalena, who are both *Hijas* born in the U.S. who identify themselves as both Villachuatans and from Marshalltown, an example of their dual home base or sense of home in two nation-states. In Villachuato, they refer to Marshalltown as “the other Villachuato” or *el Villachuato chiquito*, meaning “little Villachuato,” a demonstration of the physical, mental, and emotional connections that Villachuatans still have with both regions (Barajas, 2009; p. 147).

According to Geoghegan (2008), grounding transnational migrants within the social milieu of the receiving and sending towns forces a necessary focus on the historical and cultural context in which transnational processes take place. That focus also allows for the appreciation of the effects of these processes and the agency of migrants themselves (p. 42). Within the framework of transnational theory, we are able to understand that if a transnational community exists, it is because of the concurrence of historical, political, and cultural processes happening simultaneously around the sending community and the receiving community, such as international labor markets, migratory policies of national governments, relocation of production processes, and government control of national frontier politics (Velasco Ortiz, 2005, p. 15). History, government, and economic policies with their crises, market peaks, and structural changes have heavily influenced the migration processes between the states of Michoacán and Iowa. Migration is influenced strongly by push factors. There have been times in Michoacán history when migration was the only available option for the peasant community to subsist (Barajas, 2009). Marshalltown has also experienced structural changes from policies and economic forces that have limited the economic options of its residents. Federal policies also shaped the physical and demographic landscape of Iowa. Farms in Iowa have become bigger over time, forcing Iowa youth to leave the state in search of different types of jobs. Meanwhile, growing industries in Iowa continue to demand cheap labor to stay in business, which creates a variety of pull factors for migration (Hinrichs, 2003).

While there are a plethora of definitions for transnationalism, the definition that is most useful in this study is that provided by Suárez-Orozco and Paez (2002): “*ser y estar aquí y allá*,” or “to be here and there” (p. 7). Transnationalism implies the construction of

a social space that preserves the existence of a collectivity in more than one national territory (Velasco Ortiz, 2005, p. 13). Nagel and Staeheli (2004) suggest, “It is possible to claim identity as a citizen of a country and to negotiate membership within the bounds of ‘belonging’, even without claiming to ‘be of’ that country” (p. 4). According to Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999, p. 219), the formation of a transnational community requires simply the “occupations and activities... [are] sustained...over time across national borders.” However, nations and borders are real, and this often prevents transmigrants from returning to the community where they were born.

Transnationalism recognizes the agency of transmigrants to maintain traditions in a place far from where they were born and raised, while helping those who stayed in the sending community to preserve their customs (Basch, Schiller, & Szanton Blanc, 1994, p. 7; Smith & Eade, 2008). That agency is made easier by improvements in travel and communications technology. Transmigrants are connected “simultaneously to two or more nation-states” (Basch et al., 1994, p. 7). The homeland does not have to be either past or future, but can be accessed now, usually through real-time mechanisms, such as telephone calls made more affordable through inexpensive phone cards, Internet access, and fax, as well as postal services (Burrell, 2008, p. 17; Vertovec, 2004). Fishkin (2005) describes transnationalism as an “endless process of comings and goings that create familial, cultural, linguistic, and economic ties across national borders” (p. 24). Waldinger & Fitzgerald (2004) argue for a perspective which “emphasiz[es] the *regularity* of international migration and its inevitable collision with the mechanisms by which nation-states attempt to keep themselves apart from the world” (p. 17).

Understanding the Formation of a Transnational Community: Transnationalism and Food Culture

Villachuatans in Marshalltown have found ways to celebrate food-related events as a means of strengthening their identity and staying connected with their hometown, and food has become an expression of their ethnic resilience (Haiming, Lianlian, Liu, & Lin, 2009, p. 150). Food consumption plays a crucial role in the construction of local and national identities and in the changing self-understanding of social groups, including migrant communities. Food is never merely food, and its significance can never be purely

nutritional (Nützenadel & Trentmann, 2008). Familiar food helps Villachuatans feel comfortable at home and makes their adaptation process in Marshalltown less painful, easing the transition as they settle down in their newly adopted town (Haiming et al., 2009).

Eating is a social process that shapes family and communal relations through its changing routines and rituals; it makes and reinforces social distinctions. Food is intimately bound up with social relations, including those of power, inclusion and exclusion, as well as cultural ideas about classification (including food and non-food, the edible and the inedible), the human body, and the meaning of health. Migrants become agents in the transnational circulation of food by bringing with them their traditions, cuisine, and consumption patterns (Nützenadel & Trentmann, 2008, p. 9).

Food culture of Villachuatans reflects their traditions and culture, such as eating particular foods within each season because they are available in nature, and thus cheaper and tastier; what meals are prepared for special occasions, for example welcoming a husband that has been working in the U.S. for years; and finally which meals are considered a feast, requiring help from friends and relatives in order to make them happen. Food habits of Villachuatans living in Marshalltown, then, reflect and shape their new reality. The food that they prepare is based on what is available for them considering their new living conditions, reflecting an increase in their income, less time available for cooking, and lack of availability of accustomed ingredients. Additionally, they look for the comfort of familiar food that allows them to construct their local and national identities in the changing self-understanding of the new and old social groups that they are part of due to their transnational nature (Alicea, 1997). With their demand for familiar foods, Villachuatans in Marshalltown become agents in the transnational circulation of food, as they bring with them their traditions, cuisine, and consumption patterns. They are a driving force behind transnational food chains, something often attributed only to the globalized markets (Nützenadel & Trentman, 2008, p. 9).

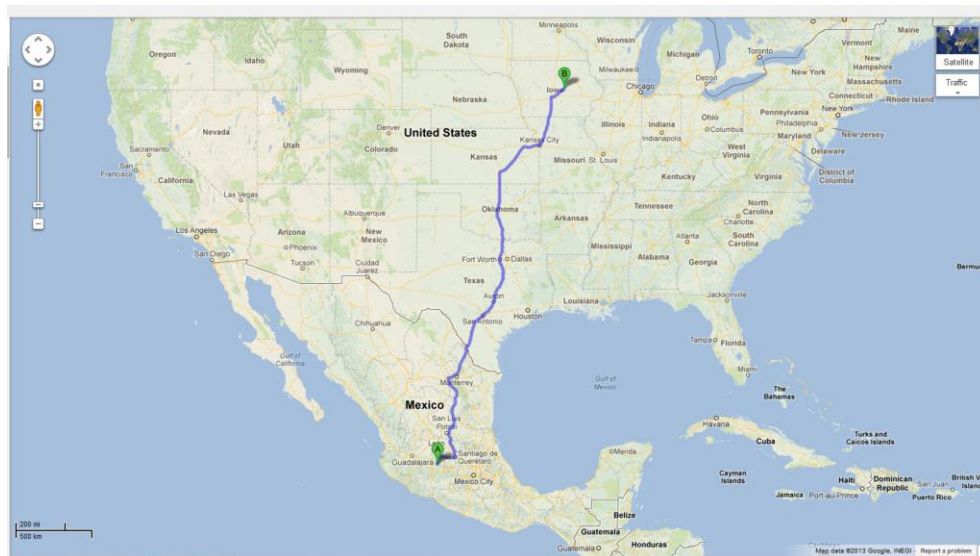


Figure 2.1. Villachuato, Michoacán, México – Marshalltown, Iowa, USA

Transnationalism, Gender and Food

Si él cocina, es blanquillos con winnies [sic] y frijoles y tortillas [risas], si no ordenamos algo, y si no es carne dorada con frijoles, es algo simple, cuando él cocina.

If he cooks, he cooks scrambled eggs with sausage, and beans and tortillas [laughs], or we order food, or he fries meat and serves it with beans. He cooks simple meals.

- Magalí, *Hijas* cohort, talking about her stepdad helping in the kitchen

The centrality of gender in this study is essential for understanding how food is one of the main vehicles for cultural continuity and resistance in the Villachuatan transnational community (Curran, Shafer, Donato, & Garip, 2006). Villachuatan women, as subjects, are the center of my investigation. I use food ways to understand how these women construct and reconstruct their local and national identities when located in a transnational community (Nützenadel & Trentmann, 2008, p. 9). I position my research to directly challenge the normative paradigms that implicitly posit globalization as agentive and masculine and local processes as reactive, passive, and feminine (Gaetano & Yeoh, 2010, p. 2). The Villachuatan women that I interviewed in this dissertation

described a life that was neither passive nor reactive. Women who remained in the sending community of Villachuato often bear the burden of increased workloads and must shoulder the responsibility of repaying debts incurred to send the migrant abroad (Gaetano & Yeoh, 2010; Gammage, 2004, p. 746). As I learned during my fieldwork in Villachuato, they also have to feed and care for the children and the elderly left in the village, individuals who might or might not be directly related to them. If the family owns land, they also have to supervise and/or work in the field, too. I wanted to acknowledge the agency of those who had decided to migrate, since most of them entered as wives and dependents of men who sponsored their admission to the U.S. (Boyd & Pikkov, 2008, p. 19). Some crossed the border without documents, bringing their children with them. All of them had to relocate in a Midwestern town that did not resemble home, and most of them had access to the job market, mainly in the meatpacking plant or as janitors in a casino in Tama, IA.

Much of the hard work that these Villachuatán women do, regardless of their place of residence, is closely related to food, whether it is hosting a feast that requires weeks of planning, gardening, preserving, or cooking every day, either for their family or to sell it (Counihan & Van Esterik, 1997) and thus contribute to the family income. Some of these women end up working in the meatpacking plants, work that is also related to the food system.

Analyzing the relationship of Villachuatán women to food allowed me to explore the ways food is a vehicle for cultural continuity and resistance in this transnational community. I use Padilla's definition of cultural resistance, "an oppositional behavior that challenges the dominant culture's premise that respect and obedience will ultimately be exchanged for knowledge and success" (1992, p. 5). Thus, food has been instrumental in the maintenance of their traditions. The traditional food that Villachuatans have cooked since migrating to Marshalltown supports the formation of the transnational community, and in turn, this transnational community allows Villachuatán women to maintain the memory of their original homeland without having to worry excessively about if they will be fully accepted by their host country (Knight, 2002, p. 23). A good example of this relationship is given by Ebaugh and Chafetz (1999), who describe how food plays a central role in reproducing religious identity and community. When

immigrant women get together to prepare food and eat together, they are producing a sense of community and reinforcing their Villachuatan identity within a religious context, which provides them power in the reproduction of ethnic identity (590).

Ethnic identity is primordial for the formation and preservation of a transnational community. In these communities, socioeconomic and political networks transcend state borders, and transmigrants can safely share symbols and myths of origin, a common historical experience, a religious conviction or some tie to a specific geographic place, all of which hold them together (Knight, 2002, p. 23). Thus, the foods that women prepare and the manner in which they employ foods to nurture children are typically specific to their class and ethnic (sub)cultures, contributing to the recreation of the class and ethnic (sub)cultures in which their families are embedded (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 1999, p. 588). Villachuatan transmigrant women may not be able to pass on significant material wealth to their children. Instead, many focus on providing children with a social and cultural heritage that has allowed them to survive in an often-hostile environment (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 75). For instance, the cultural capital of transnational food corporations negatively affects the ability of Villachuatan transmigrant women to use their local cultural capital to maintain their social, human, natural, and financial well-being. However, they are passing on their understanding of society and their role in it, food choices, community rituals, and ways of being – cultural capital – that in turn affects the choices their children make. From their perspective, this cultural continuity and continuous exercise of resistance to an unhealthy, but easily accessible, diet provides the tools needed for the survival of their children and their transnational community (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 56). Villachuatan transmigrant women's behaviors in socializing their children are strongly influenced by their awareness of the traits they consider necessary for survival and success (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 64). However, these parental aspirations vary greatly for their children, depending on the sex of the child and if they are living in Villachuato or in Marshalltown. Villachuatan women are expected to develop homemaking and social skills and get married, relying on men for financial security.

The Villachuatan women that I interviewed had learned a variety of production skills, such as gardening, preserving food, cooking, and sewing. The women in the *Hijas* cohort that I interviewed in Villachuato were not expected to continue study beyond

middle school, and in some cases were even forbidden to do so, because the high school was located in Puruándiro, the seat of the local government situated 20 minutes by bus from Villachuato. In the case of the three women in the *Hijas* cohort that I interviewed in Marshalltown, however, all had a high school education. Two of them, Magalí and Magdalena, were born in the U.S., and one of them was in college, while the other was about to begin her undergraduate studies the following year.

Another example is given by Counihan (2006) in her ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 1996-2006 in the small town of Antonito, in the southern San Luis Valley of Colorado, where she studied how food can mediate Chicana voice and oppositional consciousness (p. 70). She explains how, for many women, “Food is a powerful voice of self-expression through which they mediate relations with nature, the family, and the local and global community. In the meals they cook, the rituals they observe, and the memories they preserve, women communicate powerful messages and emotions” (Counihan, 2006, p. 71). She also describes how food and food work can offer diverse forms and conflicting avenues of self-realization for *Mexicanas*, which depends on women’s decisions of minimizing food’s oppressive dimensions and enhancing its empowering ones, or vice versa (Counihan, 2006, p. 72). She concludes that food-centered life stories are a vehicle to enter public discourse and counter the silencing that has always been a central weapon in women’s oppression; food stories affirm the value of women’s labor, memory, and resourcefulness (Counihan, 2006, p. 79). In Chapter 4, “Methodology”, I explain further how I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork, inspired in part by Carole M. Counihan’s work.

Community Capital Framework (CCF) as an Analytical Tool in Transnational Research

Es que cuando estamos descansando [del trabajo] pos decimos, ‘vamos a hacer algo aquí pa’ comer todos [como familia]’, [cocinamos] unos tacos; que a veces vienen los muchachos [porque saben que es mi día de descanso], como ellos pues ya están todos aquí [en Marshalltown], llegan. Y me gusta hacer [de comer] porque a veces no vienen a visitarme, pues ya les

ofrece uno taco, por eso casi no, yo en verdad casi no salgo [a comer a restaurantes].

When I have a day off from work, we say ‘let’s cook something to eat together as a family.’ We make *tacos*. Sometimes my children would visit me, since they know that is my day off [now all of them live here in Marshalltown]. And, I like to cook for them, because they don’t always visit me. I offer them *tacos*, and that is why I do not go to restaurants.

- Marisela, *Madres* cohort

Food ways are viewed as a complex and dynamic part of transnational communities. Transmigrant women have a strong relationship with food as part of the gendered process of migration and group identity (Alicea, 1997; Allen & Sachs, 2007; Bates, Burton, Howlett, & Huggins, 2009; Jones, 2007; Little, Ilbery, & Watts, 2009; Padoongpatt, 2011; Snyder, 1991). Food is one of the foundations of both individuality and a sense of common membership in a larger, bounded group (Wilk, 1999, p. 244).

The emerging importance of local food systems as a movement that looks for alternatives to the conventional and industrial food paradigm (Allen, Fitzsimmons, Goodman, & Warner, 2003; Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, 2012; Pollan, 2006; Thomas, McLaren, & Linklater, 2006; United States Department of Agriculture, 2009) entails a form of resistance against the unhealthy, but easily accessible, diet; thus suggesting the potential importance of food as an avenue of cultural continuity and resistance (Hinrichs, 2000, p. 296).

I used the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) to analyze Villachuatans’ food system in its six components—production, processing, distribution, access, consumption and cleanup—to see what kinds of capitals are mobilized in each one of these components. This allowed me to see the interconnected network of practices, processes and places that cover all aspects of food (City of Vancouver, 2009), and that can transform food into other forms of capital. There are seven types of capital—natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built. These capitals can either enhance or detract from one another (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 19). Capitals are created when

resources, or assets, are invested to create new resources, and these resources can be transformed from one form of capital to another form. The community capitals represent the things we have to work with, and in mapping these assets, we can have a picture of current assets and how those assets might be improved (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 363).

One of the main benefits of asset mapping the different community capitals of the Villachuatan transnational community is that it allowed me to recognize the changes that transmigrants have made in both their sending and hosting community to resist the industrial food system. This is especially true because CCF acknowledges that people can make a difference, either by influencing the broader policy agenda that constrains them or by making choices within the policy framework (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 24).

I recognize that there are inevitable changes in Villachuatan food habits, such as “the mass-marketing strategies for food that has become the norm and the emphasis put on products that can be marketed nationwide and in large volumes, and this has affected the variety available, the number, form, and quality of food products” (Kader, 2002, p. 8). Along with the advancement of women in the work force, these changes have forced families to demand foods of predictable quality that offer convenience and some variety (Kader, 2002, p. 8). However, despite all these changes, in this study I present a picture of the lengths to which Villachuatan women go to reinforce their values and influence the legacy handed down (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 71), using food as the vehicle to do so.

CHAPTER 3. VILLACHUATO AND MARSHALLTOWN: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Based on Geoghegan's (2008) work, what follows is an account of international, national, and regional historical, economic, and geo-political processes that impacted the food systems of Villachuato, Puruándiro and Marshalltown, Iowa. These complicated processes resulted in the development of a transnational community of Villachuatans living in Marshalltown, Iowa, and shaped the food ways of Villachuatans both in Iowa and México today.

According to Hinrichs (2003), Iowa agriculture has always been oriented towards national markets rather than local markets and has been heavily influenced by technology. Pressures toward accumulation have influenced federal and state policy decisions and the agenda of the land grant university.

In 1929, 29 different fruits and vegetables were grown on farms in Marshall County. In 1939, 28% of Marshall County farmland was in corn, and 4% in soybeans. By 1997, 41% was in corn and 38% in soybeans, and by the 2007 agricultural census, 58.5% of the cultivated land was in corn and 39% in soybeans (Iowa State University Department of Sociology & Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, 2002). As the agriculture in Central Iowa and Marshall County moved from producing food to producing industrial ingredients, all residents in Marshalltown shifted from a partially local diet to one purchased from purveyors of industrially processed food. As farmers in the state and across the country reduced the variety of crops produced due to federal incentives for corn and soybeans that guaranteed an income with little risk, the food consumed in Marshalltown mirrored that consumed in Chicago or Los Angeles.

The structure of Iowa agriculture and that in Marshall County has drastically changed since settlement due to industrialization, verticalization, and concentration of the farming industry, all supported by a multitude of federal and state policies. Farmers are increasingly oriented to export markets based upon the grain-livestock-meat complex. Iowa has become the United States' leader in ethanol production. Farmers in Marshall County truck their corn to the adjacent county to be processed into ethanol. Lincoln way Energy, where many Marshalltown farmers sell their corn, was one of the first ethanol

plants in Iowa, established in 2006 by local investors forming a limited liability company (LLC) as a means to secure a market for local corn and add value to their agricultural products (Bain, 2011, p. 1400). Another result of the export orientation is an increase in the importation of a range of foodstuffs for Iowans to feed themselves, even while they claim to “feed the world” (Hinrichs, 2003). Mexican farmers in Villachuato were also no longer able to feed themselves, either because the majority of their production was now dedicated to foreign markets or because they could not compete with subsidized imports. They were put out of business and forced to migrate to Mexican cities or to the United States.

The Meatpacking Industry and Demographic Changes in Iowa

The phenomenon of farms declining in number and growing in size as a result of the industrialization of agriculture in Iowa and Marshall County is reflected in the meatpacking industry. This industry expanded substantially in rural towns of the Midwest in a move to both be nearer to the supply of hogs and to lower labor costs by moving to non-union areas. As with the ethanol plants, local investment was replaced by transnational corporations, a change that was accompanied by increased levels of competition and concentration of ownership, plant closings, relocation, and substantial decreases in workers’ wages (Friedberger, 1989 & Stanley, 1992 as cited in Chapa et al., 2004, p. 50).

The meatpacking plant in Marshalltown opened for the first time in 1882, staying in business until 1916 when it was closed due to financial problems. It was then sold and reopened for just one year in 1919. Roberts and Oake later purchased the plant and opened it again in 1934, though 4 years later, they sold it to Swift and Company. However, it was in financial trouble, and “in 1988, the plant changed its name to Monfort Pork reflecting its alliance with the Colorado Corporation; with an investment of \$16 million the plant was expanded and the facilities improved, the company became the second largest employer in the city” (Times-Republican, 1992, pp. 110, 125).

Unfortunately, Monfort Pork destroyed the strong labor union with negotiated union wages. Deskilling jobs and lowering wages, as well as an increase in production and a reduction in costs of transportation, cheap land, weaker unions, and government

incentives were all part of an industry-wide movement to become more profitable and to face the challenges of a world economic crisis, (Broadway, 1991 & Stanley, 1992 as cited in Chapa et al., 2004, p. 50). In the 1980s, a series of mergers and buyouts further facilitated consolidation and the transition to this new breed of meatpacking, now dominated by ConAgra, IBP, Cargill, and Smithfield (Flora et al., 2011).

Destruction of the strong union in Marshalltown was a part of the movement of the meatpacking industry to the Midwest in the 1970s, further integrating the Midwest into global markets. By the 1970s, Iowa Beef Processors (IBP) dominated the beef packing industry, thanks to improved manufacturing methods, union avoidance, and specialized one-story plants equipped with modern labor-saving machinery (Nelson, 1995, p. 188). That business model, soon adopted by other firms, was competitive, resulting in plants closing and in the loss of more than 2,000 jobs between 1975 and 1979 in the state of Iowa alone (Nelson, 1995, p. 188).

The ability to hire low-wage labor was critical to expansion. Swift/Munson, when faced with labor shortages due to reduced wages and increasingly stressful working conditions as labor unions declined in strength, started to recruit immigrants, minorities, and women. “Headhunters” were sent to Mexico to recruit workers, and commercials advertising for workers were broadcast on Spanish-language radio in Chicago, Los Angeles and other areas where large concentrations of Mexican immigrants were located. These changes in the labor force altered the demographic landscape of the rural communities and the entire state of Iowa. In 2010, according to the U.S. Census, there were 151,544 Latinos in Iowa, while in 1980 there had only been 25,500 (Flora et al., 2011). This is an increase of almost six times in just 30 years. In the particular case of Marshalltown, in 2010, there were 6,632 Latinos, while in 1980, there were 432, an increase by more than 15 times in the same period of time (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Such demographic changes are not new to Iowa. During the farm crisis of the 1980s, Iowa lost 4.93% of its population (State Library of Iowa, 2010). At the same time, the Latino population, which first became a presence in the late 1970s, grew (State Library of Iowa, 2010). Iowa has been able to maintain a steady population, thanks to immigrants choosing Iowa as their new home.

Most of the Latinos in Marshalltown came to work at what is now JBS Swift. Owned by a Brazilian company² since July 2007, in 2008, JBS Swift employed 2,400 workers and slaughtered 19,000 pigs daily at the Marshalltown plant (Flora et al., 2011). Unlike fruit and vegetable production in other states with high Latino in-migration, jobs in meatpacking are year round and are relatively well-paid, compared to field work. Thus the new structure of meatpacking and of agriculture attracted not just workers, but entire families who brought their food habits with them. Women were agents in melding the industrial foods available in Marshalltown with what they had been accustomed to cooking in a more agrarian setting.

The Villachuato *Hacienda*

Villachuato is located in Puruándiro, Michoacán, México (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). In 1524, Hernán Cortés distributed land in what is now known as Michoacán through *encomiendas*, which was the forced labor of the indigenous inhabitants under the direct supervision of their Spanish conquerors (Chapa, 1978, p. 105). Villachuato's first *encomendero* was Juan de Villaseñor, who was granted the land by Cortés in exchange for 400 natives (Ortíz Ybarra & González Méndez, 1980, p. 50). In 1651, Villachuato was considered the most productive *encomienda* in the region of Puruándiro, with the *encomendero* at the time increasing Puruándiro's total area by buying neighboring *encomiendas* (Ortíz Ybarra & González Méndez, 1980, p. 63), and this resulted in the *encomienda* gradually becoming a *hacienda*. This change was possible because the *encomendero* gradually built up the *hacienda* by purchasing land from the indigenous inhabitants, "thus an hacienda would be born under the cloak of the *encomienda* though independent as to juridical title. The *encomendero* could create an hacienda within the *encomienda*" (Lockhart, 1969, p. 525). Another difference that emerged from this form of land ownership was in the approach to labor, where farmworkers received food, shelter and a wage paid in coin (Chapa, 1978, p. 107). By 1759, the *encomienda* in Villachuato completely disappeared and was a *hacienda*.

In 1787, the township was formed, and those who had the opportunity to be in power also owned the means of production. The mayors were chosen from among the

² Swift was owned by ConAgra before its purchase by JBS (Gray 2002).

landowners. *Hacendados* maintained their power over the years as a result of controlling the means of production as well as Federal law changes that benefited them (Ortíz Ybarra & González Méndez, 1980, p. 70).

On January 31, 1824, 3 years after the war for independence from Spain ended, the state of Michoacán was created as part of the reforms happening in Mexico. In 1889, the Villachuato *hacienda* was known for its production of grains, and it was one of the most productive in the region. It had a total area of 23,304.6 ha, with land uses divided as follows: 1,305.4 ha were rainfed, 502.9 ha were irrigated, 15,750.4 ha were used to raise cattle, and 5,735.2 ha were not used. They grew corn, wheat, chickpeas, alfalfa, and green peppers and raised herds of horses, donkeys, sheep, goats, cattle and pigs (Ortíz Ybarra & González Méndez, 1980).

Unfortunately, most of the information available about this period concerns those in power or with power, and there is little information about the indigenous people and workers. That is the reason why most of the data listed here is about the *hacienda* rather than Villachuato's indigenous inhabitants.

On November 20, 1910, the Mexican Revolution began, and with it came the Agrarian Land Reform (Benjamin, 2000). Federal authorities decided to talk with the *hacendados* and ask them to sell the uncultivated land, dividing it among those interested in purchasing. Buyers would pay the cost over 10 years with 6% interest. However, *hacendados* did not want to give any of their terrain away. They therefore simulated a distribution of land, but just among their closest friends or collaborators, which led to an armed conflict between *hacendados* and *ejidatarios* (Ortíz Ybarra & González Méndez, 1980). It was not until 1936 that the *Comisión Local Agraria*, or Local Agrarian Commission, began the distribution of land among Villachuatan farmworkers. These reforms replaced the plantation-style *hacienda* with an *ejido*, a collectivized production system governed by agricultural workers' committees to determine the division of labor and monitor the distribution of profits (Olcott, 2002, pp. 106-107). Villachuato, then, became the second largest *ejido* in the county with a 3,184 ha surface, behind Puruándiro's *ejido* that consisted of 4,000 ha.

In Villachuato, this change in land ownership impacted farming activities. Where the *hacienda* had produced wheat and chickpeas for export, the *ejido* instead produced

white corn and beans for domestic consumption. Livestock decreased, since land used for grazing was now farmed (Ortíz Ybarra & González Méndez, 1980). At the national level “this redistribution set off an era of rural prosperity which many consider the backbone of the successful 5.7 percent annual growth of Mexican agriculture from 1940 to 1965” (Arizpe, 1981, p. 629). Agriculture expanded from 1940 to 1965 through a government-financed irrigation program. This expansion was also enabled by the use of high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice. Emphasis was placed on growing agricultural products for export, in particular, tomatoes, strawberries and other types of fruit, and cattle feed in the form of grains and legumes for export to the United States. The beneficiaries of this public investment were mainly located in the northern part of México, where the large private farms were concentrated. This resulted in “larger farms producing for the lucrative export and agro-industrial markets, while traditional farmers, such as those in Villachuato, grew the less profitable staple crops” like beans and corn (Arizpe, 1981, p. 628), the basic diet of rural people and poor urban residents.

These national changes impacted Villachuato. According to Leyva Solano and Ascencio Franco (1991), the Green Revolution in the region was impelled mainly by the transnational company Ralston Purina (an international feed firm) and also to some degree by Anderson Clayton (a U.S. based cotton merchant) when Ralston Purina established a feed mill in the town in 1945. The federal government aided their expansion through agricultural infrastructure investments in the area to improve storage, transportation and irrigation systems, through subsidies to have two annual wheat harvests, and finally through fund lending to increase agricultural mechanization. Consequently, sorghum appeared for the first time in the town’s agricultural statistics in 1958, and in the ‘70s sorghum displaced chickpeas as the main feeding source for hogs. Sorghum became the main crop grown in the town, replacing white corn by 1974 (Leyva Solano & Ascencio Franco, 1991, p. 90). There were 3,539 ha planted in white corn and only 343 ha in sorghum in the 1965-66 season, while during the 1974-1975 growing season, there were 1,313 ha in white corn and 3,051 ha in sorghum (Leyva Solano & Ascencio Franco, 1991, p. 96).

Leyva Solano and Ascencio Franco (1991) explain that Ralston Purina changed not only the crops grown in the town, but the way that cattle, hogs and chickens were

raised, and also the town's food habits and what *ejidatarios* produced. The company began to sell feed for livestock, encouraging sorghum production, which in turn promoted the development of the poultry and hog industries. *Ejidatarios* started to raise hogs and chickens outside the *solares*, with more control over feeding regimes and reproduction. The changes implemented by this company along with those instigated by the federal government and explained above, resulted in more hogs and chickens raised by a single farmer (Leyva Solano & Ascencio Franco, 1991, p. 93), causing an increase in the demand for sorghum and soybeans used for feed, which in turn affected the demand for the fertilizers, improved seed and pesticides that were sold by Ralston Purina.

These changes were associated with several other changes in the local farming systems. Vegetables, especially tomatoes, were introduced in the irrigated areas (Leyva Solano & Ascencio Franco, 1991, p. 97). Between 1950 and 1970, Puruándiro tripled its hog inventory (Leyva Solano & Ascencio Franco, 1991, p. 99). As a result, some *ejidatarios* started to become small business owners, owning hog farms with up to 8,000 hogs (Leyva Solano & Ascencio Franco, 1991, p. 99).

On March 2, 1973, the Villachuatan *comisario ejidal*, along with another 97 *comisarios ejidales*, got together to create the *Unión Ejidal De Producción y Comercialización Agropecuaria "Jesús Montenegro"* or the Ejidal Society for Agricultural Production and Marketing "Jesús Montenegro". This Society was formed by drawing from a diverse pool of financial resources, from regional, state and federal subsidies as well as part of the profits obtained by the *ejidatarios*. The Society built a warehouse, thus *ejidatarios* were able to buy fertilizer in larger volumes at a cheaper price. They also got an industrial spur built in Villachuato, in order to unload the railcars directly into town, saving on other transportation costs. As a result of this Society, Villachuatan's *ejidatarios* had immediate access to fertilizer that they could buy on credit, which was up to 45% cheaper than when buying it from other businesses (Ortíz Ybarra & González Méndez, 1980, p. 298).

The Society also encouraged *ejidatarios* to raise hogs. Instead of only selling sorghum for feed, they would also sell hogs raised with the sorghum that they were growing, which could increase their income by up to 50% (Ortíz Ybarra & González Méndez, 1980, p. 303). This Society received some guidance from Extension about crop

rotation and growing beans, chickpeas and soybeans to improve the soil quality (Ortíz Ybarra & González Méndez, 1980, p. 303).

However, with the 1980's economic crisis many hog farms had to be closed, and by 1989, only one full cycle pig production farm and a few hog fattening farms remained (Leyva Solano & Ascencio Franco, 1991, p. 109).

On April 19, 1980, the *Secretaría de la Reforma Agraria* (Department of Agrarian Reform), publicly declared that *ejidos* in general were not receiving any of the support needed from local and state governments; neither the required water, credits, nor access to agrochemicals. *Ejidatarios* also complained about the low prices at which they had to sell their crops, the high cost of supplies, and how the middleman reselling their products received the biggest share of the profits. Most of these problems were structural, a dire consequence of how the land was distributed. "In the land distribution programs, no provision was made for the natural population increase of *ejidatario* households. In fact, sons of *ejidatarios* frequently do not have legal title to their *ejido* lands, making it extremely difficult for them to set up guarantees for agricultural credit and allowing all sorts of irregularities in the reassignment of land" (Arizpe, 1981, 634).

During this time, Villachuatan *ejidatarios* began to introduce strawberries as a new crop, in addition to the hog farms, and they continued growing corn, sorghum, wheat, barley, and fava beans.

On January 1, 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed by the governments of Canada, México, and the United States. This extension of the neoliberal model further deteriorated the peasants' livelihoods, as subsidies and supports were withdrawn, placing more pressure on the rural and urban labor markets and increasing migration, especially to the U.S. *Ejidatarios* faced many challenges, too. Under this new model, they were able to sell their land and to privatize the *ejido*, which signified a change in the way that *ejido* land could be owned, as before, *ejido* "... land could not be rented, sold or used as collateral for loans. It had to be passed through inheritance. The *ejidatario* was also prohibited from substituting hired labor for all-family labor. If an *ejidatario* was absent from his land for 2 years, he could lose all rights to the land" (VanWey, 2005, p. 147).

In the *ejido* sector, the 2000 census showed that women represented 22% of the *ejido* titled land (Deere & León, 2003). This is an important aspect to highlight, because, according to the rules of *ejido* membership, “only one person per household, the household head, was titled the family patrimony land” (Deere & León, 2003, p. 928).

By 2010, 16 years after NAFTA, the face of the *ejido* had changed, though perhaps not its challenges. According to the description of challenges given by José Luis Castro, the *comisario ejidal* elected in 2008, the condition of the *ejido* was very similar to how it was in 1980. Crop selling prices were low, while input prices were still high, and seeds were the most expensive input for *ejidatarios*. This was the case because the majority of the seeds were imported from the U.S., as Pioneer and DeKalb were the main suppliers of sorghum and corn seed, which had to be purchased each year.

In 2010, the Villachuatan *ejido* had 2,000 ha of irrigated land and the remaining 1,000 ha were rainfed. The main crops were sorghum and corn, and 300 ha were planted in strawberries. Organic crops were beginning to be planted, most of them leafy greens (J. L. Castro, personal communication, August 2, 2010).

Migration provided remittances that some Villachuatans invested in agricultural production. That increase in financial capital meant that *ejidatarios* were able to buy fertilizers, herbicides, and level plots. The *comisario ejidal* explained,

Sí, los hijos mandan dinero para acá, y los papás invierten más en sus casas y en las parcelas. Sí, [el ejido] ha mejorado. En aquel entonces [antes de que empezara la migración] estaba muy mal, y actualmente tenemos unos sorgos y unas tierras bien bonitas. Yes, the children send remittances and the parents invest that money in their houses and in their land. So, the ejido has improved [since Villachuatans started migrating]. It used to be really bad, and nowadays, we have very pretty lands and sorghum.

In this case, financial capital was used to increase natural capital, which in turn was intended to be transformed into more financial capital. Additionally, the production has become mechanized, as *ejidatarios* ended their use of oxen yokes around 1982. Now agricultural machinery is widely used by all *ejidatarios*. About 30% own a tractor, and

the other 70% rent from someone who owns one (J. L. Castro, personal communication, August 2, 2010).

Another change was in the *ejido* composition. In 2010, there were 564 *ejidatarios* in total, and 86 of them were women (15.25%), the highest ever (J. L. Castro, personal communication, August 2, 2010). This situation improved the political capital of Villachuatan women, as they were becoming essential in the decision making process of the community. This change in the makeup of the *ejido* was another effect of Villachuatan men's migration to the U.S. Villachuatan women that were not migrating with their husbands were left with the responsibility of taking care of the land. Thus, by being in charge of the land (natural capital) Villachuatan women were starting to have access to more political capital.

Mexican women started gaining access to *ejido* land in 1975, when they were able to hold *ejido* rights to land; while in theory, women had a right to inherit patrimonial land from the very beginning, in fact they rarely did because they were (and still are) expected to marry a husband who will provide land for the family (Arizpe, 1981, p. 635).

At the national level, in 1998, inheritance was the principal means through which Mexican women acquired ownership of *ejido* land, with 81.1% of the women acquiring land due to an inheritance, while they acquired *ejido* land through a purchase in only 8.1% of the cases (Deere & Leon, 2003, p. 929).

Unfortunately, these changes have not meant that the agricultural and food systems in Villachuato have improved, and the gap between food sovereignty and food security has widened. An example of this is the virtual disappearance of Villachuatan's food gathering practices. While *ejidatarios* have increased yields by using their remittances to buy agrochemicals, these chemicals have reduced the amount of wild greens available to gather. This will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

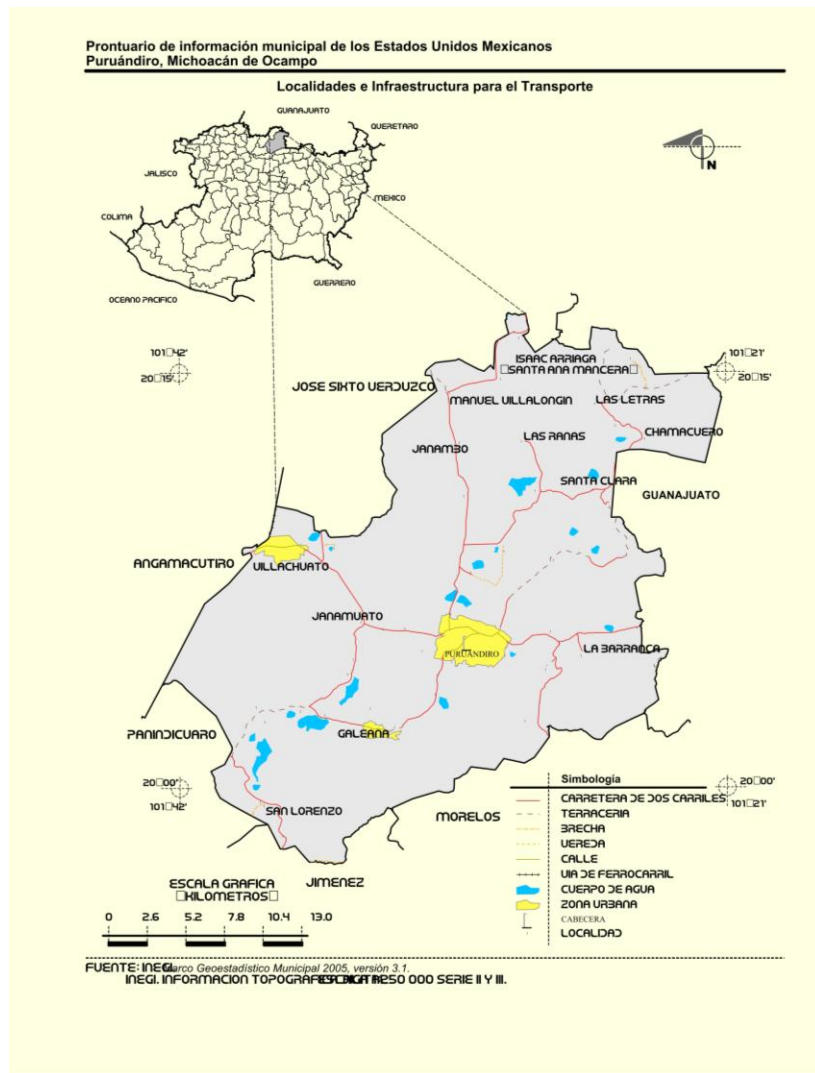


Figure 3.1 Villachuato, Puruándiro, Michoacán de Ocampo, México.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

Yo cuando estoy sola ni me dan ganas de hacer de comer. Pero cuando están las chiquillas ando con bien harto gusto, y ¿ay que voy a hacer [de comer]? porque van a venir, porque voy a tener con quien comer, pero cuando no [están en la casa], pues hay a ver que [cocino].

When I am by myself I do not even feel like cooking. But when my daughters are here, I am very happy, and like, what I am going to cook because they'll be here, and I will have someone to eat with, but when they are not at home, I do not really know what I'll cook.

- Valentina, *Madres* cohort

Research Problem: Changing Food Systems, Gendered Process of Migration and Transnational Identities

The primary question that guides this study is: What is the process through which food helps transmigrant Villachuatan women to reinforce values and influence the legacy handed down?

The research process for this study was designed as a multi-sited participant observation fieldwork to learn about the ways Villachuatan transmigrant women exercise resistance to maintain cultural continuity through food.

My First Contact with the Communities

My involvement with the Latino community living in Marshalltown, Iowa started in fall 2008. I began working on a project aimed to develop an innovative local food system for Marshall County. This project looked at changes in diet and the way food was produced to improve the local economy and the health of the people. Marshalltown was important for this project because of its intentional efforts to include the Latino community in this endeavor.

My connection with Villachuato began almost accidentally in 2007, while in my last semester of my master's degree program. I was invited to attend a seminar at Iowa

State University in which new educational initiatives to support the growing number of Latino students in elementary schools in Marshall County were being discussed. The presenters were a married couple from Angamacutiro who worked as teachers in Villachuato's middle school in México. They had been invited from México to share their work experiences with middle school teachers in Marshalltown and with Iowa State students of Multicultural Curriculum and Instruction, to help Iowa teachers to better understand the cultural background of their new students and improve their teaching skills to better serve Latino students. At the beginning of the presentation, they asked for volunteers who could translate the conversation from Spanish to English and vice versa, and I volunteered my assistance.

At the end of the conversation, I introduced myself to both teachers and told them a little about myself and about my master's thesis project—the creation of the first Latino 4-H club in Black Hawk County, Iowa. I maintained contact with them through irregular e-mail conversations and later through Facebook.

In 2010, when I was deciding my dissertation topic, Professor Katherine R. Bruna, a member of my Program of Study (POS) Committee who had worked on educational issues in Villachuato and Marshalltown, reminded me of these two Villachuatan teachers and told me that they were still collaborating on several ISU and Marshalltown projects with her. She suggested I contact the couple via e-mail. After exchanging several messages, we agreed to meet when I visited Villachuato with Professor Bruna for *La Fiesta*. They also offered to host our visit. Professor Bruna and I stayed at their home for the weekend, during which time I had the opportunity to connect more with the wife. She was very helpful in providing names of possible families that could host my visit when completing my fieldwork. My friendship with the teachers from the Villachuato middle school was central to my research, because it facilitated my access to respondents. Even though my formal fieldwork in Marshalltown on food systems research allowed me to learn a lot about Marshalltown and its relationship with Villachuatans, it was through the informal contacts that I inadvertently made while volunteering to translate that I gained the reputation as someone to be trusted.

Villachuato

My first visit took place from April 2-6, 2010, and it provided me the opportunity to participate in several food events of significant importance for the community. I was invited to taste elaborate meals cooked to welcome home those Villachuatans living in Marshalltown and other parts of the U.S. who returned for the most important public holiday of the year. I bought dinner and different kinds of snacks at the food stands in the streets that were available only for *La Fiesta*. I attended some of the celebrations at the Catholic Church, and families I visited offered me fruit they had just picked from the trees in their backyard.

One of the main celebrations of *La Fiesta* was “*Las mojigangas*” (giant dancing puppet figures), where the community was divided between spectators and participants. Spectators stood on the sidewalks, watching participants walking from the highway to the plaza around the *mojigangas*, while pouring what seemed to be incredible amounts of canned beer on each other, accompanied by local bands playing songs about coming back home after a prolonged absence. Some spectators engaged with the participants by also pouring beer on them.

During this first visit, I had conversations with Villachuatans living in Villachuato and with those who were visiting to celebrate *La Fiesta*. The few who invited me to their homes provided me a tour of their houses and explained how their homes had changed over the years, especially since their relatives living in the U.S. started sending remittances. *Solares*³ were modified by building several concrete houses on them, one for each of the sons and daughters now living in the U.S. who sent remittances for that purpose.

I later visited Villachuato a second time to collect the first half of my data, staying in the community from July to September 2010.

The gate openers in Villachuato. In Villachuato, two persons acted as gate openers and helped me contact other participants for this study. The first gate opener was the middle school teacher who hosted my first visit to Villachuato. She introduced me to

³ A *solar* is a shared piece of land, in which there is usually more than one house, and the inhabitants are blood-relatives.

Valentina, the second gate opener, who responded very positively when I called her after I had returned to Ames, Iowa from *La Fiesta*. She agreed immediately to assist and host me during my return to Villachuato to complete my fieldwork there. She was married, but her husband was living in a town near Albert Lea, Minnesota, working on a chicken farm. They were in a long process of building a concrete house in their *solar*, and therefore had an extra room for me to stay in. The household consisted of Valentina, who was 40 years old, her three daughters, who were 19, 18, and 10 years old, her recently divorced sister-in-law, who was 51 years old, and her 99-year-old father-in-law. I arrived at Valentina's home with my parents and my uncle and aunt. My parents felt responsible for my well-being, as I am the oldest child and only daughter of a Mexican, very traditional, Catholic family, and I am still single. Thus, when I explained to my parents that I was going to Michoacán to complete fieldwork for my dissertation, they immediately volunteered to take me there. Since I had learned to pick my battles with my parents, I said, "Thank you very much for doing this for me."

Valentina had cleaned the house and cooked *mole* with red rice to welcome us. This provided a perfect way to begin my fieldwork on food ways, as this dish is made for special occasions, especially for weddings, since preparing it is time consuming and labor intensive.

My parents, my aunt and uncle, Valentina, her three daughters, her sister-in-law, and I sat around the kitchen table and began talking about our families. I explained my research to Valentina and her family. When my parents were preparing to leave, my mother kept thanking Valentina for her hospitality and also saying "*ahí se la encargo mucho por favor, me la cuida,*" meaning, "please take care of her."

Through my mother's courtesy and her delegation of responsibility for my well-being, she set up my continuous welcome from Valentina and her family. They more or less adopted me, partly because they were a nice and welcoming family, but also because they thought of me as a woman who was by herself, in a place 6 hours from her hometown, with no family to protect her. The manner in which I was received in their home also made it easier for me to be treated well by other Villachuatans families, especially if they were related to Valentina. They wanted to meet *la muchacha*, or the young girl, who was 30 years old, still single, still in school, studying in Iowa, which

meant I was close to Marshalltown and with *papeles*, or a visa, meaning I was able to go back and forth between countries. I believe all these factors contributed to the acceptance I received from the community. I was an outsider, but not completely.

While completing my fieldwork in Villachuato, I had the opportunity to observe Valentina's family. It was composed of women who were accustomed to seeing their father/husband when he visited every other year for very short periods of time. Some weekends I would go with them to Puruándiro by bus to obtain the remittances Valentina's husband sent them. I observed that every night, around 10:30 P.M., all members of the family tried to be at home in case the absent father decided to call, which he usually did. He called almost daily at the same time. I even had conversations with him over the phone, during which we talked about why I chose Villachuato for my study, I asked him about his migration story, and he asked me to have long conversations with his daughters about the importance of school and *seguir preparándose*, or continuing to study. Thus, I had the opportunity to live with a family accustomed to an absent father/husband, in which they had to find ways to stay connected and be present in each other's daily lives.

Valentina, along with her three daughters and other close relatives, helped me identify possible participants for the study. She would tell others in the community about my study and the method I was using to collect data, as well as mentioning I was staying at their place, which caused the other interviewees to be less reluctant to participate.

First contact – contact between researcher and respondent in Villachuato. On only one occasion did I contact a participant in advance by telephone to invite her to participate in my research study, and to set the date and time to meet. The other times, I just stopped by a possible interviewee's home accompanied by Valentina or one of her family members. I would inform them of my research focus and invite them to participate in a semi-structured in-depth interview regarding their food habits. I told them the interview could last from 45 to 60 minutes. Most of women who I visited agreed to participate in the study, and those who did not agree at the moment usually named some other possible participants they thought would be willing to participate and would fit my research criteria.

Throughout my fieldwork with Villachuatans, I felt that my insider/outsider researcher identity was renegotiated (Naples, 2003, p. 46), and that was very helpful when inviting possible interviewees to participate in my research. They knew that I was from one of the neighboring states and that made me worthy of their trust, but at the same time, they felt that they could share a lot of their stories with me that I could not already know of, because I was not from Villachuato. Thus, although no longer living in México at that time, I was considered an insider in the broader community because I am a Mexican citizen, speak Spanish, and I had completed research work in a town where many of their families and friends lived. However, I was still considered an outsider to the community. Villachuatans used to ask me where I was from, where my parents lived, and if I was all by myself in the community, an indication of how they perceived me. Therefore, I thought of myself as an outside researcher granted conditional insider status, based on some fixed features of my identity, such as gender, race, and cultural background (Naples, 2003, p. 48), but also through some of the work that I had achieved previously.

Marshalltown

In Marshalltown, I met Mónica, the sister of Virginia, a woman I had interviewed from Villachuato. First, I explained my research to Mónica over the phone. She let me know she was expecting my call, since Virginia had already told her about me. Virginia had also asked her to let me stay at her place while completing my fieldwork. For me, this was an illustration of the strong social capital that exists among Villachuatans, regardless of whether they are living in Villachuato or not.

In Marshalltown I had a Villachuatan man acting as a gate opener, Mónica's husband, Manuel. It was through him that I had the opportunity to meet and talk with many Villachuatan men. Most of them had attained legal status, achieving it through the SAW provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, which they commonly referred to as "*le llegó la carta y se fue con papeles al norte*," or "he/she got a letter that allowed him/her to move to the U.S. with documents". The women, on the other hand, entered under different categories of admission, often as wives and dependents of those who sponsored them. While these women related to each other, first

by being from the same town, then by kinship or friendship, or just because they knew of each other through a relative or friend, their different migration stories, ages, and current residence helped me better understand transnational extended family dynamics, how these dynamics intersect with their changing food ways, and how they look for ways to support each other in the process of becoming transnational, acting simultaneously within both Mexican and American social fields such that neither one alone (Mexican or American) is explanatorily sufficient (Richardson Bruna, 2008, p. 234).

The gate opener in Marshalltown – a male gate opener for a female researcher interviewing other women. Mónica and her husband, Manuel, both from Villachuato, invited me to stay in one of the spare rooms in their home while collecting my data. Similar to what happened in Villachuato, Mónica and Manuel acted as gate openers and introduced me to other Villachuatans living in the community. According to Manuel, he and three childhood friends were the first Villachuatans to settle in Marshalltown to work at the meatpacking plant; thus he knew a lot of the Villachuatans living there.

In Marshalltown I had a very different experience with the family who hosted my visit and acted as gate openers than in Villachuato. In this case, I saw the way Manuel interacted with Mónica, and how the activities around food and the kitchen were organized, such as which partner was responsible for doing what and when on a daily basis, since he worked the morning shift and she worked the evening shift. Also, since Mónica did not drive much at the time, Manuel made a lot of the decisions about whom to visit and when. As a result, most of the interviewees were Manuel's close relatives. Additionally, having a male as a gate opener provided me the opportunity to have more informal conversations with Villachuatan men about food and agriculture and how their food ways had changed since they started migrating to the U.S., something I did not have much opportunity to do in Villachuato.

In addition to Mónica and Manuel, I relied on a local activist group of Latinos, with whom I was familiar through my previous research assistantship work, to contact the remaining participants. While Mónica and Manuel did not introduce me, all the women who I interviewed knew each other. Often, the first question I was asked was with whom

I was staying in Marshalltown. When I mentioned Monica's family, they usually would tell me they knew them — another aspect that demonstrates the strength of their bonding social capital.

First contact – contact between researcher and respondent in Marshalltown.

In Marshalltown, the way I contacted possible participants varied from that in Villachuato. I collected my data between November 2010 and February 2011. Since I do not know how to drive, I had to rely on Manuel to drive me around town to meet the interviewees at their homes. He was very enthusiastic about my research and wanted to help me collect my data quickly. Usually when we were on our way to Marshalltown from Ames, Manuel would ask me to remind him of the participants' criteria, and then Mónica and he would start brainstorming who we could visit that weekend. Manuel believed it was not necessary to contact possible interviewees beforehand and that we would be welcomed without prior warning. For him, contacting people in advance was an unnecessary formality. As a result, I only called a few respondents in advance to ask them to participate in my research.

Manuel, Mónica, and I would visit possible participants to invite them to take part in my research. Usually, Manuel would be the first to introduce me. He would explain to our hosts that they were helping me finish my homework so I could graduate and that I had already completed part of my research in Villachuato. He added that I was staying in their home. Mónica then would explain that the interview would last about 60 minutes, and it was about food and what they used to eat when they were living in Villachuato. Then, Manuel would almost immediately say, "*y como eso es cosa de viejas, yo me voy a la sala a ver la tele, ahí las dejo que platicuen en la cocina,*" meaning, "and since this is women's stuff, I am going to the living room to watch TV, and you can stay talking in the kitchen".

Some of the women we visited agreed to participate, but others were just too surprised by my visit to trust me immediately and be willing to participate. And, while in Villachuato, stopping by at someone's home without calling in advance did not feel intrusive, in Marshalltown, women were busier and I was not very comfortable just stopping at someone's place. However, I did, and it worked out. Nevertheless, there were

three interviewees I contacted over the phone—two women I met through the Latino activist group, and Magalí, who was referred to me by one of Valentina’s daughters.

Collecting data in Marshalltown. At the beginning of my fieldwork in Marshalltown, I planned to use the same methodology I had used in Villachuato. However, I had to adapt the methodology to the life conditions of Villachuatan women. My first interview was with Mariana. When Manuel, Mónica, and I arrived at her home, her oldest daughter accompanied her, and they were caring for four of her grandchildren. When I asked them how many meals they cook each day and how often they eat together as a family, I learned they usually do not have much time to spend cooking. Weekends were the only occasion when they had meals together as a family. As my research progressed, I learned this was the case for most of the women that I interviewed in Marshalltown. I would arrive at their home during a Saturday or Sunday evening unannounced, and I then had to wait for my possible interviewee to return home from work.

The semi-structured questionnaire for the in-depth interviews I used was similar to the one I used in Villachuato, but I focused more on the changes they had experienced in their food ways while living in the U.S. At the end of the interview, I explained how I conducted my research in their hometown and that I would like them to invite me to their homes again so they could cook one of their favorite dishes for me. In all cases but one they gave me the same response—they were too busy, had too little time, or on the weekends when they were not working, they were too tired from work and wanted to spend that time with their families. As a result, I decided to rely more on the photographs that I had already taken, and I took more pictures of their kitchens as well as pictures of the content of their refrigerators, asking how often they bought or ate some of the ingredients they had in them.

An advantage of conducting this second half of the fieldwork during winter break was that I was able to have conversations about how they were celebrating Christmas, New Year’s Eve, and the *Levantamientos*. We would talk about how they had to adapt the way they celebrated some of their more important traditions now that they were living in Marshalltown.

Since I expressed interest in the way they celebrate some of their most important traditions, I was invited to two *Levantamientos*, and I even helped cook for one of them. During the *Levantamientos*, I asked for permission to take pictures. This was a good opportunity for me to have informal conversations about food and the importance of celebrating *Levantamientos* away from home.

Data Collection Methods

Home-Based Interviews

When selecting methods to use for data collection, I decided to conduct each interview at the respondent's home and to observe and pay attention to the kitchen, including how it was arranged and the appliances, as a way to contextualize the interviews without being intrusive.

The home-based interviews in Villachuato were divided into two phases—the first was the in-depth interview, and the second took place when the interviewees cooked and taught me to cook their favorite dish, and I sat at their tables to eat with them. By doing this I was able to see who was in charge of the kitchen. Some of the field notes I took focused on the kitchens of Villachuatans. I was determining the resemblance, if any, between the two locations—México and U.S.—and if the physical ways in which they have found to preserve their traditions and identity are similar. The degree of my participation when conducting the interviews in the kitchen varied from household to household. On some occasions I took notes and pictures, while at other times I asked questions for clarification. Some of the other interviewees asked me to help them with part of the cooking process. Thus, I was both an observer and participant. As a participant observer, rarely did I have the opportunity to be a complete participant (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998). I transcribed all interviews and coded them using NVivo to discover emerging themes. I used the same software to code the photos I took in their kitchens.

Interviews

The interview process was completed according to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines at Iowa State University (ISU). Participants were provided a consent

form written in Spanish that included my contact information, the scope of my research, and my commitment to keep their identity confidential. I read them the consent form before starting the interview. If they agreed to participate in the research, I asked them to sign a copy of the form for me and to keep a copy for themselves. Therefore, they would have my contact information as well as that of my adviser. All participants' names and biographical information were changed to maintain confidentiality. I decided to assign all the participants in Villachuato with names that began with the letter V and pseudonyms beginning with the letter M for those in Marshalltown.

All interviews in México were conducted in Spanish. I only conducted one interview in English in Marshalltown, due to the interviewee's preference. All Marshalltown interviews except one took place in the respondent's home, with most occurring in the kitchen, though on rare occasions, this was changed to the living room or bedroom.

The food-centered life stories were collected and tape-recorded, using semi-structured interviews focusing on experiences and memories about food and processes and places that cover all aspects of food, such as production, processing, distribution, access, consumption and waste, to see what kinds of capitals are mobilized in each of these components of the food system. Each respondent was asked about the food they grow, prepare, and eat. Their descriptions of how foods have changed since they were children helped me to understand the changes over time and by generation.

An important component of my interviews to note was that while my research initially was aimed towards one-on-one, in-depth conversations with the interviewee, I never really had the opportunity to achieve this. In Villachuato, all the interviews I conducted with the participants were in the company of other women; only Viridiana was by herself. I believe the reason for this was that I arrived at their homes unannounced and the other women—close friends or relatives—were already there most of the time. The Villachuatian women I visited would gather to watch TV and see Mexican soap operas while knitting or crocheting table cloths, baby clothes, pillow cases, or cloth napkins. I observed that these activities allowed them the opportunity to be creative. They would think about the colors or types of thread, while also learning what their friends were doing.

When I explained I was there for an interview, they would invite me to sit with them to begin our conversation. Thus, I rarely interviewed them alone. However, it was clear I was conducting an interview to only one person in the room and the others would remain silent most of the time. On a few occasions, the interviewee would ask others to confirm something they just said, ask for clarification, or be reminded about an unclear date or fact. To be around the other women was useful for my research, especially when talking about the migration stories of relatives, because the interviewee and her guests would start remembering who left first, when and with whom, helping each other recall the specifics. However, the fact that the interviewee was with others could have impacted the information they shared, as the interviewees might have been censoring themselves. They could have felt embarrassed to share certain details in the presence of family or friends.

This situation was repeated in most of the Villachuatan homes I visited in Marshalltown, with interviewees in the company of their daughters or mothers. However, most were watching television in the living room. While some of them said they still occasionally knit and crochet, I did not see any of them doing this as I had in Villachuato. In Marshalltown, I only interviewed three participants by themselves: Magdalena, Mayra, and Mónica.

Participant Observation

Participant observation supplemented the formal interviews. In Villachuato, I observed and sometimes took pictures of grocery stores, food stands, restaurants, farmers' markets, gardens, and community celebrations. Field notes were sketched out daily and developed further each night, noting carefully all the references to food and agriculture. In Marshalltown, fieldwork was conducted during the winter. Therefore, there were no farmers' markets or gardens for me to visit. However, I did accompany families to buy their groceries in local Mexican grocery stores and big chain grocery stores. Direct observation helped me to better understand what they said, what they did, and to contextualize my research findings.

Using participant observation to understand Villachuatans' food system. In Villachuato, at the end of the in-depth interview, I asked participants to invite me to their home once more to show me their favorite dish. Most agreed to participate in this second stage of the research and were happy to share their recipes with me. One woman, Viridiana, could not participate because she had to return to California, since school was about to start and she had two children in elementary school there. Viviana, from the *Hijas* cohort, did not participate either, since she lived with her parents-in-law and was not comfortable cooking for strangers in front of her mother-in-law.

After they agreed to participate, I wanted to learn about the food production and access processes, thus I went to the market with them to learn from where they purchased their ingredients, where the ingredients came from, and which ingredients were produced in their home garden (if they had one). When accompanying them to buy their groceries, I paid for all the ingredients needed to cook the dish. I took pictures of the stores with permission from the store managers or salesclerks, which gave me the opportunity to informally interview these employees and ask them about the origin of the ingredients; and therefore I was better able to understand the food distribution process.

When all ingredients for their favorite dish had been obtained, we returned to their homes so they could teach me how to prepare the dish, thus I had an opportunity to learn about the food processing process. While they were cooking, I asked them when and from whom they learned to cook this dish, from where they usually got the ingredients, and if they cooked it for any particular occasion or if it was an everyday meal. When using ingredients we did not purchase at the grocery store, I asked them to let me take a picture of it, and then I would inquire about when and where they got it. By doing this, I had the opportunity to learn about food and herbs grown in their backyards, which were usual ingredients in their meals. Occasionally, I had the opportunity to learn about ingredients shared with them by relatives. We would sit and eat together while continuing the conversation about food, and from this I learned about the food consumption process. When we were done eating, I would try to help them clean the kitchen, which I was rarely allowed to do since I was their guest, but in volunteering to help I was trying to learn about their waste management.

Photographs and Discussions with Respondents

Photos I took during the course of the interviews provided another method of recording information, checking field data, and providing conclusions (Basil, 2011, p. 249). The participants became markedly self-conscious at times. They wanted to explain and justify themselves, especially when informants could “see familiar data in unfamiliar ways” (McCracken, 1988, p. 24). Taking pictures of each step in the preparation of family meals was effective to help the interviewees be mindful of the processes of gathering food, cooking and eating. Each new photo provided an opportunity to explain each step. Sometimes they asked me to take particular photos of what they thought was important for others to know about what they cooked and the way they cooked it.

I had to adapt this methodology for the second half of my fieldwork after determining time was a scarce resource for Villachuatan women living in Marshalltown. I adjusted to these changing conditions, an advantage of the reflexivity and flexibility of my methodology (Mahler & Pessar, 2006). Thus, I asked them to open their refrigerators and kitchen cabinets to show me the ingredients they used to cook, and to talk about the meals that they had cooked that day.

The Sample

When designing my research strategy, I looked for methods through which I could compare, describe, and understand the ways in which Villachuatan women living in Villachuato and in Marshalltown share their stories about the food they grow, cook and share, in order to learn about how they resist the conventional and industrial food system in each of its six components: production, processing, distribution, access, consumption, and waste; and how they look for ways to support each other in their status as transmigrants. This strategy was advantageous because it allowed me to understand the relationships that existed among Villachuatans who had homes in both communities and to recognize their mobility and agency across borders (Marcus, 1995).

For this multi-sited participant observation fieldwork study I used a purposive snowball sampling procedure, through which “participants were deliberately selected for

the important information they could provide that could not be obtained as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 1997, p. 87).

Influenced by a typology developed by Michael Barajas (2009) and using a transnationalism over the life course approach (Lauer & Wong, 2010) I divided the participants into three cohorts consisting of 1) *Hijas*, women aged 18 to 29 years, 2) *Madres*, women aged 30 to 59 years, and finally 3) *Abuelitas*, women aged 60 and older.

In both communities I insured inclusion of older women. In the case of Villachuato, I interviewed *Abuelitas* who somehow had been excluded from the migration experience and had no opportunity to leave their hometown, in spite of their desire to do so and/or those who had no relatives supporting them through remittances at the time of the interview. The older group of women in Villachuato was a source of information regarding the food ways of those least touched by transnationalism. The main purpose for including them was to draw attention to what is unseen, under theorized, and excluded in the production of knowledge about globalization (Barajas, 2009; Mohanty, 2003).

In the case of the *Abuelitas* I had the opportunity to interview in Marshalltown, I tried to include women who were not considering returning to Villachuato any time soon because either their migratory status or financial situation was preventing them from returning.

Stratification by Different Migration Trajectories

The life course framework emphasizes the historically unique cultural and contextual forces with which individuals interact as they live through life stages, such as childhood or parenting (White and Klein, 2002 as cited in Lauer & Wong, 2010, p. 1055). Thus, I tried to include migration stories, class, and age cohorts that were as varied as possible in order to understand how the persistent transmigration had affected their food habits. The age of migration to the U.S. was used to analyze the change in eating habits from generation to generation and the impact the number of years they had lived in the U.S. had on their food habits, and this analysis was prompted by the fact that some previous studies have found that the changes Mexicans made to their diets were based on

the length of stay in the U.S. (McArthur, Anguiano, & Nocetti, 2001; Norman, Castro, Albright, & King, 2004; Romero-Gwynn & Gwynn, 1997).

In Villachuato, the gate openers helped me identify possible participants who met the following criteria: 1) female, 2) a variety of ages, and 3) different migration histories. The migration histories I was seeking were 1) women who had never migrated to the U.S. and had no relatives living there, or at the time of the interview had no one sending remittances; 2) those who had never migrated, but were partially or totally dependent on remittances received; 3) women who go back and forth from Villachuato to Marshalltown; and finally 4) women who had been in Marshalltown, but were not expecting to return there anytime soon, or who considered themselves to be back in Villachuato permanently (see Figure 4.1).

In Marshalltown, the gate openers helped me identify possible participants based on the following criteria: 1) female, 2) considered herself Villachuatan or born in Villachuato, 3) migrated to the U.S. at varying ages, and 4) had different migration stories. Also, for Villachuatan participants living in Marshalltown, I was looking for migration stories from 1) women who could visit Villachuato, 2) those who had little or no chance to return to their hometown, due to financial or migratory reasons, and, 3) women who were born in or had spent most of their lives in the U.S. These criteria would insure different lengths of U.S. residence for my sample.

Since this was a purposive snowball sampling based on gender, age, migration history, and current residence, most of the women I interviewed were related to one another, with some being immediate family, while others were more distantly related but had known each other for years. They were a transnational extended family, in which the members had various residential statuses—U.S.-born citizens, naturalized citizens, documented residents, or undocumented residents. Furthermore, some of those who were documented had migrated to the U.S. as undocumented and therefore had experienced both lives—undocumented and later, documented.

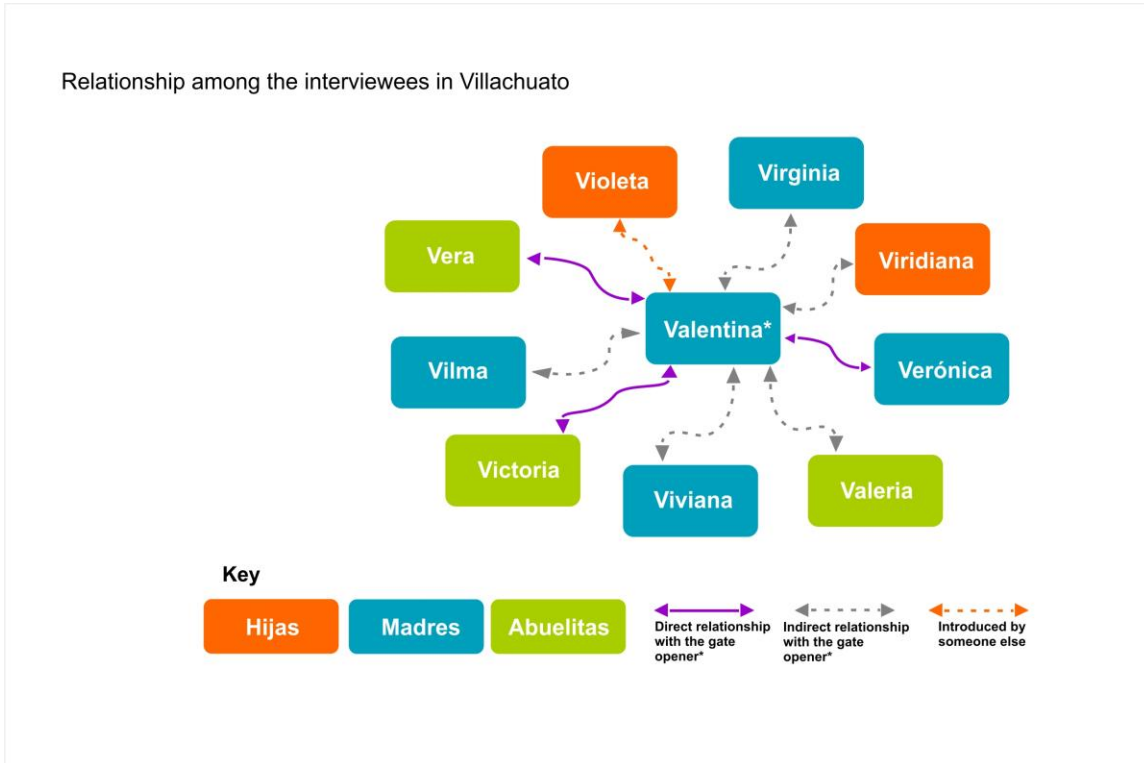


Figure 4.1. Relationship among the interviewees in Villachuato

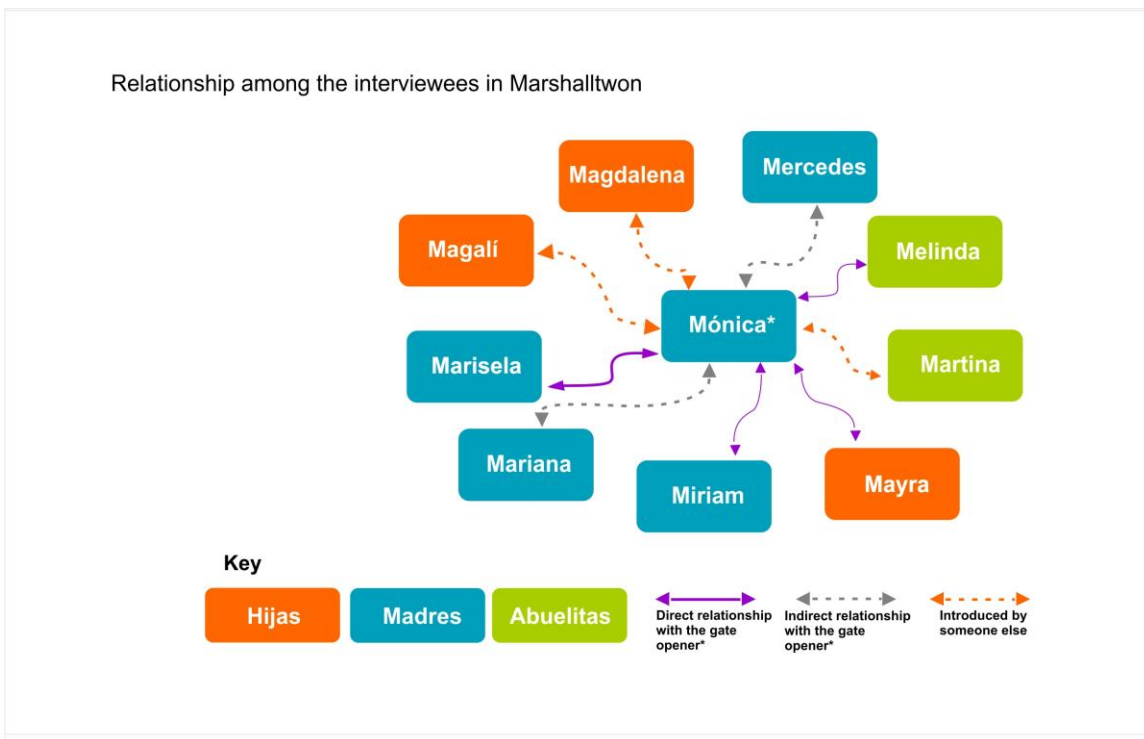


Figure 4.2. Relationship among the interviewees in Marshalltown

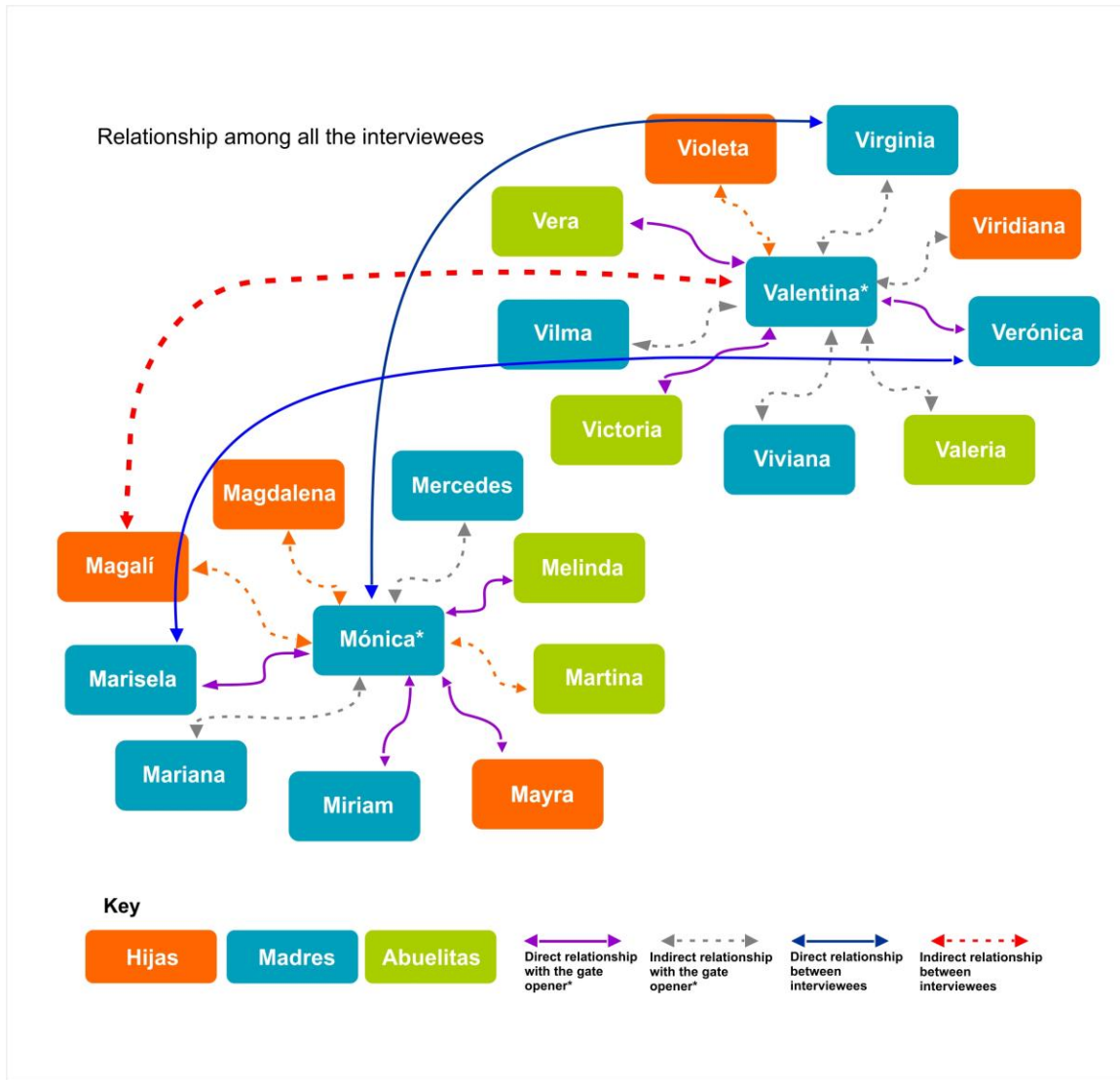


Figure 4.3. Relationship among all the participants in the research

The Three Cohorts in the Two Communities

Abuelitas in Villachuato

I was inspired by the work of Mohanty (2003) and Barajas (2009), who proposed including older women excluded from the migration experience. By incorporating the *Abuelitas*, it was possible to have as a source of information those who were touched least by transnationalism. Therefore, I decided to begin my fieldwork in Villachuato by interviewing *Abuelitas*, and Valentina suggested I interview Victoria, her mother, Vera, her aunt, and finally, Valeria, her neighbor, who had just turned 102 years old.

Vera and Valeria had no relatives in the U.S., had never been there, and at the time of the interview were not receiving any kind of remittances. Both were landless and relied heavily on close relatives for access to food. Victoria, on the other hand, had four daughters and a son in the U.S. at the time that we spoke. All of her children were sending remittances to her on a monthly basis. She had a visa to travel to the U.S. and had been to Nebraska twice to visit one of her daughters.

Madres in Villachuato

The *Madres* cohort was the group with the most varied migration stories. For this cohort, Valentina introduced me to Verónica, her brother-in-law's wife. She and her husband lived in the same *solar* as Valentina. She had never migrated nor visited the U.S., but she was receiving remittances from two sons and a daughter. Her sister was Marisela, a participant from Marshalltown.

Vilma was Valentina's neighbor. According to her, one of her sons, along with Manuel, Mónica's husband and one of the gate openers in Marshalltown, was among the first Villachuatans to settle in Marshalltown. She had seven daughters and five sons, all of whom were living in the U.S. Vilma had been to Marshalltown once, crossing the border without documents, but she now considered herself to be back in Villachuato permanently.

Virginia was the sister of one of Valentina's brothers-in-law. She had never been in the U.S. but was receiving remittances from a sister and two brothers. Virginia and Victorina were sisters of Mónica, the participant who acted as the gate opener for my fieldwork in Marshalltown.

Viviana, one of Valentina's closest friends, lived in California and Des Moines, Iowa. She and her entire family had visas and were currently residing in California during classes, but returned to Villachuato during school breaks.

Hijas in Villachuato

Viridiana, one of Valentina's daughter's friends from middle school, had never been to the U.S. and was not receiving remittances at the time of the interview. She was married and had a 1-year-old son.

Violeta was the only interviewee who was not introduced to me by Valentina, but rather by the female middle school teacher in Villachuato. However, at Valentina's house some construction work was being done, and Violeta was a sister of one of the workers. Violeta had never been to the U.S. and at the time of the interview, she was not receiving remittances, though her husband had just returned from Des Moines, Iowa a month prior. She had a son in preschool and a 1-year-old daughter.

Abuelitas in Marshalltown

Melinda was the first *Abuelita* I interviewed in the U.S. She went to Marshalltown in 2002 to reunite with her sons who were already there. She did not have proper documentation to work in the U.S. She lived with one of her sons and worked at home as a *sobadora*, a self-taught massage therapist.

Martina was referred to me through the local activist group of Latinos in Marshalltown, where one of her daughters was a member, but she also knew Mónica and Manuel. When I told her their last name, she said they had relatives in common. Martina received her visa in 2002 through one of her daughters, and spent part of the year in Marshalltown and the remainder in Mexicali with her other two sons.

Madres in Marshalltown

Marisela arrived from Villachuato at the end of 1991. Since she did not have the proper documents to work in the U.S., she rarely left home, but she contributed to the family income by baby-sitting children of her relatives. She is Verónica's sister. Her first son was born in Villachuato and is therefore undocumented. Her other two sons and daughter were born in Marshalltown.

Miriam is Mónica's brother-in-law's wife. She arrived in Marshalltown in 1992, crossing the border with her eight children to reunite with her husband, a meatpacking worker. She received her visa a couple years ago and visited Villachuato after a 17-year absence. Upon receiving the visa, she immediately applied for jobs, and was hired as a custodian at the casino close to Marshalltown.

Mercedes was born in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, while her parents were harvesting crops there. Immediately after the season was finished, she and her parents went back to

Villachuato. She came to Marshalltown in 1999 after her husband arranged the documents for her and their children. She and her husband both work at the meatpacking plant, but on different shifts. Mónica introduced her to me, since they were childhood friends in Villachuato.

Mariana arrived in Marshalltown in 1989. During her first 9 years of residence in the U.S., she did not have the proper documents to work; yet she worked at the meatpacking plant. She has been working there for over 20 years. As soon as she received her visa, she began visiting Villachuato every other year for *La Fiesta*. However, since the drug cartel problems have started, she has discontinued these visits.

Hijas in Marshalltown

I met Magalí through one of Valentina's daughters. I contacted her first by telephone to set a date and a time to meet. She was born in California, but her stepfather was born in Villachuato. She has visited Villachuato four times to celebrate La Fiesta. She was single.

Magdalena was part of the local activist group of Latinos. I met her on the day of a local election in the Democratic Party office, where she was a volunteer. Her job was to accompany Latinos who did not know English to vote. She was born in California, but had lived in Marshalltown since she was 1 year old. Both of her parents were from Villachuato. She has visited Villachuato four times, all of them for *La Fiesta*. She was also single, but engaged to her high school sweetheart.

Mayra was the only *Nieta* Mónica introduced to me. She was married to one of Manuel's nephews. She came to Marshalltown when she was 14 years old, and was 23 years old at the time of the interview. She does not have the proper documents to work in the U.S. Therefore, she has not returned to Villachuato since she left in 2003.

CHAPTER 5. CELEBRATIONS

Este año que pasó yo estaba apurada, yo dije ay, ya se va a llegar la fiesta y dije, ay, ¿qué iré a hacer yo?, sin estreno, y sin centavos [para comprar estreno]. Pues ya me andaba por eso, en la madrugada me puse mala, y fui al doctorcito que esta aquí, entonces dice el doctor, ay dice, anda muy alta de la presión, ¿por qué?, cuidado con eso, me dice, anda muy alta. Pues si ando muy alto, bájemela [risas de todas]. Pues, que me la podía bajar tú. Duro dos, tres días y no, no me la podía controlar.

This last year I was worried, I told myself, “*La Fiesta* is almost here, and what I am going to do? I do not have *estreno* nor the money to buy new clothes.” Well, I was so worried about it, that that night I got sick, and went to the doctor that is here, and then, the doctor said to me, “You have high blood pressure, why? Be careful with that, because it is too high.” And I told him, “Well, if it is too high, make it go down.” (laughs) Well, he could not (stabilize her blood pressure). I was like that for 2 or 3 days, and I could not get better.

- Vera, Abuelitas cohort

Food ways are a source of both public and private identity. Public celebrations often include food and drink as an integral part, thus engaging the senses of taste and smell as part of public reality and memory. In this chapter, I describe and analyze using the Community Capital Framework (CCF) two of the most important celebrations for Villachuatans—*La Fiesta* and *Los Levantamientos*—which I had the opportunity to observe and participate in Villachuatans, México and Marshalltown, Iowa, respectively. These two events are highly related to food and are important for Villachuatans because the preparation and consumption of ritual meals play a crucial role in shaping their identity as Villachuatans, regardless of their current residence (Gasparetti, 2009, p. 2).

The cultural meaning of food becomes stronger and is amplified through the familial, collective, and communitarian Villachuatán rituals. Their repetition impacts the Villachuatans' sense of belonging. By looking at food and food ways within the ceremonial setting, we are able to see a holistic development of transnational identities. The result is a powerful ritual of self-identification and social cohesion (Gasparetti, 2009, p. 11). Thus, Villachuatans' eating practices help reproduce as well as construct their identity (Jones, 2007, p. 130). In turn, their identity and alimentary symbolism significantly affect Villachuatans' food choices (Jones, 2007, p. 130).

Community and Family Celebrations

During my stay in Villachuato, I learned about the variety of celebrations that helped reinforce a sense of collective identity. Villachuatans talked about the celebrations surrounding *quince años*, christenings, and weddings. Some of these celebrations occur throughout the western world (New Year's Eve, Christmas, Mother's Day, weddings, and christenings), Latin America (*quinceañera*, *Día de los Muertos*), or México (Independence Day, La Virgen de Guadalupe). Others are unique to Villachuato (*La Fiesta*, *Los Levantamientos*, and *La Subida al Cerro*).

The events that I had the opportunity to witness and participate in were *La Fiesta* in Villachuato and the *Levantamientos* in Marshalltown. *La Fiesta* is the town's biggest celebration, and it is also when the *hijos ausentes*, or absent sons and daughters, return to their hometown to reunite with relatives and friends, and to celebrate together.

La Fiesta

La Fiesta starts on Palm Sunday and ends the Monday following Easter. The most important celebrations are held on Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday, and the following Monday. However, the food stands remain in the plaza and the rodeo lasts until the weekend after Easter, a total of 15 days. *La Fiesta* is on the feast day of *El Señor de la Salud*, the holy patron of Villachuato. Regardless of their current residence, Villachuatans celebrate *La Fiesta* as part of being Villachuatán.

On the morning of the Holy Saturday, it is not easy to walk around town, as the children of Villachuato participate in the tradition of pouring water on each other. This

practice stems from a Catholic tradition—the water represents the tears of sorrow that María, the mother of Jesus, cried over her dead son. While mainly children engage in this activity, I also saw young adults pour buckets of water over children who dared to walk down the streets.

By 4:00 P.M., Villachuatans are no longer afraid to walk around town. Our group, which consisted of my mother, father, aunt, and uncle, Dr. Katherine R. Bruna, the married couple hosting our visit, and myself, drove to see *Las Mojigangas*. *Las Mojigangas* are two giant puppet figures that walked down the main road from the highway to the plaza, dancing to the rhythm of several bands, while adult Villachuatans poured beer on each other. No one I asked seemed to know the meaning of this custom, but they all agreed that those participating in it had a lot of fun.

On the day of the festival, there was no place to park, as all the main streets, which were deserted during the previous day, were filled with parked cars. When I asked about the number of cars and people in the community, I was told it was the only time of the year when something like this happened. When I returned to Villachuato for my fieldwork later, I realized the truth of this statement. The town was always calm, and cars rarely traveled the streets. Buses to Angamacutiro, also known as San Francisco, and Puruándiro were the most common vehicles on the streets.

For *La Fiesta*, Villachuato and its streets are flooded with visitors, with Villachuatans and their visitors beginning their day early. They gather in the homes of relatives who live close to where *Las Mojigangas* pass. We visited a family who lived three blocks from the main street. Vicenta⁴ and her husband had a *casa llena* (full house). Their two sons, a son-in-law, and some grandchildren had come by car from Marshalltown to celebrate. Everyone in the house was getting ready to go to see *Las Mojigangas*, with women and men examining themselves in the mirror one final time before going to the plaza. Wearing new clothes is an important part of this celebration, which Villachuatans commonly referred to as *el estreno*, or wearing an outfit for the first time.

⁴ Vicenta was one of the main contacts for Dr. Bruna in Villachuato, and we had discussed the possibility of me staying with her family during the summer to complete my fieldwork. However, that changed when she decided to spend the summer in Marshalltown, visiting one of her daughters. This was something that she used to do quite often because she had documents to travel back and forth, as one of her daughters was a naturalized U.S. citizen.

The number of Villachuatans in town for *La Fiesta*'s main celebration is a strong indication of the importance of cultural capital for Villachuatans. "Cultural capital includes the values and symbols reflected in clothing, music, machines, art, languages, and customs" (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 55). With entire families returning to their hometown to celebrate *La Fiesta*, they are committing to preserving their cultural capital. However, with their new transmigrant reality, their cultural capital is being influenced by what they have learned and experienced in Marshalltown, as well as by the type of event they desire to recreate based on what they miss when they are away from home.

Magali's mother, who is from Durango but married to a Villachuatan man and living in Marshalltown, explained this well when she said:

Porque le voy a ser honesta, nosotros, -cuando yo me case con mi esposo, mis niñas [las mayores] son de una pareja anterior-, entonces nos tuvimos que adaptar a como era la vida de ellos en Villachuato, y como era lo de ellos aquí (Villachuatences en Marshalltown)... porque nosotros no estábamos impuestos a eso, en la vida de nosotros era si trabajar, pero era, como le diré, no era tanta fiesta, se nos hacía raro, en como un pueblo es tan pequeño, pero a la misma vez tan grande. Because, I am going to be honest with you; when I got married to my now husband—my two older daughters are from a previous partner—then we had to adapt to the life of Villachuatans there in Villachuato and in here [Marshalltown]... because we were not exposed to that. Our life was, yeah, to work, but without that many parties. It was weird to us, in a town so small, but at the same time so big [when celebrating parties].

El Estreno

Vera, one of the *Abuelitas*, told me that before the last *Fiesta* started she was feeling a little bit down, stating:

Este año que pasó yo estaba apurada, yo dije ay, ya se va a llegar la fiesta y dije, ay, ¿qué iré a hacer yo?, sin estreno, y sin centavos [para comprar estreno]. Pues ya me andaba por eso, en la madrugada me puse mala, y fui al doctorcito que esta aquí, entonces dice el doctor, ay dice, anda muy alta de la presión, ¿por qué?, cuidado con eso, me dice, anda muy alta. Pues si ando muy alto, bájemela [risas de todas]. Pues que me la podía bajar tu. Duro dos, tres días y no, no me la podía controlar. This last year I was worried, I told myself, "La Fiesta is almost here, and what I am going to do? I do not have estreno nor the money to buy new clothes." Well, I was so worried about it, that that night I got sick, and went to the doctor that is here, and then, the doctor said to me, "You have high blood pressure, why? Be careful with that, because it is too high." And I told him, "Well, if it is too high, make it go down." (laughs) Well, he could not (stabilize her blood pressure). I was like that for 2 or 3 days, and I could not get better.

According to Valentina and her family, *el estreno* was initiated when the *Hacienda* was still flourishing. Every year, the *hacendado*, in anticipation of Easter and its association with the biggest community celebration, gave workers *manta*, a rough-textured cotton fabric so they would sew new clothes.

In Villachuato today, things have changed. There is no *hacendado* to give *manta* to workers, but Villachuatans still carry on the tradition of wearing a new outfit for *La Fiesta*. Some save money for weeks to go to Moroleón, a city a short bus ride from Villachuato famous for its garment factories. However, there are some Villachuatans who do not need to rely on savings. Magalí's mother explained that besides the money they give to the *mayordomo* to help celebrate *La Fiesta*, Villachuatans in Marshalltown also send around \$200 U.S. to her mother-in-law each year, so that she, her husband, and a daughter who still lives with them have money to buy new clothes. Magalí's mother, who is not from Villachuato, had arguments with her husband about the gift. She does not feel they should keep sending money to her parents-in-law just for the *estreno*. However, her husband tried to explain to her that he has always helped support his parents and did not think that they could stop now. When I asked Valentina about those families without savings or someone sending remittances, she explained that most would borrow money from a friend or a relative just to be able to wear a new outfit during *La Fiesta*.

El Estreno is a clear example of how Villachuatans, regardless of their place of residence “pass on an understanding of society, speech, dress and ways of being, -cultural capital- that in turn affect the choices their children [or in Magalí's case, family members] make” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 55). “Legacy stands at the intersection of what parents have achieved in their own lives relative to these goals and what parents see as possible and desirable for their children to achieve” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 55). Through my research I learned that although legacy in Villachuato is usually passed on by parents to their children, transmigrant children who send money to their parents still living in their hometown are the ones helping to organize and celebrate their community's traditions. Thus, cultural continuity in the Villachuatan transnational community not only comes from parents, but also from their transmigrant children through their remittances,

which are a form of financial capital, as well as from the importance that they give to cultural capital.

The *Mayordomos* and Money from Marshalltown to Villachuato for *La Fiesta* Celebration

Relatives in Marshalltown contribute in at least two ways for *La Fiesta*. One is through self-organized fundraising. Villachuatans select a total of six to seven *mayordomos*, or stewards, every October. This is based on the number of Villachuatans living in the U.S.—two *mayordomos* are selected in Marshalltown and two in Lexington, Nebraska—as well as two or three in Villachuato. When I asked Manuel if there were any *mayordomos* selected in Merced, California, a city where many Villachuatans used to live in the 1980s, he said, not anymore, since “*no queda nadie allá ya*,” “there is no one left there anymore.” These men—and they are always men—have the responsibility of collecting money for *La Fiesta*. *Mayordomos* are selected by past *mayordomos* who nominate their replacements and submit the names to the Catholic Church in Villachuato. The Catholic Church in Villachuato then recognizes them as *mayordomos*, and once approved, these six or seven start working together along with the Catholic Church and the *encargado del orden*, peace officer, to organize *La Fiesta* for the next year.

When I interviewed the local Catholic priest in Villachuato, I asked him how many of the *mayordomos* are usually men and how many are women. He replied that all have been men. However, when I asked him how many of the people who help organize the activities and community celebrations around *La Fiesta* are men, he answered that around 80% of the volunteers are women and the other 20% are men.

The two *mayordomos* in Marshalltown agree on who will visit each household in Marshalltown to collect money, and they also collect money in neighboring communities where they know other Villachuatans live. Other places Marshalltown *mayordomos* visit to collect money for *La Fiesta* are Des Moines, Waterloo, Tama, Osceola, Iowa City, and, in recent years they have been traveling to Albert Lea, Minnesota, a meatpacking city located 2 hours and 40 minutes from Marshalltown.

In Marshalltown, *mayordomos* visit each Villachuatan household to ask for donations for the celebration of *El Señor de la Salud*. Each family donates accordingly,

and the *mayordomo* provides a receipt that states the name of family, the amount donated, and the date, as a way to maintain the transparency of the events.

The amount Villachuatán families donate for *La Fiesta* ostensibly must be kept secret, so that families feel comfortable about donating, regardless of the amount of money they give. However, Magalí and her mother told me this is usually not the case. When the fundraising for *La Fiesta* is finished, people at the meatpacking plant start talking about who gave how much. This information affects Villachuatans in two ways. People praise someone who donates a large sum of money to *La Fiesta* for his generosity. However, this often creates a rivalry among Villachuatans, since others wonder why that family donated so much money. For instance, are they trying show they make more money than the other families? And when the amount given is judged too small, then people question why that family did not donate as much as others. The fact that this information is leaked to other Villachuatans creates discomfort and a sense of competition that permeates for the remainder of the year until the fundraising starts again.

Duties of the *Mayordomos*

Besides collecting money from families, *mayordomos* in Villachuato also visit *campesinos*, who planted corn, wheat, and sorghum, to collect for *La Fiesta*. These collected grains are sold, and all the money is kept for the celebrations. In this particular case, natural capital, in the form of the grains, is transformed into financial capital, which in turn is used to maintain their cultural capital, *La Fiesta*. The goal is not only to maintain the celebration, but also to make it bigger than the previous year's *Fiesta*.

Besides collecting money for *La Fiesta*, *mayordomos* have a long list of duties to fulfill. As a result, some resign from their jobs or ask for a month of vacation to return to Villachuato and coordinate the efforts for *La Fiesta*. The main events of *La Fiesta* are held during Easter weekend (Saturday, Sunday, and Monday), and for these 3 days, the *mayordomos* must oversee the provision of free food given to the community during lunchtime, to members of the musical bands, and to the priest and visiting priests.

Traditional meals cooked for these 3 days are goat *birria*, turkey *mole*, red rice, and *carnitas*. *Mayordomos* are in charge of buying the ingredients, finding people to prepare the food, and finding locations to offer the food. Wholesale food ingredients and

the chicken for the *mole* are bought in Puruándiro; hogs and goats are bought from local farmers. Villachuatans who like to volunteer for *La Fiesta* cook the meals, and this cooking is a gendered process. Women are asked to cook the goat *birria*, turkey *mole*, and the red rice, while the men cook the *carnitas*, since hogs are bigger and heavier, and *carnitas* are cooked in a gigantic copper pot that needs to be constantly stirred. In total, about 15 goats and four or five hogs are cooked during these 3 days. The *tortillas* are made at the local *tortillerías*, stores that sell *tortillas*. However, *mayordomos* request they be made from *nixtamal* (hominy that is locally grown) only and not contain any *maseca* (instant corn masa flour) commonly used by *tortillerías*, either by itself or by mixing it with some *nixtamal*. Food cooked and served in *La Fiesta* plays a central role in reproducing Villachuatan religious identity and community; when transmigrant Villachuatan women get together to prepare food and eat together, they are producing a sense of community and reinforcing their transnational identity within a religious context, and this provides them power for cultural continuity (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 1999, p. 590).

There are two different places where these free foods are served. The first is the churchyard, where only the priest, his relatives, and other visiting priests eat. The second location is usually in the backyard of one of the *mayordomos*. This one is for the members of the musical bands and is also open to the community in general.

Other duties of the *mayordomos* are to hire the bands for the free local dance held at the town plaza during Easter weekend celebrations and to rent the furniture and buy the plastic ware for the community lunches. One of the most important responsibilities of the *mayordomos* is to stage a representation of Christ rising from the dead. This is seen by other Villachuatans as one of the highest honors a community member can receive. They lift a life sized, hand crafted statue of *El Señor de la Salud* high upon the altar.

***La Fiesta* and its Food**

Money sent by Villachuatans living in Marshalltown allows Villachuato to celebrate *La Fiesta* abundantly. On Palm Sunday when *La Fiesta* starts, there are two or three *castillos*, elaborate fireworks displays. From the following Monday to Good Friday there is one *castillo* nightly. While I grew up attending similar celebrations in México, I was surprised by the quality, exuberance, and number of the *castillos* at *La Fiesta*. On

Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday, and the following Monday, two or three more *castillos* are burned. At the end of the program, some of these *castillos* display the surname of a Villachuatan family in bright colors. This indicates that one family donated an entire *castillo* for the evening.

The freshly cleaned Catholic Church is adorned with hundreds of fresh flowers, and its plaza is decorated with colored paper. One of the rooms in the old *Hacienda* is the site of a small carnival. Small vendors sell kitchen appliances, DVDs, and clothes at the carnival, the plaza, and in some of the main streets.

There are plenty of foods and drinks available during the two-week celebration, including a large variety of snacks sold at stands operated by vendors from both inside and outside the community. Drinks available include a sort of cocktail in little jars of clay, commonly known as *jarritos*, as well as sodas and *agua frescas* (fruit drinks). The food stands are more varied than the drinks stands, with some selling fresh peeled fruits, like melon, pineapple, watermelon, mango, cucumbers, coconuts, and *jicama*, sprinkled with salt, chili powder, and fresh lime juice, in small plastic bags. Others sell a large variety of Mexican candy commonly sold at the fairs, like roasted peanuts, sugared almonds, raisins, dried figs, mixed nuts, caramel apples, and *tejocotes*. Some of these candies are handmade by the street vendors at the front of their stands, allowing Villachuatans to see that the candies are freshly made, but others are industrial in origin.

Some of the other food stands prepare snacks to sell in self-made carts. Two common snacks sold at *La Fiesta* are corn on the cob and *guasanas*. The corn can be eaten without seasonings or sprinkled with salt, lemon, and chili pepper, or it can become *esquites*, or corn on the cob smeared with sour cream and sprinkled with dry granular cheese, salt, lemon, and chili powder. *Guasanas* are just-harvested chickpeas in their seedpod, steamed, and sprinkled with salt. Hamburgers, hot dogs, ice cream, freshly made potato chips, and freshly cooked hot cakes are also available. Finally, some food stands sell dinner, providing tables and chairs so people can comfortably sit to eat their *tacos*, *tortas*, and steak.

When I asked Viridiana from the *Hijas* cohort why she liked *La Fiesta*, she responded, “*pues, porque [carcajadas] que no cocino ese día y me divierto mucho*; well, because [laughs out loud] I do not cook that day, and have a lot fun.”

Manuel commented that every time he has the opportunity to go to *La Fiesta*, he likes to have *enchiladas* for dinner, almost daily. He said, “*allá las enchiladas las hallo más buenas*; there [in Villachuato] the *enchiladas* [sold at *La Fiesta*] are tastier.” Familiar food helps Manuel feel at home in Villachuato, even though he has been living in Marshalltown for more than 20 years. And eating *enchiladas* in Marshalltown eases the pain Manuel feels due to having to consider Marshalltown, where his children and wife live now, his new home. Familiar food is, then, a tool for resistance, a medium to ease the transition as he has settled in Marshalltown, his newly adopted home (Haiming et al., 2009).

Magdalena from the *Hijas* cohort, who was born in La Merced, California, and has lived in Marshalltown since she was 1 year old, has visited Villachuato on four different occasions, each time to celebrate *La Fiesta*. When I asked her about the food, she replied:

I feel like during *La Fiesta* there is food everywhere and there is, like, a lady on the corner that will sell food like a half block away from where we live, like she lived there and everything and... people would go buy food from her. It wasn't like a restaurant, you just take your plate and they give it to you full of food. That's where we would go and usually get in trouble for going. My aunt would be like, “I could make that for you,” or something, but I love *tortas*. I love *tortas* down there. I do not know. I do not know why; I just think that they are, like, amazing from there.

While some of the food sold at *La Fiesta* has an industrial origin, other items, like the *tortas* to which Magdalena referred, are completely homemade. Additionally, some of the best selling snacks are seasonal fruits and grains that are grown in the community; in this particular case, natural capital transforms into cultural capital. Thus, Villachuatans' eating practices during *La Fiesta* are essential for their cultural continuity by helping to reproduce as well as construct their transmigrant identity (Jones, 2007, p. 130).

Alcoholic Drinks and *La Fiesta*

There are street vendors everywhere with wheelbarrows full of ice and beer cans. You can buy beer and drink it as is, or you can sprinkle the can with salt, chili peppers, and lime juice. Some of the beer Villachuatans buy is to drink, but some is purchased in order to pour it on those walking with *Las Mojigangas*.

The entire town gets excited about the celebration, with the young and the old participating. After *Las Mogijangas*, mass begins in the packed cathedral of the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, other Villachuatans wander around the plaza, buying snacks and more alcohol.

When I talked with the *encargado del orden* about the beer sold at *La Fiesta*, he explained to me that every year, they get together with the main Mexican breweries and identify which ones offer them a better deal. Based on the amount of beer that is purchased, both to be consumed and to be poured on one another, this is a very profitable contract, which allows local authorities to look for good deals. However, what this means for the larger celebration is that only that brand of beer will be sold at the main community events. In the particular case of beer and *La Fiesta*, a product of the industrial food system is used to maintain one of the community's largest celebrations.

The Celebration of *La Fiesta* for Mónica

I asked Mónica if she had attended one of the free lunches organized by the *mayordomos*. She said she never had, because she and her family usually had relatives visiting during Easter weekend for *La Fiesta*. Her relatives lived in Irapuato, a city in the neighboring state of Guanajuato, an hour and 15 minutes from Villachuato, and they usually arrive during the evening of Good Friday and leave on Monday morning. To welcome them, Mónica and her two sisters still living in Villachuato (one is Virginia, a participant in this study), cook two goats in *birria*, or six chickens in *mole*, accompanied by red rice and a fruit drink usually made from fresh pineapple or strawberries.

When cooking *mole*, Mónica and her sisters buy the chickens in Puruándiro, since they are less expensive there. If they are making goat *birria*, they arrange to buy a goat in advance from a local farmer. The goat is killed by one of Mónica's brothers and is washed and prepared by her sister, Virginia.

How Villachuatans in Marshalltown Celebrate *La Fiesta*

Villachuatans in Marshalltown have maintained ties to their hometown through their continuing exchange of resources, information, and people across borders. These networks have helped in the social construction of a transnational community (Alicia,

1997, p. 598). The ways in which Villachuatans living in Marshalltown celebrate *La Fiesta* helps them maintain identification with their hometown and connect with relatives still living there (Alicea, 1997, p. 598).

One of these practices is the reenactment of *Las Mojigangas* in two of the local bars owned by Villachuatans. They celebrate this on Holy Saturday night with live music. As the evening advances, they pour beer on each other like they do in Villachuato. The second way they celebrate is by viewing videocassettes recorded during Easter weekend in Villachuato and edited by semi-professional video production companies located in the area. These videocassettes are sold to Villachuatans. As soon as they are available after *La Fiesta*, Mónica's sister Virginia sends her the collection of these recordings, which were in VHS format until 2011, when the entrepreneur started recording in DVD format. Mónica's 3-year-old son watches the videos all the time, every day. Since I was staying at their place, he invited me to watch the DVDs with him, more than once a day, every day. These videos are divided into the different events held during the weekend, including the *castillo* and fireworks, the rodeo, and the main musical event of *La Fiesta*, a community dance that takes place right after the rodeo. In between these events, there are small and informal interviews of some of the participants in these celebrations. They send greetings to family and friends in the U.S., and invite them to attend *La Fiesta* the next year, since it is a lot of fun.

Mónica has videos of *La Fiesta* for the three years that she has not been able to attend. But her collection is incomplete, as she has loaned some of the videos to some Villachuatan friends who also wanted to view them. By sharing these digital resources and information by regular mail, Villachuatans in Marshalltown are recreating one of their most important celebrations with the help of their relatives in the sending community.

Final Thoughts about *La Fiesta*

La Fiesta is the biggest annual community event in Villachuato. This celebration brings those who are away from Villachuato home to be with their families. This event happens on the scale it does, thanks to the efforts of Villachuatans living in the U.S. and México. Villachuatans in Marshalltown help to provide a bigger fiesta every year by self-

organizing to raise money. In Villachuato, *mayordomos*, local authorities, and the Catholic Church try to organize a bigger celebration annually. Street foods, both local and industrial in origin, are an important part of the celebration.

La Fiesta is celebrated simultaneously in Villachuato and Marshalltown. However, the conditions under which it is held vary greatly between the two towns. In Villachuato, *La Fiesta* is celebrated in a more elaborate manner every year, something that would not be possible without the financial resources sent by Villachuatans living in Marshalltown. This festivity in Villachuato is held in the main plaza and continues during the day and night for 15 days, starting on Palm Sunday and ending on the Monday after Easter. Women and men, young and old participate in the celebrations, most of which are free for the public.

The commemoration in Marshalltown, while recreating the main activities, differs greatly in size, visibility, and the time of day it is held. *La Fiesta* is held at two private bars—Salón Diana and Salón Midnight Ballroom—out of the spotlight, on Easter Sunday evening, which speaks of how the life of these Villachuatans have changed now that they live in a Midwestern town. However, Villachuatans in Marshalltown still look for ways to recreate the exuberance that *La Fiesta* in Villachuato provides. The bars' owners compete with each other to see who will have the most famous music band or *Las Mojigangas*. Transmigrant Villachuatans, therefore, are experiencing the privatization of their culture, where Villachuatan entrepreneurs are both profiting from and contributing to cultural continuity. Villachuatan entrepreneurs are adapting to their new reality of living in a profit-oriented society and using it to their benefit. In Marshalltown's case, Villachuatan entrepreneurs' financial capital is transformed into cultural capital to be enjoyed by transmigrant Villachuatans living in that Midwestern town; this cultural capital, when used by transmigrants, is then converted to financial capital that only benefits the Villachuatan business owners.

La Fiesta's religious aspect is not celebrated in Marshalltown; therefore transmigrant Villachuatan women do not have the opportunity of playing a central role in reproducing Villachuatan religious identity and community. Since they do not get together to prepare food and eat together, they have a more difficult time producing a sense of community. However, transmigrant Villachuatan women have found ways to

reinforce their transnational identity within a religious context by organizing *Levantamientos* without much help, (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 1999, p. 590) and this will be described in more detail below.

La Fiesta and the Community Capitals

The desire of Villachuatans to gather to celebrate one of their most popular and ancient traditions is the engine that makes *La Fiesta* possible. Cultural capital in the form of clothing, music, and customs, such as *Las Mojigangas*, the rodeo, the *castillos*, and the collective community food preparation events, are all part of a socialization process that serves to transmit the Villachuatan values from one generation to the next (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 56), and also from one place to another, in this case from Villachuato to Marshalltown, and vice versa.

Magdalena and Magalí from the *Hijas* cohort both were born in and have lived most of their life in the U.S. The times they have visited Villachuato have always been for *La Fiesta*. As a result of these visits and the stories their parents tell them, they have learned how Villachuatans' traditions are unique, which helps them construct their transnational identities, through which they can act simultaneously within both Mexican and American social fields such that neither one alone (Mexican or American) is explanatorily sufficient (Richardson Bruna, 2008, p. 234).

Villachuatans are also able to transmit their values to new generations with the help of three organizations: the Catholic Church, the *encargado del orden*, or peace officer in Villachuato, and the group of six or seven *mayordomos* selected in Villachuato, Lexington, Nebraska, and Marshalltown, Iowa. By collecting funds and organizing *La Fiesta*, these organizations help Villachuatans reinforce values and influence the legacy handed down (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 71). *Mayordomos* are an expression of how Villachuatans value obligations, respect, and commitment to mutual support (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 77). *La Fiesta* is, then, a celebration made possible because new generations of Villachuatans, regardless of their current residence, think it is important to preserve their identity and shared ancestry and to convey pride in their heritage (Flora & Flora, 2008, pp. 76-77).

Local entrepreneurs in Villachuato and neighboring communities also help pass on traditions to new generations by recording and editing videos about *La Fiesta*, aimed at an audience that will buy the videos because of nostalgia. Villachuatans then have the opportunity to experience from afar one of their most important celebrations. Watching these videos allows them to recognize familiar faces, to see if *La Fiesta* was celebrated in a different manner from previous years, and to recreate a positive experience that allows them to feel more comfortable with the fact that they are now settled in their newly adopted town.

Along with the importance placed on cultural capital, Villachuatans are also able to celebrate *La Fiesta* because of two other almost equally important capitals: social, both bonding and bridging, and financial. These two capitals are united by the work of *mayordomos*. *Mayordomos* are first selected by past *mayordomos* and then recognized by the Catholic Church in Villachuato to collect funds among Villachuatans living in Villachuato, Lexington, and Marshalltown to celebrate *La Fiesta* in a more elaborate manner than the past year. The fact that Villachuatans are visited by *mayordomos* for fund raising every October in their current residence is an example of the strength of their social capital, both in Villachuato and in other towns in the U.S. When *La Fiesta* is celebrated, it is due to the voluntary participation of both Villachuatan men and women. This is a very gendered process, where the leadership positions, such as the peace officer, the Catholic priest, and the *mayordomos*, are all held by men. Women also collaborate in a vital manner, but the positions and activities in which they are asked to participate do not have the same status as those held and performed by men.

Financial capital is definitely key in the celebration of *La Fiesta*. It is through the money that Villachuatans donate that *La Fiesta* is the biggest event in Villachuato and that it continues to grow each year. In Villachuato, some of the natural capital is also considered part of the financial capital; corn, wheat and sorghum grains are collected from Villachuatans, who plant and sell it as a means of providing more funds.

Cultural capital is closely linked to human and natural capital, since meals offered to the community during the Easter weekend are cooked by community volunteers. Some of the main ingredients, especially goats and hogs, are raised by local farmers. The *tortillas* made especially for these meals are also another example of cultural capital

coming together with natural capital. Due to the number of *tortillas* needed, the *tortillas* are not handmade, but *mayordomos* contract with the local *tortillerías* to have them made with special, non-industrial ingredients. This is a practical solution to meet the need of providing traditional food to a large number of lunch attendees.

Villachuatans pouring beer on each other during *Las Mojigangas* is another example of how financial capital comes together with cultural, natural and built capital, since this part of the celebration occurs on the main streets of the town. Beer must be purchased in order to be able to pour it on to the attendees, one of the main activities during *La Fiesta*.

All celebrations are carried out in the main plaza, the main streets, and at the Catholic Church. All are important built capital that allows Villachuatans to have elaborate and very visible celebrations. Built capital is also very important for Villachuatans living in Marshalltown when celebrating *La Fiesta*, since they are able to reenact *Las Mojigangas* in local bars owned by Villachuatans. At these bars, Villachuatans can celebrate with traditional band music, pouring beer on each other. They would not feel comfortable bringing the puppets out in the street nor pouring beer on each other in public in Marshalltown. The videocassettes and DVDs sent through the mail are also part of built capital. Therefore, built capital is a vehicle that allows Villachuatans both a public and a private celebration of *La Fiesta*, depending on their current place of residence.

Levantamientos

The other community event in which I had the opportunity to participate was *Levantamientos*. I learned about *Levantamientos* while completing my fieldwork in Villachuato. Although I was born in Colima, a neighboring state of Michoacán, and raised Catholic, I had never heard of *Levantamientos* before. I first heard of *Levantamientos* by chance, during a conversation with Valentina and her daughters about a Mexican soap opera that was very popular 10 years ago. When we could not remember the exact time this particular television show was airing, Valentina and her daughters started to remember they saw the final episode while participating in a *Levantamiento*. Later, I learned *Levantamientos* are a family event used as a point of time reference.

The importance of food related to this event was evident when I interviewed other participants, who remembered the first time they ever had *carnitas* for dinner in a *Levantamiento*, instead of the traditional red *pozole* and *mole* with red rice. Catholic families, who have a nativity scene at their home, celebrate *Levantamientos*. *Levantamiento* literally means lifting. Thus, what it is celebrated is the lifting of the Baby Jesus from the nativity before taking the nativity down. These celebrations are usually held from January 6th, Epiphany, or Day of the Kings, to Ash Wednesday. Families usually plan when they will celebrate *Levantamientos* based on when they will have money available, since these events require a large investment of time and money.

Villachuatans Celebrating the *Levantamientos* in Marshalltown

All the women I interviewed were Catholic. Because I completed my fieldwork from November 2010 through February 2011, I had the opportunity to observe the nativities these families had in their homes. Most of them use a corner in their living room to recreate the birth of Jesus as a nativity scene.

Mónica's was one of the biggest nativities I saw during my fieldwork. She had two different representations of Baby Jesus—one for all the family, which was life size, and a smaller one bought to celebrate the birth of their only son, who is now 3 years old. Both representations of Baby Jesus were placed in the middle of the nativity, lying in a bed of hay, surrounded by Christmas ornaments and lights of different sizes and colors. Also, a big Santa Claus with looped lights that sang "Merry Christmas" accompanied these nativity scenes.

Other participants had smaller nativities that usually consisted of a Baby Jesus, some Christmas lights, and an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In some homes, there were several representations of Baby Jesus—one for each family member. I observed that many of the nativities were next to a Christmas tree or a Santa Claus. The nativities are a mix of their traditions from Villachuato and the traditions of their new home.

The size and exuberance of the nativity vary from household-to-household. Nativities are part of built capital transformed into cultural capital essential to celebrate *Levantamientos*, and they are also a direct result of the financial capital that each Villachuatan wants to devote to this celebration. In the families that I visited, the women

were in charge of choosing where the *Levantamiento* was situated in the house and putting it together, occasionally receiving help from their children, and, if an ornament proved complicated to put in place, then the husband might help too. While men do not help much during this part of the celebration, women do discuss with them the timing of when to put out the nativity and when to celebrate the *Levantamiento*. Therefore, most of the decisions about this celebration are shared, but women are the ones who take responsibility for the majority of the organization.

Obtaining a Baby Jesus

Celebrating the *Levantamientos* starts when a family acquires a Baby Jesus. A replica of Baby Jesus is usually given by a relative or a friend as a present to celebrate something good that has happened to the recipient. Families can also buy one to celebrate an important event, like the birth of a child.

At Magalí's (from the *Hijas* cohort) house, they started celebrating the *Levantamientos* when they were given a Baby Jesus to celebrate Magalí's stepfather's acquisition of residency. Magalí's mother said:

A mi esposo le regalaron [el niño Jesús] cuando yo le arreglé los documentos legales para que él estuviera aquí; mi cuñadita, ella le regaló un niño Dios, y de ahí yo tuve que aprender [para celebrar el Levantamiento] a hacer el ponche, el pozole yo ya sabía. Pero, como la sopa de mariscos, que la sopa de mariscos ellos la comen con pan, nosotros la comemos con tortilla. They gave a Baby Jesus to my husband when I helped him to do his paperwork for his residency, my sister-in-law gave him a Baby Jesus, and from there on I had to learn [to celebrate a *Levantamiento*] to make *ponche*, I already knew how to make *pozole*. But, for example the bisque, they eat the bisque with bread, and I was used to eating it with *tortilla*.

Magalí's mom was born in Durango, and she moved with her parents to California when she was 1 year old. She married in Washington, and after her divorce, she and her two young daughters moved to Marshalltown. Before marrying her current husband, she had never celebrated *Levantamientos*.

When I interviewed Mayra, also from the *Hijas* cohort, her family had just moved to their first house. Previously, she, her husband, and their 18-month old son had lived with her parents-in-law for three years. Now, with a home of their own, they were given a

Baby Jesus as a way of blessing them and their new house. She was thinking about cooking *carne enchilada* for the *Levantamiento*.

These replicas of devotional icons are a form of built capital that becomes part of the family and the transnational Villachuatán community; the Baby Jesus figures are mediators that connect Villachuatans to the divine (Flores Tondo, 2010, p. 228) and help them to maintain the memory of their original homeland without having to worry excessively about if they will be fully accepted by their host country (Knight, 2002, p. 23).

The *Chichihuas*, the New Generations and the Importance of Social Capital

Chichihuas are an important element of *Levantamientos*. Every Baby Jesus has a *chichihua* (godmother or a godfather), and *chichihuas* are allowed to invite their friends over for the dinner served during *Levantamientos*. A person who agrees to be a *chichihua* holds that responsibility for at least three consecutive years. If the family and the *chichihua* decide to maintain their relationship for over seven years, then she or he can keep the Baby Jesus. The *chichihua* has an obligation to bring candles and goody bags for all the *Levantamiento*'s attendees. They also buy new clothing for the Baby Jesus every year. *Chichihuas* usually stop by the house where the Baby Jesus is kept before the *Levantamiento* is celebrated to borrow the doll for a day or two. They use this time to find new clothing that Baby Jesus will wear for the remainder of the year. Both the family and *chichihuas* invite relatives and friends to the *Levantamientos*. This often results in big parties that last the entire night and into the next day.

Chichihuas are also in charge of providing goody bags that are given to each attendee immediately after s/he kisses the Baby Jesus's forehead, which is done after he is lifted from the nativity. The Baby Jesus is an icon that becomes part of the family. For Villachuatans, to touch the Baby Jesus is to 'touch the divine' (Flores Tondo, 2010, p. 228).

I had the opportunity to receive two different goody bags—the first at Marisela's and the second at Mónica's. At Mónica's home, the goody bag provided by the *chichihua* had typical Mexican candy, like *duvalin*, hard candy "chilipops" with sweet and spicy flavors in different fruit figures and flavors, jaw busters, and some gum. Thus, the goody

bags were a mix between Mexican and American industrial candy. At Marisela's home, the goody bags were very similar in content to Monica's home, but they had also had a CapriSun juice pouch, which contains only 7 to 10% real juice and high fructose corn syrup (Kraft Brands, n.d.). The goody bags are important for the celebration of *Levantamientos* since they are an easy way to attract new generations to be part of this long religious event; thus the *Levantamientos* in Marshalltown were filled with small children, all born in the U.S. At one *Levantamiento*, I counted 21 children under the age of 10 among a total of 39 Villachuatans attending. These children were eager to kiss Baby Jesus's forehead in order to receive the bags filled with sweets.

Chichihuas are an expression of the importance of social capital for Villachuatans, because when a Baby Jesus has a *chichihua*, the celebration of the *Levantamiento* will be attended by more people than just the family hosting the event. Then, cultural capital in the form of *Levantamientos* is transformed by Villachuatans into bonding social capital. This type of capital allows Villachuatans to support the formation of their transnational community, and in turn, this transnational community allows Villachuatan women to have cultural continuity (Knight, 2002).

Food at the *Levantamientos*

Most of the participants mentioned the same dishes prepared to celebrate *Levantamientos*: *tamales*, *pozole*, *mole*, *enchiladas*, *tacos*, or *buñuelos*. However, the food that was served varied, depending on the preference or the budget of the family. Mayra, from the *Hijas* cohort and about to celebrate *Levantamientos* for the first time with her family in their newly purchased home, said:

Será que estoy de antojo [tenía cuatro meses de embarazo al momento de la entrevista], pero a mi me gusta mucho la carne enchilada, y 'taba pensando [en cocinar eso para el Levantamiento], pero no sé todavía, a ver. Es otra de las comidas que me gusta a mí mucho, pero no sé. It could be the cravings [she was 4 months pregnant at the time of the interview] but I like carne enchilada, a lot, and I was thinking of [cooking it for the *Levantamiento*]. But I do not know yet, we'll see. That is a dish that I like a lot, but I haven't decided.

Magdalena, also from the *Hijas* cohort, talked about the *Levantamientos* she celebrates at her fiancée's home:

They always have *mole*, and, for some weird reason, they always make tacos, which is kinda weird, I think, for like a celebration kind of thing, and also *pozole*, and *carnitas*. His neighbor makes *carnitas*, like, for a living, so they always have *carnitas*, or *birria*, or whatever. So, like, that is the kind of food they have there, at those kind of things that I've gone to.

Manuel and Mónica had saved part of their year-end bonuses for the *Levantamientos*, spending a little over \$500 to achieve the celebration. The turkey they used for the *mole* was a Thanksgiving gift Mónica received from the casino where she works. As soon as she received it, she saved it in the freezer, planning to use it for the *Levantamiento*. The strawberries and the guavas for the *tamales dulces* were bought at the Mexican store, as were some of the spices, Serrano peppers, and purple corn for the *pozole*. The pork shoulder used for the *pozole* was purchased at Wal-Mart. Mónica made the *tortillas* to accompany the *mole* and the red rice. She usually makes *tortillas*, almost from scratch, on a daily basis. Although she uses *maseca* instead of *nixtamal*, she takes a lot of pride in the fact that in her home there are always fresh, homemade *tortillas*.

Villachuatan women do most of the work to make the *Levantamientos* happen. When I attended Mónica's and Marisela's *Levantamientos*, they alone were responsible for cooking all the dishes offered during this celebration; help received from their husbands was minimal. However, I observed both Mónica and Marisela celebrating *Levantamientos*, regardless of the unacknowledged, very important, hard work, because doing so created a sense of belonging and a sense of family. In turn, this brought them power and recognition as Villachuatan women (Alicea, 2007, p. 599), contributing then to the social constructions of transnational families and households (p. 599). For example, at Mónica's, when the food had to be served, there were three other women helping her serve the food—Marisela, Mina (Marco's partner), and myself. We not only served plates of food, but we monitored the two rooms where the guests were eating to ask what they wanted for dinner and if they had a particular preference of meat or type of *tamal*.

Food is instrumental to the maintenance of Villachuatans' traditions. The traditional food that Villachuatans in Marshalltown cook for *Levantamientos* supports its transnational community and allows Villachuatan women to reproduce their religious identity and community; when transmigrant women prepare food and eat together with

other Villachuatans, they are producing a sense of community and reinforcing their transnational identity within a religious context.

Beverages at the *Levantamientos*

Beverages are another important aspect of *Levantamientos*. Most of the beverages served are chosen to accompany the food and because they are appropriate for the season. Since *Levantamientos* is held between January 6th, Epiphany, or Day of the Kings, and Ash Wednesday, hot drinks are usually offered, a nice treat considering how cold the winters can be in Marshalltown. The drinks are *atole*, a *masa*-based hot drink and *ponches*, a type of hot cider, with popular fruits from Villachuato. It usually has *tejocotes*, guava, and raw sugar cane. These ingredients are bought in the frozen food section of the Mexican grocery stores located in downtown Marshalltown. Mónica used coupons from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to buy milk at Wal-Mart. At the Mexican grocery stores, she also bought the *maseca* to make the *atole*. *Maseca* is the most common brand of instant corn *masa* flour in México. Mónica used it as a substitute for *nixtamal*, since there are no *molinos*, or places to grind white hominy, in Marshalltown. *Maseca* can now also be purchased in Wal-Mart and Hy-Vee in the Hispanic foods aisle. Cinnamon sticks and *piloncillo* are needed for *atole*. *Piloncillo* is unrefined whole cane sugar, a solid piece of sucrose and fructose obtained from the boiling and evaporation of sugarcane juice. Mónica bought both *piloncillo* and cinnamon sticks at the Villachuato Mexican grocery store in Marshalltown. *Agua fresca*, a fruit drink, is a common cold beverage sometimes served. Soft drinks, usually Pepsi Cola and Mountain Dew, and alcoholic beverages, generally Miller Lite, are also provided. I observed that men are in charge of purchasing and offering alcohol and soft drinks to the attendees. These beverages are bought ready to drink and do not require further preparation, and men in the company of other men usually consume the alcoholic drinks. However, women have the solely responsibility of preparing and offering homemade beverages.

The Music

In Villachuato, there are several methods through which music can be provided for the event. If the family can afford it, they hire an *estudiantina*, a string band composed of six or seven women, who sings lullabies to the Baby Jesus. In the past, Villachuatans in Villachuato invited *pastores*, groups of men and women who specialized in singing lullabies for the Baby Jesus, to sing. However, *pastores* are not very common at *Levantamientos* in Villachuato anymore. When I asked why this was the case, Valentina's 19-year old daughter replied, “*Ay no que bueno, duraban montones cantando, y ahora ya nomás va uno, reza el rosario y a cenar, y no que antes, te tenías que esperar a que terminaran de cantar los pastores, y duraban horas cantando.*” “It is better now; they used to sing for hours. Now, you just go [to a *Levantamiento*], pray, and then you have dinner. Before, you had to wait until the *pastores* were done singing, and they used to take forever.”

When I had the opportunity in Marshalltown to attend *Levantamientos*, music was provided in very different ways. At Marisela's, guests sang hymns each time they concluded one of the five decades of the rosary⁵. At Mónica's, they played a videotape of a *Levantamiento* celebrated in her house at Villachuato a couple of years earlier, where they had hired a *estudiantina* to sing the songs. They contracted with a semi-professional cameraman from Puruándiro to record the *Levantamiento*. Mónica brought one of the copies of this recording with her to Marshalltown and uses it to provide a celebration similar to those back home.

Levantamientos are Villachuatans religious celebrations that play an important part in recreating and reproducing their culture in Marshalltown. In the case of music—cultural capital—Villachuatans try to have a celebration as similar as possible to what they would have at home, thereby helping them to reinforce their sense of identity. Because *Levantamientos* are well attended by children, they create an opportunity for cultural continuity, and during this event, Villachuatans transmigrant women reproduce

⁵ A Roman Catholic prayer, the sequence of prayers is the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary ten times, and the Glory Be to the Father, each sequence is known as a decade.

their hometown cultural traditions for other Villachuatans and their offspring (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 1999, p. 586).

My Participation in *Levantamientos*

I had the opportunity to attend the *Levantamientos* hosted by Mónica, who hosted my visit in Marshalltown. Since she had two consecutive days off from work—Saturday and Sunday—she decided to celebrate it on Saturday, February 26, 2011. Manuel picked me up from Ames the day before the party, after he finished work for the day. Mónica had asked me to arrive on Friday so I could help her start with all the pre-cooking, since she had to work the evening shift at a casino close to Marshalltown.

When I arrived at their house and saw the size and number of pots, I realized I was not there to help her organize a simple dinner, but a feast! She had left written instructions on top of all the ingredients stating what I should do with each of them. The menu was *pozole rojo*, pork, chicken, guava and strawberry tamales, *mole*, and red rice. For drinks, I helped her make *ponche caliente*, *atole*, and Manuel bought soft drinks and beer.

I completed most of the things she asked me to do and went to bed exhausted. When I awoke at 7:00 A.M., Mónica was already working in the kitchen. She explained she started the *pozole* when she got home from work around midnight. The initial plan was to finish the *pozole* first, and while the *pozole* was on the stove, we would start the *masa* to make the *tamales*. Since I was no expert in the kitchen, there was only so much I could do. I tried to help as much as possible, but when Mónica realized my help would not be sufficient; she called Marisela, her brother-in-law's wife, to ask for help. Marisela agreed to help by making the red rice and finalizing the *mole* at her house across the street.

Manuel's Role

Because Manuel and Mónica's house had been under construction for a while, Manuel spent most of the day cleaning the house. Since they were anticipating many attendees, they removed the furniture from their bedroom and stored it in their son's

bedroom, so they could place a table for the children there. They had another table for the adults in the dining room.

Since Mónica and I were busy cooking, Manuel and his friend, Marco, who is from the greater Mexico City area, Distrito Federal and married to Mina, Manuel's cousin, were in charge of going to the stores to buy what was needed, including plastic ware, disposable tablecloths, beer, soft drinks, and ice. He helped some in the kitchen by moving around the big, heavy, hot pots.

During the dinner, he helped arrange the chairs and the table and invited the men to have a beer. After the *Levantamiento* finished, Mónica and I cleaning everything, while he talked and drank beer with one of his nephews until 6:00 A.M. the next morning.

The Different Cohorts and the Celebration of *Levantamientos*

Hijas Celebrating the Levantamientos

The three *Hijas* I interviewed celebrate the *Levantamientos*. However, most of the responsibility for the celebration still falls to their parents. Even though Magalí and Magdalena still live with their parents, they are not the main women responsible for the celebration. When I asked Magalí about what they eat for the *Levantamientos*, she said *pozole*. Since her mother does not have a lot of time to cook, she does not begin making the *pozole* by soaking and peeling the grains of corn (which takes several days). Instead, she buys canned white hominy.

Mayra is married. Recently, they moved into their first home after living for 3 years with her parents-in-law. Now, she is in charge of celebrating the *Levantamientos* on her own. She planned to cook carne enchilada to *levantar* the baby Jesus.

Magdalena was the only participant I interviewed in English. When I asked her if she saw herself celebrating *Levantamientos* in the future, she responded,

I think I probably will, and actually I'm engaged to my boyfriend now. So his family does make things like that, like we're getting ready to have a *Levantamientos* at his house. The *Levantamientos* [at his house] is like a block party. Everybody from around his house goes to his house.

Madres Celebrating the Levantamientos

I attended two *Levantamientos* in Marshalltown hosted by *Madres*—Mónica and Marisela. Mónica mentioned that one of the main reasons she continues to celebrate *Levantamientos* is so her 3-year-old son can learn about the traditions that are important to her. However, she wonders if he will celebrate it. When I asked her why this was important for her, she said:

Ay no sé [empieza a llorar] será porque me nace mucho del corazón, que tengo esa fe en Dios más que nada y le tengo mucha fe a mis santos. Yo pienso que va a ser su única compañía [la religión, ya que es hijo único], ya te digo [mientras se limpia las lágrimas]. I don't know [and she starts crying]. It could be because it comes from my heart. I have a lot of faith in God and all my Saints. I think that [religion] is going to be his only companion [since he is an only child]. I am telling you [while she wipes her tears].

The *chichihuas* for her two representations of Baby Jesus figures were two cousins who lived on the west side of town.

The other *Levantamientos* I attended was at Marisela's house. Her oldest son was the *chichihua* for the Baby Jesus. Marisela's oldest son is undocumented and recently graduated from high school. Since he could not apply for college and does not want to work at the meatpacking plant like his dad, he stays home most of the time and usually spends this time playing video games in his bedroom. A few weekends before the *Levantamientos*, Marisela found some beer cans in her son's bedroom, hidden under the bed, while cleaning the house. As a punishment, he was forced to participate in the *Levantamientos* as a *chichihua*, which meant that he had to be part of the entire celebration. After saying the rosary, he had to lift the Baby Jesus from the nativity and pass it around for the guests to kiss Baby Jesus's forehead. Next, he handed each guest a goody bag. While I did not have the opportunity to interact much with Marisela's son, he seemed to be a little embarrassed to have such an active role in the celebration.

Abuelitas and the Levantamientos

Melinda and Martina were in difficult situations. While Melinda lived permanently in Marshalltown, she did not own a house and lived with one of her sons. At times, due to family issues, she would move to the home of one of her other children

in Marshalltown. Martina, on the other hand, divided her time between Marshalltown and Mexicali. While in Marshalltown, she split her time between the households of her two daughters. Thus, both women were constantly moving.

In the house where Melinda lived with her son, there was a small nativity in the middle of the living room, adorned with Christmas lights and decorations. At the time of the interview, she said she and her daughter-in-law still needed to decide what to cook for the *Levantamientos*, but she would help with the cooking.

Gender, Celebrations and Identity

Levantamientos in Marshalltown are actively celebrated mainly by Villachuatan women who are part of the *Madres* cohort. These women are married, have children, and have their own source of income. Additionally, all of them grew up in Villachuato, learned how to cook there, and experienced *Levantamientos* celebrations there. These women have the necessary financial, cultural, human, social, built, and natural capitals to commemorate these occasions.

A driving factor of the *Levantamientos* celebrations in Marshalltown is a combination of several capitals coming together. The first is the *Madres*' desire to maintain and pass on their culture in a town that does not resemble their hometown, but where their children will grow up. This desire to pass on their legacy is both a way to recreate home away from home and a strategy to make sense of their new reality, through receiving strength from the familiar, which provides them a sense of security and comfort (Alicia, 1997).

While all Villachuatan women know and have celebrated the *Levantamiento*, their levels of participation depend greatly on their transnationalism life course and their current stage of life (Lauer & Wong, 2010). The women in the Villachuatan *Madres* cohort in Marshalltown are economically independent, which means they also have access to financial capital. Human capital is also important, since all have learned to cook the traditional meals for this event. Built capital also plays a big role in the celebration as well. The *Madres* I interviewed in Marshalltown have access to built and financial capital by owning or renting a house. Another form of built capital that contributes to the celebration is the DVDs and VHS tapes played during the rosary, which allow the

attendees to sing traditional Villachuatan lullabies to Baby Jesus along with the Villachuatans in México featured in the recordings.

Each of the Villachuatans in the *Madres* cohort lives in a home of her own and has a partner, who also grew up in Villachuato and shares the same beliefs and traditions. Thus, the husbands are willing to contribute financial resources and time for the celebration. These women, besides earning an income, have the responsibility of caring for the home and cooking for the celebrations. They can decide whether or not to celebrate a *Levantamientos*, and when and at what time to commemorate it. Since they are financially secure, they have the monetary resources to buy all the ingredients needed. They purchase some ingredients at the four Mexican stores and others from Wal-Mart and Hy-Vee. While Wal-Mart and Hy-Vee have Hispanic food aisles, there are certain ingredients not yet sold by these stores, such as white and purple corn for *pozole*, a staple ingredient in the Mexican cuisine. Mónica buys white and purple corn in large quantities from a local Mexican grocery store, since she likes to make *pozole* often.

Abuelitas and *Madres* both have the cultural capital to select meals for the *Levantamientos* and to continue the rituals associated with it. However, the *Abuelitas* lack the built capital, and sometimes the financial capital, to do so. Both Villachuatan women I interviewed from the *Abuelitas* cohort were living in someone else's home—Martina with one of her daughters and Melinda with one of her sons. Thus, some of the decisions regarding inviting people to celebrate the Baby Jesus are made by the homeowners, with occasional input from their mothers. Additionally, Melinda and Martina are income insecure in their older ages and do not have the needed money to buy all the ingredients and host the *Levantamientos* feasts.

Villachuatan women put a lot of effort into big gatherings that require a lot of planning, financial resources, and hard work in the preparation of elaborate meals in order to make the rituals as similar as possible to those in their hometown. These events “symbolize the integrity of the family and provide concrete memories of sharing in an activity. The memories help create the sense of solidarity and commitment to the common aims of family that make it a special unit” (Daniels, 1987, pp. 411-12 as cited in Alicea, 2007, p. 611).

Most Villachuatans are Catholic and have strong attachments to popular and seasonal fiestas, like *Día de los Muertos*, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Fiesta*, *Los Levantamientos*, and *La Subida al Cerro* on October 12th. *La Subida al Cerro* celebrates the anniversary of when the Virgin of Guadalupe Chapel opened on top of a Villachuatan hill. *Levantamientos* and *La Fiesta* are rituals derived from the Mexican Catholic Church. These two popular religious practices open a space for affirmation of a shared religious tradition, a social memory, and an identity (Flores Tondo, 2010, p. 223). The food, music, replicas of devotional icons, and celebrations are held not only in their hometown, but also, for those who have moved from Villachuato, in their current place of residence.

Women have an essential role in preserving and passing on the Villachuatan traditions to the younger generations, regardless of their current residence. The women are willing to endure all of the organization, execution, and even the cleaning after a family or community event because the preservation of these traditions is so significant to them.

The celebrations on which Villachuatans place importance are extremely visible in their hometown. The most important celebration for Villachuatans in Marshalltown is *Levantamientos*. This celebration is familial and private, located within their homes, and shows a sharp contrast to the way Villachuatans living in the U.S. work together to raise money to provide an ever more visible celebration of *La Fiesta* in México. *Levantamientos* are also very visible in Villachuato. Violeta refers to it as *percha*, *vamos a la percha*, or *ahí hay percha*, an expression to indicate a lot of free food because a *Levantamientos* is being celebrated. Then, she adds, “*Es que no creas que hacen poquito, así mira [expresión con las manos, de unas ollas grandes], ollas, y ollas de pozole.*” “It is that they cook a lot, like this: [and with her two hands she makes the sign of big pots] pots and pots, filled to capacity, of pozole.”

Villachuatan traditions in Marshalltown are continued, but they are adapted to continue the tradition without experiencing hostility from the Anglo population. These traditions are a creation and a re-creation, which reaffirms their identity as Villachuatans.

In their reconstruction and reinterpretation of traditions (Flores Tondo, 2010, p. 227) and shared video recordings, Villachuatans have found ways to *ser y estar aquí y allá*. They influence the grocery stores’ stock in Marshalltown because of their food

practices. It is a cycle, where their food ways help to reproduce as well as to construct their identity, and, in turn, their identity and alimentary symbolism significantly affect Villachuatans' food choices (Jones, 2007, p. 130).

In conclusion, for Villachuatan women, family gatherings and traditional celebrations serve as an important method to keep and continue their traditions. By adapting these traditions to new places of celebration, they provide new generations with the legacy and pride of what being a Villachuatan means.

**CHAPTER 6. EVERYDAY FOOD PROVISIONING OF VILLACHUATAN
WOMEN IN VILLACHUATO**

Pues me siento bien, acompañada se siente uno mejor, que cuando come uno solo; pues porque uno esta platicando, y comiendo, y pues sabe más sabrosa la comida, y solo pues hasta más rápido se la termina [la comida] uno [risas].

Well, I feel good, accompanied, you feel better than when you eat by yourself, because you are chatting and eating, even the food tastes better, and when you are eating by yourself you even finish your food faster [laughs].

Viviana, *Hijas* cohort

Villachuato is a town of constant calm. When I was there, I awoke to a rooster crowing. Getting out of bed, I would find Valentina already planning what to cook for breakfast. She had to feed her 10-year-old daughter, Vanessa, her two teenage daughters, Venus and Virtudes, visiting for their summer vacation from Morelia, and me. Venus, the oldest, always said, “*Ay yo no sé, ya saben que a mí no me gusta cocinar. Yo mejor limpio la cocina y lavo los platos,*” “I do not know; you already know that I do not like to cook. I’d rather clean the kitchen and wash the dishes.” On the other hand, Virtudes, the middle daughter, named possible dishes she could prepare without the help of her mother, since they are from a recipe of her own creation. She has always liked to cook and likes to help her mother in the kitchen. During breakfast, as the five of us sat around the kitchen table, we talked about what each of us would do during the day— the person I was going to interview or what we would eat for lunch. This decision was made based on what we had in the house (the ingredients and leftovers) or what we wanted to eat that day. Deciding what we wanted to eat was just the first step. We then had to determine who would be at home, if we had the necessary ingredients, or if something needed to be purchased. If we needed to buy something, where would we go to get it? Who would go? After agreeing on who would do what, we asked a third set of questions. Who would prepare it? If the dish was simple and did not require too much time to prepare, Valentina

would usually say that she could do it by herself and did not need any help. However, if the dish was elaborate and required a lot of time to cook, we decided the remainder of the chores based on this. Perhaps Valentina and Virtudes would spend most of the morning cooking, while Vanessa, the youngest, would be in charge of going to the stores and buying the needed ingredients. Venus and I would be in charge of cleaning the kitchen and washing the dishes. In a way, our day was determined based on our food choices, from getting the right ingredients, to who would cook the food and how it would be cooked, at what time we would eat, and who would clean the kitchen afterwards.

The relationship that Villachuatan women in Villachuato have with food is complex and depends greatly on their transnationalism life course and their current stage of life (Lauer & Wong, 2010). In this chapter, I describe some of the most important aspects of the relationship that Villachuatan women living in Villachuato have with food, as well as the ways in which their food ways have changed over time. The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) is used to analyze Villachuatans' food system in its six components: production, processing, distribution, access, consumption and waste/cleanup, in order to understand the capitals that are mobilized in each one of these components and how they can transform food into other forms of capital.

Food Production

In this section I describe Villachuatan women's farming, gardening, and gathering practices as well as their sources of food production: their gardens, the *ejido*, the community-based form of land tenure, and the *solar*, a shared land, where there is usually more than one house and the inhabitants are blood-relatives.

Animals and Trees, *Todo Cabe en un Solar Sabiéndolo Acomodar*

A year before she was interviewed, Valentina decided to raise chickens for her own consumption. She had two different kinds of chickens—*rancho* and *engorda*. She told me that she regretted the fact that she had decided to change the kinds of chicken she raised. The *ranchos*, while skinny, could be fed with daily leftovers and maize her father grows. She purchased the *engorda* chickens in Puruándiro, and the *rancho* chickens were a gift from her mother, Victoria. While she said initially they were not very expensive,

feeding them was not as easy as she had expected. *Engorda* chickens grow bigger than the *ranchos* and have bigger breasts, but only when fed with special feed. This meant she had to spend extra money. She ended up eating all of the *engorda* chickens but one, and decided to keep raising the *ranchos* because, though they were skinnier, they were easier to tend.

Verónica lives in the same *solar* as Valentina, and in this *solar* there are four different houses. The first house is an old uninhabited adobe, where Valentina's husband was raised. The second is a recently built concrete house that Valentina and her husband Valentín slowly constructed over a period of 20 years. When windows and doors were installed, Valentina, her three daughters, her sister-in-law, and her elderly father-in-law moved in. Verónica and her husband live in the third house in the *solar*. Their house is a mix of rooms made of concrete and others made of adobe. The fourth house is the newest and fanciest of all— its architecture style was based on U.S. houses, but it was also uninhabited. It was built with the remittances sent by one of Verónica's sons who, according to Verónica, planned to move to the U.S., work, and save money to one day return to Villachuato to live in his own home. However, Verónica did not think that would happen any time soon, since her son had gotten married and had children, who were now in school. He married a Villachuatan woman, and they were living in a meatpacking town in Minnesota.

Verónica and Valentina's *solar* contains Valentina's chickens, Vanessa's cat, Verónica's two cows and a horse, which her husband rides to their land to work each day. Although one of their sons, who lives in Marshalltown, bought them a truck to make it easier for his father to go to work, it sits idle, like the empty house, as Verónica's husband has not learned how to drive yet. They also have two very big dogs that usually accompany Verónica's husband to work. Both the truck and the house are large built capital assets depreciating without producing either use value or exchange value.

In this same *solar*, Valentina has fruit trees, including key lime, avocado, pomegranate, peach, and fig. At the end of their *solar* are many *nopales*, a type of cactus that Valentín planted so they could eat as much as they wanted of this favorite food. Valentina's neighbors know about the *nopales* and at times visit to ask her if she can sell them some cactus. When Valentina sells them, she harvests them, carefully removes the

cactus needles, dices them, and places them on a plate the neighbor brings with her, adding value to what she has grown.

Valentina has many roses, which she likes very much. To keep them healthy, she puts all her fruit peels into the soil where the roses are planted in order to supply them with nutrients. She explained to me this was a good and cheap method to fertilize the soil. Valentina was using empirical knowledge of composting, but she was doing nothing else to speed up its process. The other food leftovers were given to the dogs, the cat, and the backyard chickens.

Most of the women that I interviewed in Villachuato have animals in their backyard. Some are raised to sell, some are used to feed the family, and others are kept as pets. Victoria, from the *Abuelitas* cohort, has a cow and six hogs in her backyard. She explained that she fed them leftovers and said:

Aquí nada más trabajé en el hogar, nada más criando animales, criando puercos y criando gallinas, eso es lo que he hecho yo toda mi vida, criar puercos y criar reses, vacas, gallinas, hasta palomos tenía. Fíjese que tenía una vez, vivía yo para arriba, tenía muchos palomos, eran parvadas llenas de palomos, pues has de ver un día que volaron todos y se fueron, y nomás me quedé viéndolos que. Yo creo que se asustaron, porque vine una noche y los agarré y maté muchos, e hicimos moles, pero después me volvía a agarrar otros, y después del miedo ellos se --- fueron, se fueron asustados. I have always worked at home, just raising animals, raising hogs and chickens. That is what I have done all my life—raise hogs, cattle, and chickens. I even had pigeons once. When I lived some blocks up, I had many pigeons, flocks of pigeons, and one day all of them flew away. I just stood there, watching them go. I think they got scared, because one night I killed a lot of them, and we cooked them in *mole*, so the others got scared and they left.

Valeria, from the *Abuelitas* cohort, has a dog, but no other animals, since she cannot take care of them due to her poor eyesight. Velia, Valeria's daughter-in-law, grows a lot of chamomile in her backyard. When I visited them to say goodbye, thank them for everything, and introduce them to my parents, both Valeria and Velia insisted we take some chamomile as a gift. I kept telling them it was not necessary, but they assured me the chamomile was high quality and asked me to please accept their gesture. Thus, my mother and I went to the backyard and harvested some chamomile.

Vera, from the *Abuelitas* cohort, has a dog, several pigeons, and other birds in her backyard. When Vera's health was better, she helped her brother and her sister-in-law, Vania, care for the hogs and cattle they raised. However, since she could not do much

physical work anymore, Vania and her husband became solely responsible for everything. Vania explained,

Lo que mi esposo me pueda dar, por ejemplo él, trae tres vaquitas se va.. este a cuidarlas, entonces de ahí yo saco la leche, y ya de ahí me ayudo de lo que la leche; de los huevos, de las gallinas, porque yo tengo hartas gallinas, tengo mis puercas, eso es con lo que uno se ayuda. Y ahí va uno. Aquí tenemos un corralito [a una cuadra de la casa], tenemos las gallinas, los puercos, y, las vacas. Y es en lo que ando. What my husband gives me, for example, he has three milk cows that I care for and I sell their milk. I help myself with that; also from the eggs, because I have chickens—many chickens; I have my sows, and that is what helps us. We have a *corral* [one block from the house] in which we have the chickens, the hogs, and the cows. And that is what I do.

Vilma, from the *Madres* cohort, raises three sheep and many chickens, which run freely in her *solar*. When I asked her if she eats the eggs, she told me, “*Si, ya tengo mucho que no compro.*” “Yes, I have not bought [eggs] in a long time.” She also has a peach tree in the backyard.

Virginia and her sister, Victorina, also raise hogs and goats to sell. They said, “*Los vendemos y de ahí le compramos más comida a ellos, y de ahí pagamos gastos que a veces tenemos.*” “We sell them and from that money, we buy more feed for the other animals, and also pay some expenses that we might have.” Raising small animals in the backyard is a way to diversify their income, to be their own boss, and to maintain a rather flexible schedule, which would not be possible were they working for someone else in the community, for example, harvesting strawberries for a wage. Virginia and Victorina felt strongly about the flexibility and independence granted them through their animal enterprises. When I asked them if they liked to raise animals, they said, “*Si, pos [sic] porque de andar en la fresa y criar animalitos, pues mejor animalitos que andar allá en el sol, es mucha friega.*” “Yeah, from working in the strawberries to raising little animals, I would rather raise little animals than work in the sun. That is too much work.” At the time of the interview, they had seven goats, two sows, and a boar. They had peach trees, cactus, many roses, and were growing cucumbers. Since Virginia loved to cook, she also grew many herbs.

Viviana, from the *Madres* cohort, also raises hogs and sells them live by the kilo to a man who visits periodically to see what she has to sell. She started this enterprise in 1996. Both of the *Hijas*, Viridiana and Violeta, have only dogs as pets, which they feed

with leftovers. Neither of the women from this cohort raises animals for home consumption or to sell.

Access to natural capital through raising animals and growing trees, herbs, and other edible plants, allows Villachuatan women to maintain their cultural capital, growing some of the ingredients for their staple dishes. This access to natural capital is enhanced for those Villachuatan women who have sufficient natural capital in terms of access to land to grow food. Valentina and Verónica, from the *Madres* cohort, live in the same *solar* where their husbands grew up. Thus, they have access to enough land to grow trees, animals, and herbs. Virginia, from the same cohort, still lives in the *solar* where she grew up.

Vilma, another of the women from the *Madres* cohort, had access to natural capital to raise animals and grow some trees in the backyard. In her *solar*, there were two houses. She, her husband, and her elderly mother were living in the smaller of the two houses. Her son had started building the other house, which had two stories, when he moved to Marshalltown at the end of the 1980s. The house is still unfinished, and it is rarely used, since Vilma's son rarely visits Villachuato. She told me that the first time her son visited her after 17 years of absence, she did not recognize him. Vilma asked him, “¿qué se le ofrece?” “What do you want?” He replied in offended tone, “ay amá, no me diga que ya no me conoce?” “Aw, mom, don't tell me that you do not know me anymore?”

In the *Hijas* cohort, Viridiana and Violeta lived in the *solar* in which their husbands grew up. And, while they had access to natural capital in the *solar*, they were not growing edible plants or raising animals. Neither of them received remittances at the time of the interview, nor were they planning to migrate to the U.S. or receive remittances any time soon.

In the case of the *Abuelitas* cohort, both Vera and Valeria, while having access to natural capital in the *solar*, grew little food there. They relied on relatives to do the work of planting and harvesting foods that could be grown without much care, like chamomile, in the case of Valeria, or peach trees, in the case of Vera.

Decisions regarding land use in a family *solar* were not only made by Villachuatans living in Villachuato, but also by their relatives living in Marshalltown or

other parts of the U.S. The area available to grow food in some of the *solares* had been reduced in order to build houses for those living in the U.S. According to the relatives still living in the *solar*, there is little chance they will return to Villachuato to live permanently, since now their children and grandchildren go to school and are growing up in the U.S. The decrease in built and natural capital available for self-sufficiency is somehow compensated by financial capital, or the remittances, that their relatives send. The money, while helping Villachuatan families to be food secure, negatively impacts their food sovereignty, since the amount of food they can grow on their own is decreasing to further built capital. The large, two-storied, concrete houses are uninhabited and even some trucks are not used because the recipients of these gifts do not know how to drive.

Ejidatarias (Female Ejido Members)

Visitación, Valentina's sister-in-law, has been a member of the *ejido* since her father got too sick to take care of the land or participate in the meetings. Her father's land was distributed between Visitación and two of her brothers, Valentín, and Verónica's husband, Vidal. When Visitación's father passed his rights as a member of the *ejido* to her, she did not know much about growing crops to sell. She asked her brother, Vidal, for advice. As a result she was not involved much in the work necessary to produce the first crops. Instead, she hired friends and relatives to do this. Five seasons later, after realizing she was learning more at the end of every crop season, she decided to become involved in all the steps of the process. She now decides what to grow, usually sorghum or wheat, and what agrochemicals to use. She also goes to the field to supervise the planting, land preparation, agrochemical application, and harvest, and she oversees the sale of the grain.

Villachuatan women started to become more involved in the *ejido* at the end of the 1980s, when Villachuatan men began migrating to the U.S. for longer periods of time, eventually settling in the U.S. According to the current *comisario ejidal*, ejido commissioner, when an *ejidatario* migrates to the U.S., the land remains productive, since it is usually rented to a relative or a friend. When I asked him about the role of *ejidatarias*, he explained:

Una mujer tiene más palabra, tiene más honestidad y se sujeta más a las reglas que un ejidatario hombre, o sea valen más las mujeres actualmente que el hombre, el hombre no tiene palabra, así de sencillo. A woman has a word of

honor. She is more honest, follows the rules better than an *ejidatario*, meaning that nowadays women are more worthy than men; men do not have a word (of honor), it's just that simple.

However, when I asked the same question to Visitación, she explained that the role of women in the *juntas ejidales* (the meetings of the *ejido* board) was not satisfactory. She envisioned they could do more together. Visitación thought they never expressed their opinions at the meetings and only agreed to what men wanted to do.

Visitación and the *ejido* commissioner are describing the same situation from different perspectives. The *ejido* commissioner was happy about the fact that women did not argue much at the meetings and did what they said they would do. However, Visitación found women were just following orders and never giving their opinions.

Ejido land in the form of natural and built capital left by migrants to the U.S. has allowed Villachuatan women to have access to political capital, which in the past, was very limited. However, in Villachuato, women's full participation in community decisions is still a work in progress. Men hold all positions of authority in town, except one—the town doctor.

Gender—Those Left Behind, Work, and Responsibilities

Only one of the 10 women interviewed in Villachuato was single – Virginia, from *Madres* cohort. Two of the three *Abuelitas*, Vera and Valeria, were widows. The seven remaining women were married, and two of them, Valentina and Viridiana, were in the somewhat unique situation of being solely in charge of their households, as their husbands lived in the U.S. When I asked Valentina and Viridiana how they felt when their husbands were with them, Viridiana replied:

Pues que duermo a mis anchas y no me despierto tan presionada del trabajo, verdad?, si salen las cosas mal, él esta aquí, eso es lo que más me gusta. Porque de ahí en más, no me gusta nada, porque salimos de pleito [risas], a lo mejor porque ya no estamos impuestos, ni él a mí, ni yo a él. Eso es. I can sleep as much as I want, and I do not wake up worried about work, right? If something goes wrong, he is here; that is what I like the most. Because from then on, I don't like anything, we tend to fight [laughs], maybe it is because we are not used to each other anymore. That is what it is.

Valentina said that even when her husband is away, she has to do what he says:

Es que uno quiere hacer las cosas y siempre se va por lo que ellos dicen. De las tierras, yo ni he ido a mirarlas y le digo que ya fui y las mire, si ni me esta mirando. It is not like I do not want to take care of stuff, but I always have to do what he says I should do. About the land: I have not even gone to take a look at it; I just tell him that I already did. It is not like he is watching me.

Both Viridiana and Valentina recognized that when their husbands are gone, the work they need to do increases, because they have to take care of the family, the land, and the family's business all by themselves. While their husbands still have a lot of input in household decisions, telling them what to do and how to do it, Viridiana and Valentina do not follow their husband's instructions indiscriminately, but they make what they think is the best decision for the family. When Viridiana told her husband that she had saved enough money to remodel the bathroom, he did not want her to go ahead with the plan, because he was in the U.S. and would not be there to oversee the work. She said:

Y le doy gracias a un primo de él que vino, y lo bueno que mi esposo estaba aquí [Villachuato], le dio tanta vergüenza de lo que el primo le dijo, que como pensaba que nos iba a tener en esas condiciones, que ese baño tan horrible, le echábamos agua con cubeta. Y ya lo empecé a hacer [el baño] cuando él se fue. Yo lo hice como yo quise, y [él] se enojaba. Y le dije, “ya lo hice, y si te parece bueno, y si no, vienes y lo tumbas, como tu quieras [sic]. Me sacaba el coraje él, porque todo tenía que ser como el quisiera.” And I thank one of his cousins, and the good thing is that my husband was here [Villachuato], he was so embarrassed with what his cousin said to him, asking why he was having us live in these conditions, that it was an awful bathroom. We were flushing the toilet with a bucket of water. And I started remodeling it when he left for the U.S. I did everything the way I wanted, and he would get mad at me. So I told him, “I already did it; if you are ok with it, then good, and if you are not, then come back and tear it down.”

Viridiana added that sometimes, regardless of the fact that what they did was best for the family, if it were not something that the husband had previously approved; he would say something about it:

Hace uno las cosas, y aunque las cosas estén bien, le tienen que poner un pero para que estén, nosotros cada rato salimos de pleito, [y le digo, por teléfono] “hazlo como te de tu gana, entonces que estas fregando”. Hay veces que ando en las tierras, y ando chille, y chille de que ya no hallo. And, when I do something, regardless of if it is done well, he has to complain about something. We are constantly fighting, [and I tell him, over the phone], “Then do it the way that you want to. Why are you bothering me?” Sometimes, when I am on the land, I'm crying and crying, since I do not really know what to do.

Both Viridiana and Valentina are in charge of the land; Valentina is in charge of doing everything by herself, but her husband will tell her what to do over the phone: what to grow and who to hire to take care of the land and harvest. Meanwhile, Viridiana receives a lot of help from her oldest son, who despite still being a teenager, takes care of looking for other land to rent and supervises the workers. When I asked them what they usually grow, both Viridiana and Valentina mentioned that they alternate between wheat and sorghum.

Food Processing

Cooking is a big part of Villachuatan women's lives; every day they transform food from its raw state into something that is eaten. This can be anything from making *tortillas*, something they do not consider to be cooking, to something as intricate as making *buñuelos* for Christmas. In this section, I also describe some of their preserving practices.

Nixtamal, Molino and Fogón

Victorina, Virginia and Mónica's sister, does not like to cook. All her life she has tried to avoid being in charge of the kitchen. As a way to compensate Virginia, who is solely responsible for cooking all the meals at their home, Victorina makes *tortillas* every day from scratch on the *fogón*, a wood-burning stove in the backyard of their *solar*. It is very common for women in Villachuato to start helping in the kitchen at an early age, usually when they are around 10 years old, by making *tortillas*. However, they do not regard this as cooking. Thus, Victorina did not consider that by making *tortillas*, she, like Virginia, was cooking.

Victorina and Virginia were the only unmarried *Madres*. They lived with an older brother, who was also single, and their elderly, but still very active, father. Their mother passed away 16 years ago, when she was 52, of a *coraje*—a big disappointment—and it was then that the two sisters started to take care of everything around the house. In addition to cooking for their brother and father, Victorina and Virginia also cooked for two young nieces and two young nephews, all under 10 years old. The nephews and nieces were children of Victorina and Virginia's younger brother, who lived in the same

solar, but in a different house. While Victorina and Virginia never really explained to me why they were feeding their nephews and nieces, I learned later from other Villachuatans that their brother had an alcohol addiction problem and was unemployed most of the time.

Victorina and Virginia had multiple sources of income. They raised hogs and goats to sell. Their brother was a construction worker and contributed part of his income to the household expenses. Their father, Victorino, worked a small piece of land and, from that, gave them the corn needed to make *tortillas* and other corn-based dishes. They also received some remittances from their relatives living in Marshalltown, Iowa and Lexington, Nebraska.

Victorina told me that each morning she had to rise at a quarter to six to take the bucket in which she soaked the corn overnight that is commonly called *nixtamal*, to the *molino*, a corn mill. She explained that she did not like to get to the *molino* late (after 7:00 A.M.), because the other women waiting in line would tease her, asking her, “*sí se le pegaron las sábanas*,” an expression used when someone oversleeps. Having no desire to confront others, or to give them the impression she did not know how to be a good housewife, she always made sure to wake up early to go to the *molino*.

Later, I learned teasing at the *molinos* in Villachuato was not an uncommon practice. Victoria was a client of the other *molino* in town. She only had to cook for her husband and her two teenage daughters who rarely awoke early, because her children did not have jobs or attend school, thus one day she decided to go to the *molino* around 8:00 A.M. However, due to all the teasing she received from both the female owner and the other clients, she was seriously considering returning to her old habit of going to the *molino* at a very early hour.

All the women I interviewed in Villachuato used a *fogón* in their homes. These wood burning stoves were located in a separate room in the backyard of their *solar* or house, due to the amount of smoke produced. Most of the time, the *fogón* is used to make *tortillas* or to cook *pozole* or *tamales*. To use the *fogón* is a decision based not only on the final taste of the dish, but also on economic factors, since these are dishes that must be cooked for a long period of time, and gas can be very expensive.

Valeria and Vera from the *Abuelitas* cohort did not cook at all at this point in their lives. Velia, Valeria's daughter-in-law, and Vania, Vera's sister-in-law, both cooked for Valeria and Vera. Victoria, the third *Abuelita*, was the only one who was actively cooking at the time of the interview, and she used the *fogón* daily to make *tortillas*.

Valentina, from the *Madres* cohort, explained to me that she stopped making *tortillas* daily when her two teenage daughters moved to Morelia to attend college. She decided it was too much work making *tortillas* for just herself and her 10-year-old daughter, Vanessa. She only used the *fogón* when making *tamales* or *pozole*. Vilma, on the other hand, used the *fogón* daily to make *tortillas* for herself, her husband, and her elderly mother living with her at the time of the interview. When I interviewed Vilma about the *fogón*, she said:

Mira, para hacer los frijoles, yo los cuezo arriba del comal, en olla de barro; de que no tengo gas, pos [sic] hago todo en el jogón [sic], pero para hacer más rápido, pues en la estufa, y como ya estoy impuesta pues al jogón [sic], siempre me ayudó con el jogón [sic], para poner nixtamal, frijoles, pongo a hervir acá la leche también. Look, to make beans, I cook them on the *comal*, in a clay pot; if I do not have gas, then I cook everything in the wood stove, but if I want everything faster, I use the gas stove. But since I am used to the wood stove, I always do the pre-cooking in the wood stove, to make the *nixtamal*, the beans, and to boil the milk, too.

Viviana from the *Hijas* cohort mentioned she and her mother-in-law used the *fogón* every other day to make *tortillas*. Viridiana stated she did not like to make *tortillas* in the *fogón*, instead purchasing them from the *tortillería*. However, occasionally, if her husband was craving fresh, homemade *tortillas*, she would make them using the *fogón*.

Built capital in the kitchen can make a difference in the amount of work that Villachuatan women have to do when cooking. The *fogón* is built and cultural capital and requires more work, including gathering wood and making the fire. While its use helps preserve their cooking traditions, the smoke from the fire has a negative impact on the health of Villachuatan women, a crucial human capital.

Comidas Saludables, Healthy Foods

When having conversations about healthy food with Villachuatan women, there were three foods repeatedly mentioned—vegetables, chicken meat or chicken soup, and

milk. Virginia, who cooks for her nieces and nephews, explained the following about healthy foods:

Porque siempre el doctor eso es lo que nos ha dicho, que cómanos muchas verduras, y leche. Porque hay muchos niños que no les gusta la verdura y yo si los voy imponiendo [a los sobrinos], les voy poniendo pedacitos y si se la comen], se van imponiendo. Because that is what the doctor has told us, to eat a lot of vegetables and milk. There are a lot of children that do not like to eat vegetables, but I am introducing [her nieces and nephews] to them, I put little pieces of vegetables in, and they eat them. They are getting used to them.

Another aspect mentioned when considering whether a food is healthy or not was the amount of fat in the dish. Victoria said, “*Las verduras son sanas, pues porque no tienen grasa,*” “Vegetables are healthy, because they do not contain fat.” Violeta also explained, “*El caldo de pollo, es el que les doy más a mis niños; una porque les nutre más y otra porque es la comida que más les gusta también.*” “Chicken soup is what I give my children the most – one, because it is nutritious, and two, because it is the dish that they like the most, too.”

Kitchen Appliances

Valentina explained one of the first things she bought with the money sent her by her husband the first time he went to the U.S. was a refrigerator. Valentín had suggested she buy a bed with the money, but she convinced him the bed could wait. The refrigerator was more necessary. She believed she purchased it around 1994. Vania, Vera’s sister-in-law, bought her first refrigerator in 1996. Her husband had sold several cows and gave Vania part of the money. He, like Valentín, also suggested buying a new bed, with Vania convincing him that a refrigerator was what she needed. Verónica bought her refrigerator in 1994, with money one of her daughters living in Lexington, Nebraska sent her.

Refrigerators had a significant impact on Villachuatan women’s food system. Most mentioned that before having a refrigerator, they could only buy the needed ingredients for the meal of the day, estimating how much they should cook so that everyone got enough and nothing was left over. If there was some food left at the end of the day, they would put it in a big container with water, hoping that the food would be good to eat the next day. For most of the Villachuatan women, having a refrigerator at home was possible thanks to the remittances sent by their relatives. These new kitchen

appliances, along with the continuous remittances, allowed Villachuatans to increase the quantities of ingredients they purchase at one time.

Families who receive remittances also have the opportunity to transform the physiognomy of their kitchens. Viridiana, from the *Hijas* cohort, travels back and forth from Villachuato to the U.S. She renovated her kitchen and now has an integral kitchen. Victoria, from the *Abuelitas* cohort, who also has a visa to travel to the U.S. and has been in Lexington twice, still receives remittances from her children. She also remodeled her kitchen, which now bears little resemblance to the kitchens of the Villachuatan women I interviewed who did not have anyone to send them remittances.

Violeta, from the *Hijas* cohort, was not receiving remittances at the time of the interview. She had a very modest home and kitchen. She had an old stove, refrigerator, and a small table where she had a blender and cutting board to prepare food. The kitchen floor was not tiled; it was concrete. When she taught me how to cook her favorite dish and the meal was prepared, her husband did not sit at the table to eat with us, as they only had sufficient chairs for family members. I used his chair, which he said was fine, and he went into the bedroom to watch television.

Vera and Valeria, from the *Abuelitas* cohort, also had no one sending remittances at the time of the interview. Both had very modest kitchens compared to Victoria and Viridiana's. Vera received remittances from her husband for a very short period of time after she was married. Unfortunately, he died in a work accident when he was in the U.S. after just 4 years of marriage. At that time she was 24 years old and pregnant with their second child.

Kitchens are an essential part of the built capital that allows Villachuatan women to cook. Kitchen architecture and appliances have changed over time, based on what the families are able to afford. Financial capital was the force driving these changes. Remittances sent to Villachuatan women have allowed them to upgrade their built capital and to reduce the amount of human capital necessary to cook.

Food Access

The ability of Villachuatan women to access healthy food via grocery stores and markets is what is considered in this study to be food access. Instead of using measures

like “density (average number of stores within a set buffer zone, as well as number of stores relative to population density within neighborhoods); proximity (distance from residents’ homes to the nearest store); and food variety and price (but not quality) to indicate their accessibility to healthy foods” (Ball, Timperio, & Crawford, 2009, p. 579), I describe my experiences of accompanying the participants in this study to buy their groceries, as well as the types of stores that are common in Villachuato.

One of the things that I learned when doing my fieldwork is that food is a very communal event, and a lot of the food consumed by Villachuatans is shared, grown or gathered from the wild.

Grocery Shopping Patterns

When Valentín, Valentina’s husband, sends money from Albert Lea, Minnesota, where he works on an egg farm, Valentina and her three daughters go to Purándiro to get it. I went with them one weekend on a Saturday morning around 10:00 A.M. We boarded the bus at the bus stop near the highway, and we paid \$5.00 pesos each for the bus ticket. After a 20-minute bus ride, we arrived at the main plaza and walked a few blocks until we reached a travel agency. The first thing Valentina and Virtudes noticed was the number of people waiting in line for money sent to them. All of the adults in line were women, some with young children, while others were accompanied by female friends, chatting with them. While waiting in line with Valentina, I asked her why Valentín sent them money through a travel agency. She explained that when he first arrived in Albert Lea, he sent her money through one of the local banks. But in recent years, they had to wait up to 2 hours in line to receive their money. After discussing it with Valentín, Valentina and her daughters started looking for alternative places to receive their remittances. They decided upon the travel agency, since it was new to the business of money transfer and did not have many clients. In addition, the company in Albert Lea that was associated with the travel agency was close for Valentín.

After waiting in line for almost an hour and a half, Valentina started listing all the things they needed to buy or pay for with the money. They paid the telephone bill at a bank two blocks away. We purchased shoes for the youngest daughter, Vanessa, since she was about to enter fourth grade. Lastly, we went to the *mercado*, an open-air market.

We did not visit many vendors, because Valentina likes to always go to the same one. According to her, that market stall vendor sold fresher, better quality, cheaper vegetables and fruits. She bought produce she always uses, like roma tomatoes, white onions, and Serrano peppers. She also purchased other produce she thought looked good and was reasonably priced, such as radishes. Since we had spent most of the morning in Puruándiro, we decided to buy something to eat. There were many food stands outside the *mercado*. One of the most popular stands sold a type of *sope*, a small *tortilla* made by hand, topped with refried beans, ground beef, shredded lettuce, and sour cream. After we had purchased what we needed, we waited in the plaza for the bus to return to Villachuato.

All the women I interviewed in Villachuato had similar grocery shopping patterns. When they have enough money to buy a lot of *despensa*, they take the bus to Puruándiro to *surtirse de despensa*, meaning to buy all the groceries needed for the week or sometimes two weeks, depending on how often they have money. Usually they buy *despensa* – groceries for the week – which includes all their vegetables, fruits, legumes, and greens, from the Puruándiro open-air market. They purchase cleaning supplies from *Mi Bodega Aurrerá*, grocery stores owned by Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. and located primarily in areas with a population of middle and low incomes, and focused on places with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants (Bodega Aurrerá, 2008).

However, they have different shopping patterns for the meat. The women that I interviewed like to buy meat from the few Villachuatan meat lockers. Valentina mentioned that when she buys meat from the butcher a couple blocks from her house, she can see the meat is fresh and knows the animal was raised by someone in the community. Violeta, from the *Hijas* cohort, explained her grocery shopping patterns:

[En Puruándiro] pues la verdura, y la fruta, es lo que compramos allá. Aquí [Villachuato] la carne, la carne es lo que compramos. Porque allá la carne la tienen de un mes en el mercado. Toda ley la de aquí, aquí esta recién matada. Allá esta de días. We buy the vegetables and the fruits in Puruándiro. We buy our meat here [Villachuato]. There [Puruándiro], the meat is old, it is from a month ago. Here, it is fresh; there [Puruándiro] the meat is old.

Though from the same cohort, Viviana's grocery shopping patterns were slightly different. She would buy groceries from two or three stores in Villachuato and rarely go

to Puruándiro to *surtirse de despensa*, only if she had sufficient money to buy groceries for at least a week. From her point of view, this was a result of her economic situation, but also of her and her husband's migratory stories. Vladimir, Viviana's husband, had diabetes diagnosed when he was 17. In a lamenting tone of voice, Viviana, explained:

Pues la verdad, él si me platica que se quiere ir, pero como esta enfermo, pues la verdad no se hace muchas ilusiones, pero si dice pues que es una ayuda muy grande pues estar allá, que si se hace [dinero] pues, se construye a lo que uno quiere, una casa, o que se yo, y aquí pues la verdad no sale para construir una casa. A lo mucho pues irse manteniendo. To tell you the truth, he does say that he wants to go [to the U.S.], but because he is sick, he does not have a lot of illusions about it. He says that it would be a big help to be there, where you can make money and you can build whatever you want (here in Villachuato), a house, or I do not know. And here, well you can't make enough money to build a house. At most you can have enough money to support yourself.

Virginia, from the *Hijas* cohort, was in a different economic situation. As she had income from several sources, money was fairly stable for her. Virginia bought fruit and vegetables in Puruándiro, primarily due to price, "*Yo siento que me las dan [las verduras] más baratas, y me rinde más, todo por junto.*" "I feel like the vegetables there [Puruándiro] are cheaper, and I get more for less."

From the *Abuelitas* cohort, Valeria and Vera have not been in charge of buying groceries for a long time because of bad health. Victoria was the youngest, most active, and independent member of this cohort. Thus, she was still in charge of buying groceries and cooking, even though two of her teenage daughters were living at home with her. However, she has started to adapt her grocery shopping patterns, due to her decreasing physical mobility. She purchased her vegetables and fruits every Sunday morning from a truck that drives around town. This truck was part of the business of a local grocery store.

When deciding where to buy ingredients to cook, Villachuatan women not only take into account price, but the freshness and quality of the groceries, along with a sense of trust, developed because, for instance, they know the slaughterer, the butcher, and the person who raised the animal. The physical health of the *Abuelitas* and their restricted ability to move meant they had to rely on relatives to obtain their groceries. When they shopped themselves, they did it locally. This was not really a problem, since there were several options in town to buy what they needed.

Small Family Stores in Villachuato

One of my initial goals when I first arrived in Villachuato was to determine where local people purchased food. I walked around the town to become acquainted with the little family stores and other food-related businesses. Counting the butchers, *tortillerías*, green grocers, live poultry shops, and food stands was not difficult, since the town is relatively small in size and there were not many. However, counting the number of small stores proved to be a challenge. In a couple blocks, I counted up to five different small stores located along the street as well as on street corners. This is because these stores tend to be attached to the proprietor's home. These small stores not only compete against each other, but also provide informal businesses. Some families sell candy they make at home, like frozen chocolate bananas, and others resell industrial candy from a small table located near the front door.

Victoria, from the *Abuelitas* cohort, owned a little store located in the front of her home. She complained the store “*no era negocio*,” meaning it was not profitable and had very few customers, since there were three more little stores within two blocks. Victoria's sales were primarily bottled milk and beer. When I asked her why she decided to create a little store in the front of her home, she explained they were trying to determine various ways to provide extra income. Therefore, she saved part of the money her children living in Lexington, Nebraska sent her, and when she finally had sufficient money she opened her small store. There were no value-added products in the store. Its inventory was comprised of a great variety of Sabritas, a snacks company subsidiary of PepsiCo, including potato chips and a large variety of candy developed mainly for young children. Sello Rojo was the brand of bottled milk distributed by Lechera Guadalajara, a company that advertises as *una empresa 100% Mexicana*, meaning it is owned by Mexican businessmen.

Most of these stores had very little inventory, and they all sold the same kinds of products. This duplication and lack of differentiation among the small stores is one of the main reasons they were not profitable. Villachuatán families established these stores as a way to supplement their income. However, there is only so much they can do to earn money by reselling goods locally. While remittances have changed the physiognomy of

the town by providing two-story concrete houses, satellite TV, and paved roads, the local economy of Villachuato is still very limited and dependent upon those remittances. The remittances are not invested in innovative entrepreneurship, but in replication of what currently exists.

Villachuatans' desire to diversify their economy through reselling goods made elsewhere opened the door for the establishment of highly processed food products, changing their food habits indefinitely. Diets have become more industrialized as remittances increased. The increase in Villachuatans' income has resulted not only in bigger houses, but also in changes in their food ways.

Butchers, *Tortillerías*, Green Grocers, Live Poultry Shops, and Food Stands

Violeta decided to teach me how to cook *Pollo a la Mexicana* or Mexican Style Chicken. I met her at her place around 12:30 P.M. We talked about all the ingredients we would need and in which stores we would buy them. She lived closed to the highway in the same *solar* as her parents-in-law. After our planning was complete, we walked to a live poultry shop located on the main street, close to the town's plaza. The owner of the business had a table in the street with a cutting board, a scale, and cash box. Violeta ordered a kilo and a half of chicken breasts and thighs, since she wanted to shred the chicken meat. We had to wait at the store for almost 20 minutes, because the chicken had to be butchered. I asked the business owner if she raised the chickens in addition to butchering and selling them. She explained to me she did not and that once a week, she would go to Puruándiro to buy them.

Virginia showed me how to cook *Carne con Chile*. She really liked to cook this dish, because it was her nieces' and nephew's favorite meal. Since this dish takes approximately 3 and a half hours to cook, Virginia asked me to arrive at her house early in the morning so I could go with her to the butcher located close to her home to buy the meat. We walked about six blocks to the butcher and bought two kilograms of stewed beef. Most of the meat hangs out front on hooks or is on top of the counter. I asked the owner permission to take pictures of his business. While taking them, I questioned him about the origin of the meat, who raised the animal, and who did the butchering. He

explained to me that he bought the animal from neighbors and he was the person in charge of butchering the animals.

Valentina decided to cook *corundas*, known as *tamales*. This was perhaps the most elaborate dish I was taught to make. The day before cooking the *corundas*, we visited Valentina's dad to ask him to give us some corn he had planted and harvested the past season that was stored in a room in the backyard. She asked him for four kilograms of white corn and also if he knew where we could go to obtain some corn leaves to wrap the tamales. He suggested we go to a cornfield two blocks from his house, and offered to accompany us to help.

Some ingredients of the Villachuatan cuisine can still be bought locally, or in other cases, gathered from the fields. However, there are some ingredients not produced in town that had to be brought from neighboring communities.

Other ingredients Violeta bought for the Mexican Style Chicken were avocado, sour cream, Oaxaca cheese, cilantro, Serrano pepper, green tomatillos, vegetable oil, roma tomatoes, and white onions. We went to the green grocer on Main Street to buy all the ingredients. While there, I had the opportunity to informally interview the storeowner. He explained most of the vegetables and fruits were brought from Irapuato, Guanajuato, a city located 1 hour and 15 minutes northeast of Villachuato. Irapuato is considered the most important city of Guanajuato, as it is the location of the state's biggest irrigated farming area and mostly commercial agriculture (Instituto Nacional para el Federalismo y el Desarrollo Municipal, 2005).

Food in Villachuato is easily accessed. Butchers, *tortillerías*, green grocers, live poultry shops, and food stands are all within walking distance. As in most towns, most of these food businesses are located along the main street. Built capital in Villachuato is distributed in a way that allows Villachuatans to have access to natural capital in the form of food. When buying in Puruándiro, there are two main elements of built capital that facilitate access to food—the bus system (private sector) and the highway (public sector). Highways are maintained through investing fuel taxes to keep them passable. Social capital facilitates Villachuatans' access to natural capital. Valentina used social capital to acquire white corn from a relative for her dish.

Valeria and Vera, from the *Abuelitas* cohort, were seeing their access to natural capital slowly decline. Because of their health problems and decreasing mobility, they had to rely on cultural and social capital to maintain their access to food. Their network of friends and of relatives who were taking care of them allowed them to have food on their table daily. These relationships are strengthened by cultural capital, since it is important in Mexican culture to take care of the elderly, and this is primarily women's responsibility (Alicia, 1997). Neither woman had access to financial capital. They did not have a job, nor did they have relatives sending remittances. The first time I interviewed Valeria, she asked me to send her \$20 dollars when I returned to the U.S., since she wanted to tell her neighbors she also had someone sending money to her. She told me she was tired of hearing others brag about receiving dollars, while she had never had this chance.

Villachuatan women not only take care of legacy by passing their food habits to the new generations, but also by helping others to preserve their traditions. They do this by preparing food on a daily basis for them, but also by occasionally cooking their favorite foods. One morning when I visited Vera, she was still in the kitchen eating a light breakfast. She had awakened craving *atole de puscua* and told Vania, her daughter-in-law, about it. Vania told her she would prepare this for breakfast *en una carrerita*, meaning she could do this quickly, and it would not be a problem.

Access to natural capital is enhanced if Villachuatan women have access to financial capital. One of the main sources of financial capital is the remittances sent by relatives working in the U.S. Some of the women, like Victoria, started a small enterprise to diversify their income. Other ways Villachuatan women try to expand their income include raising animals, taking care of the land in absence of their husbands, and working for pay in the fields of larger landowners.

School Lunch Program

The school meals programs at the elementary and middle school started in 2002, as part of the federal program—*Oportunidades*. This program was developed by the government to assist communities with extreme poverty, high rates of malnutrition, basic curable diseases, and high dropout rates of elementary and middle school students. This

program aims to improve the conditions of all members of the family in order to help the children stay in school and improve their diets and health.

The main change made at the elementary school was that during school recess, food was no longer being sold. Mothers were asked to visit their children in school and bring them lunch. The main objective of this change was to provide children the opportunity to eat healthier and homemade foods, especially since prior to this, during the school's recess, a lot of candies and chips were sold to the children.

Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to stay longer in Villachuato to learn more about the food program and to interview other mothers about their food choices. Political programs in México now are aiming to change the food habits of younger generations by offering more balanced meals and prohibiting the sales of junk food. In this particular case, political capital is used to influence human and natural capital. However, according to the principal of the middle school, where a similar initiative was implemented, the program was far from being considered successful. This change was complemented with the program *desayunos escolares*, or school breakfast program, where students pay 13 pesos per day for a balanced breakfast and lunch. Yet, of the 184 students enrolled in school, only 50 or 60 were registered in the program. According to the principal, the main reason not all students participated in the program was they did not like the food served. They complained about the food prepared with soy derivatives. Students who were not part of the program were provided food by their mothers visiting during the lunch break. In most of the cases, the food was purchased at the food stands located outside the middle school; they would usually buy *tacos* and *tortas*.

My penultimate day in Villachuato was the first day of school after the summer break. I asked Valentina if I could go with her to the elementary school during lunch break to take pictures of mothers bringing food for their children. Across the street from the school's main door, there were several informal food stands making *tortas*, *tacos*, sandwiches, homemade fries, industrial candy, juices, and chips to sell. And while some mothers brought homemade food, several mothers purchased foods from these businesses to give to their children. When I went with Valentina, she did not cook, but rather bought a pork ham *torta* and a bottle of industrial orange juice. I asked why she decided not to cook and instead purchased lunch for Vanessa. She explained that when she did not feel

like cooking or just did not have the time to do it, she knew she could always buy something from one of these food stands.

Choice vs. Necessity

All the women interviewed in Villachuato mentioned *Xoconostles*, a cactus fruit similar to the prickly pear, *nopales*, another kind of cactus, *verdolagas*, common purslane, and *quelites*, also called lamb's quarters or wild spinach; these were staple foods of the Villachuatan cuisine. However, these foods are not eaten as often today as they were in the past. Previously, Villachuatan women would go to the field and gather these items for free, as all these wild greens and cactuses would grow freely in the Villachuatan hills. Victoria, from the Abuelitas cohort, explained the importance of these staple, wild foods:

En aquel tiempo era nopales, frijoles, chiles con blanquillo, papitas con chile, era lo más, lo mejor que podía comer uno, casi no comía uno que carne de res, que caldo de res, que caldo de pollo, en ese tiempo no había eso; comía uno hasta verdolagas, si las conoce las verdolagas, verdad? O hacía uno los quelites, cocía uno lentejas, cocía uno habas, y creo estaba uno más sano, sí, que ni ahora, hasta duraba más años la gente. Y ahora pues de vez en cuando, casi nomás por gusto los come uno ahora, o a veces porque no tenga más que hacer otra cosa [por falta de dinero], pues hace uno eso, pues vuelve uno a lo de atrás. Y si tiene uno dinerito, le corre uno a la carne y cuando no tiene uno le corre a los nopales y a los frijoles, sí! In those times it was cactus, beans, eggs with chiles, potatoes with chiles. It was what we ate the most, the best that you could eat. We did not eat beef, beef stew, or chicken stew. There was not any of that in those times. We even ate common purslane, you know it, right? Or we cooked wild spinach, lentils, lima beans, and I think we were healthier, yes, healthier than nowadays. People could live longer. And these days, we eat these foods once in a while, just when you are craving them, or sometimes because we do not have a choice as we do not have money, and you cook that again. You cook what you used to cook. However, if you have money, you buy meat, but if you do not, you get cactus or buy beans, yeah.

Vilma, from the *Hijas* cohort, spoke about her similar food habits when growing up. Her father was never an *ejidatario*, and she did not know the reason why her father was never part of the *ejido*. To support his family, Vilma's father planted white corn and beans on the *cerro*, one of the hills available to farm, especially for those who were not *ejidatarios*. He was also a farm worker and worked for other Villachuatans who did have land. When Vilma and her brothers grew up, they did not attend school. Instead, they

helped their father work. Vilma recalls that most of the food they ate was grown by her father or gathered in the wild. Since her parents did not have a steady source of income to support their 12 children, meat was a luxury they did not eat often. Her brothers used to go to the hills to hunt, with the rabbits and pigeons they killed constituting their main source of animal protein.

Vera, from the *Abuelitas* cohort, still remembered when she first married and started cooking for her husband. In the past, meat was sold in Villachuato only once a week. Every Saturday morning a butcher from another town would park his truck in the Plaza to sell meat. Eating and buying meat in 1972 was still a luxury for most Villachuatans, according to *Censo Ejidal, Michoacán y Sus Municipios (1972)*. At that time, in Puruándiro, the municipal seat of Villachuato, out of 100 families, 42 did not eat meat at all, 17 ate meat once a week, 15 ate meat twice a week, nine ate meat three times a week, four families ate meat four times a week, one family ate meat five times a week, one family six times a week, and 11 families would eat meat daily.

Poverty and scarcity affected all Villachuatans women, regardless of their cohort. All women from the *Madres* cohort – Viridiana, Virginia, Vilma, Verónica, and Valentina – worked for pay picking strawberries when growing up. At the time of the interviews, all women from this cohort received remittances—Viridiana and Valentina from their husbands, Vilma and Verónica from their children, and Violeta from her brothers and sisters. To supplement the remittances, Viridiana and Virginia raised animals to sell.

The money sent by Villachuatans living in the U.S. to their relatives living in their hometown has gradually changed the physiognomy of the town and their kitchens. These changes began in the mid-90s. Thus, the *Hijas* cohort has had a very different experience regarding poverty and scarcity. Both Viviana and Violeta remembered experiencing deprivation. Violeta recalls, “*Pos antes, porque antes no había dinero y pos, comía uno lo que había. Y ahora que ya hay dinero para la carnita, ya se hace puro chilito con carne, el pollo, el caldo de pollo.*” “Well, before, because we did not have money, we had to eat what there was available. And now that there is money to buy meat, we cook just meat, beef with a spicy sauce, chicken meat, and chicken soup.” However, neither Violeta nor Viviana had a job growing up. Violeta’s father went to Marshalltown a

couple of times to work at the meatpacking plant. Viviana's brother migrated to Marshalltown when he was 16 years old to work at the plant. Thus, when both Violeta and Viviana were living with their parents, the family received remittances. Therefore, their food habits and experiences related to food were very different from the *Abuelitas* and the *Madres* cohorts. Viviana mentioned that one of the biggest changes in her diet was now she could buy fruit juices and yogurt at the store, and the number of times a week she was able to eat meat had considerably increased. Violeta, besides increasing her consumption of meat, was able to eat more fruits now. This was due to a change in her personal finances and a structural change in the provisioning of fruits and vegetables in Villachuato. Not only did she have the financial capital to buy them, but the green grocers had increased the variety of fruits they sold.

The *Hijas* cohort had never participated in gathering or hunting their own food, but they did talk about growing up eating what at one time were considered staple foods of the Villachuatan cuisine. Women in all the cohorts talked about those staple foods as either special cravings or something they ate when they had no other option because they had no money. Nevertheless, their gathering habits also changed over time. Valentina explained that because a lot of concrete houses were built in the foothills, they had to walk farther to find *nopales* and *xoconostles*. Remittances used to improve yields through the use of agrochemicals negatively impacted the availability of wild greens. Villachuatans had to develop skills to identify which greens were edible and which were affected by agricultural chemicals, with leaves with brown spots indicating they should not be eaten.

Food Consumption

In this section I describe consumption, perhaps the most enjoyable process of the food system – everything from sharing breakfast, to participating in cultural food celebrations. For Villachuatan women living in Villachuato, cooking and eating are more than just putting ingredients together and digesting them. Food is a social event, part of their daily routines that makes the lives of others easier and more social.

Gender and Informal Networks: Feeding Family and Friends

Valeria is one of the oldest people in Villachuato. She was 102 years old at the time of the interview. Valeria talked about her 100th birthday party like it was yesterday and really enjoyed talking about it. She danced with friends and relatives to the music of a huge band that played her favorite music the entire time. Her memory is intact and she likes to have long conversations. She remembers when the *Hacienda* was still working and when it went out of business, and she likes to recall the names of all those who participated in the Revolution.

She was visiting her daughter-in-law when I spoke with her. Later, I learned that although her memory was intact and she was a very strong woman, she was losing her sight. As a result, she stopped cooking. Valeria's only son, Vicente, lives a block away. Every morning around 11:00 A.M. she leaves her home to go to her son's. Velia, Vicente's wife, was 86 years old, but her health condition appeared to be much worse than Valeria's, since she had been suffering from rheumatism for a long time. Sadly, Velia passed away a year after I met her, which was something that Velia had predicted when I met her. She said "*Le digo [a Valeria] que me voy a ir yo más primero yo que ella,*" meaning "I tell her that I will die before she does." She was right.

While Velia's eyes were good and she was able to see, her legs did not help her much due to her illness. She spent most of her time on a couch outside in their backyard. Both women kept each other company most of the time. They spent their days talking, and Velia was in charge of cooking for the three family members. When I went to visit Valeria and Velia for the first time, one of Velia's daughters and a granddaughter were also visiting. They were all knitting and chatting. In just that one visit, I had the opportunity to visit with a four-generation family.

Vera, from the *Abuelitas* cohort in Villachuato, was in a situation similar to Valeria's. Her health had recently begun to decline, so she did not spend as much time as she used to in the kitchen or cooking. She lived with two younger brothers. One was single and had many health problems, due to his epilepsy. The youngest brother was married, and his wife and 14-year-old daughter were also members of the household. Vera's sister-in-law, Vania, was in charge of all the cooking and cleaning, took care of

everyone in the house, and helped her husband feed the cattle, milk the cows, and sell some of the milk to the neighbors.

All the women I interviewed in Villachuato were in the company of other women when I interviewed them. These networks provided someone to talk to and organized their daily lives. Valentina was in charge of taking care of her 100-year-old father-in-law and her youngest daughter, Vanessa, during most of the year. During the school breaks, she also cared for her two teenage daughters. However, since her daughter, Vanessa, and her father-in-law did not eat much, she rarely cooked elaborate meals. She even stopped making tortillas from scratch for the same reason. Valentina always complained that since she did not have to cook for anyone and most of the time she would eat by herself, she did not feel like cooking. This recurrent comment would always get Valentina in trouble with the youngest daughter, since Vanessa would immediately reply, “*No sé porque sigues diciendo que estas sola, y luego yo, ¿qué?, ¿no existo?*” “I do not know why you keep saying that you are alone, what about me? Do I not exist?” Valentina replied, “*Pero tú comes bien poquito, y luego por andar jugando ni quieres sentarte a comer conmigo,*” “But you do not eat much, and then, because you are busy playing, you do not want to sit down and eat with me.”

While cooking for others meant extra work, for which they did not receive recognition, for Villachuatan women in Villachuato, it did provide the opportunity to share their knowledge with others, entertain company, and create a community around them.

Verónica, from the *Hijas* cohort, had lung problems due to cooking over a wood stove. Since her husband did not like to eat *tortillas* from the *tortillería*, her two daughters, who were living in Villachuato, visited every Sunday morning to make *tortillas* over the *fogón*, or wood stove. I asked Verónica if she had ever tried to explain the consequences that cooking over a wood stove was having on her health to her husband. She told me her doctor had explained it to him once. The doctor told him that if he liked *tortillas* made over the *fogón* that much, then he should consider making his own *tortillas*. Verónica’s husband was very offended by that suggestion and never wanted to talk with the doctor again. It was then that Verónica’s daughters, Vicenta and Viola, both in their early 30s and married, decided to do something about the danger to their mother’s

health. Each Sunday they visit their parents' home and made *tortillas* for the rest of the week. This solution benefited all family members. On Sundays, Verónica woke up early to cook a special dish on the gas stove in a separate room. She knew her daughters and grandchildren would visit, and they would all eat together as a family, a nice change from her daily routine in which she ate only accompanied by her husband. These weekend meals were even bigger when her youngest son, Valente, visited. Valente was 21 years old, studying for his undergraduate degree in Business Administration at a college in Guadalajara, Jalisco, the second biggest city in the country, and located 2 hours and 20 minutes from Villachuato.

Cooking for Others, Eating Together

Victoria wanted to show me how to make *buñuelos* from scratch and invited me to her house on a Sunday morning. *Buñuelos* are fried dough sprinkled with sugar and are very delicious, usually accompanied with *atole de puscua* to drink. *Buñuelos* is a celebratory dish, mostly cooked during the winter, especially to celebrate Christmas, New Years' Eve, and *Levantamientos*.

Valentina, and her three daughters, Vanessa, Venus, and Virtudes, went with me to Victoria's house. On our way there, Valentina kept predicting that she would be in charge of doing most of the work, since her mother was not really a good cook. When we arrived, Victoria was accompanied by two of her teenage daughters who still lived with her, as well as Vega, another of Victoria's daughters, to help cook. Vega was 24 years old, married, and had an 18-month-old son. Three and a half hours later, we were enjoying our first made from scratch *buñuelo* along with a cup of *atole de puscua*.

Villachuatan women were open about the time they spend in the kitchen. When I asked them how many meals a day they cook and how much time on average they spent cooking each meal, I found the following eating/cooking patterns.

There are up to four meals a day, *desayuno* (breakfast), *almuerzo* (brunch), *comida* (lunch), and *cena* (dinner). The 10 women I interviewed mentioned that for breakfast and dinner they usually do not cook a complicated dish, perhaps some coffee with *pan de dulce* or sweet bread. Virginia, from the *Hijas* cohort, usually cooks oatmeal, rice pudding, or *atole* with sweet bread for dinner. She said, "*Pero tortilla ya no, ya es*

pan con arroz.” “But no *tortilla*, it is only bread with rice pudding.” Brunch and lunch meals, which Villachuatán women spend more time cooking and are more elaborate, are also the ones they eat together as a family.

Victoria, from the *Abuelitas* cohort, spends around two hours cooking for brunch, since she makes *tortillas* every day from scratch. She explained, “*Me levanto ya tarde, me levanto como a las 7:00 a hacer las tortillas, y luego a hacer el almuerzo, casi para dar como a las 9:00, duraría como dos horas.*” “I wake up late; I wake up like at 7:00 A.M. to make the *tortillas*, and then to cook brunch, I finish around 9:00 A.M. I spend about two hours.” For lunch, she spends around 1 hour and 30 minutes cooking. When I asked her why she thought it was important to have meals together as a family, she said,

Nooo, pos nos remos [sic], bromeamos, nos remos, platicamos, y así estamos, estamos ni mucho, alguna media hora ahí sentados, y ya nos paramos a ver que hacemos de quehacer, si a ver que, a lavar trastes, a barrer, a lavar, a arreglar la casa. Well, because we laugh, joke, and chat, and not for very long, we sat for around half an hour, and then we start seeing what it is that needs to be done, like doing the dishes, laundry or house cleaning.

Vera, from the same cohort, does not cook anymore, but she explained it is important to her for her family to continue to eat together:

Sí, juntos y fíjate que hasta luego dice mi hermano [cuando llega a la casa tarde del trabajo], -hombre coman, ya es muy tarde, ¿por qué no se sientan a comer?, [y yo le digo] No, pues te estamos esperando pa' comer juntos. Yes, together, and sometimes when my brother gets home late he says “eat, it is too late already,” and “why do you not sit at the table to eat?” [and I said], “no, because we are waiting for you to eat together.”

Valentina from the *Hijas* cohort explains:

Yo cuando estoy sola ni me dan ganas de hacer de comer. Pero cuando están las chiquillas ando con bien harto gusto, y ay que voy a hacer [de comer] porque van a venir, porque voy a tener con quien comer, pero cuando no [están en la casa], pues hay a ver que [cocino]. When I am by myself I do not even feel like cooking. But when my daughters are here, I am very happy, and like, what am I going to cook because they'll be here, and I will have someone to eat with, but when they are not at home, I do not really know what I'll cook.

Valentina does not cook breakfast or dinner. She says that she does not really feel hungry at night. She spends around 45 minutes cooking brunch, and from one to one and a half hours cooking lunch.

Verónica, Virginia, Vilma, and Viridiana of the *Madres* cohort all cook brunch and lunch. Virginia explained that she spends around 20 minutes cooking brunch, and one and a half hours cooking lunch. Viridiana, the only woman from this cohort who travels back and forth from Villachuato to the U.S., says for breakfast and dinner, she does not cook much or at all—perhaps a glass of milk with some sweet bread, or frosted flakes with milk. As to the importance of eating together, Viridiana says:

Me gusta comer en familia, yo pienso que es importante, porque estamos todos juntos, aunque hay veces que nos da coraje, porque ya pelea uno [hijo] acá, otro allá, y digo, hay cálmense. [Estar] a gusto feliz, de que Dios nos dio licencia junto, de compartir, aunque estamos hablando de una cosa [o de otra]. I like to eat together as a family. I think that it is important, because we are all together, even though sometimes I get mad, because one son starts fighting, and I say, hey calm down. To be happy together, that God gave us the opportunity to be together and sharing, just talking.

Viviana, from the *Hijas* cohort, explained, “*Pues me siento bien, acompañada, se siente mejor, que cuando come uno solo; pues porque uno esta platicando, y comiendo, y pues sabe más sabrosa la comida, y solo pues hasta más rápido se la termina uno [risas].*” “Well, I feel good, accompanied, you feel better than when you eat by yourself, because you are chatting and eating, even the food tastes better, and when you are eating by yourself you even finish your food faster [laughs].”

The previous chapter established the importance of cultural, social, and human capital in the elaboration of food, especially in the celebration of the traditions of the Villachuatans, because it strengthens their social capital and maintains their traditions to pass down their legacy to new generations. This also could be said of their everyday meals. Food allows Villachuatans women to build their social capital, especially among other women. These networks are important, as they elucidate the value of women’s work, allowing them to feel pride in their daily activities. Cooking and all the activities related to food allow them to express their creativity. Food procurement, preparation, serving, and clean up combines their human capital, in the form of their cooking skills, time, and knowledge of food, with natural capital, in the form of ingredients grown in their backyards, gathered in the wild or harvested from their fields. While feeding family and friends means extra work for Villachuatans women, it allows them to build their social, cultural, human, and natural capital.

Gender, Food, and Relationship with Others—The *Padecer*

Viviana ran away from her parents' home when she was 14 years old to be with Vinicio, who is now her husband. She was 18 years old when I interviewed her, with a son of 18 months. Since her husband was only 3 years older than her, they had been living at his parents' home since they got married. One story related to food she shared with me that was different from others shared by Villachuatan women was the *padecer*, or suffering. *Padecer* is about how the mother of the girl suffers because she decided to leave home to go to live with her boyfriend. This situation was resolved when the parents of the husband-to-be and the young couple visited Viviana's parents with two bottles of rum to ask for forgiveness and to let them know the young couple would get married properly. During the conversation, the children do not talk much. Both fathers are the ones who do most of the talking, agreeing on the wedding date. Viviana said the following about *padecer*:

... y pues según uno le viene a pedir perdón a sus papás, pero pues [los padres del novio] no hablan de perdón, nada más vienen a decir para cuando más o menos se casa uno y ya. Pero ya estando uno [la futura esposa] ya allá [en la casa del futuro esposo]. ...and well the idea is that you are coming back to ask your parents for forgiveness [for escaping], but [the groom's parents] do not talk about forgiveness, they are just there to talk about the wedding date, and that is it. But the bride is already living at the groom's home.

Bottles of rum are given to the bride's father from the groom's father as a part of the ceremony for forgiveness, but they do not drink it. According to what Viviana explained about the *padecer*, it seems the mothers and the future bride and groom are spectators, while both fathers agree on their children's futures and try to lessen their anger. Since this is a conversation that occurs between two men, alcoholic beverages are the perfect gift. Based on what I observed from both the *Levantamientos* and *La Fiesta*, it is reasonable to deduce that if this same conversation had occurred between the two mothers, food they had cooked, rather than alcohol, would have been exchanged during this ceremony.

Cleanup/Waste Management

Villachuatan families did not seem to have a problem managing waste, as they put the peels of fruits and vegetables in their big backyards full of trees and plants, and they also have different kinds of pets—dogs, cats, chickens, ducks, cows, pigs, goats and pigeons—to which they gave the leftovers. I also had the opportunity to see that a lot of leftovers were shared among neighbors and relatives. When I was living with Valentina, her mother came to visit several times to give her food that she had in her refrigerator and did not want to go bad.

At first sight, Villachuato seemed to be a very clean community, with not much of a problem regarding their waste. However, one day I had the opportunity to visit the *ejido* in the irrigated land part, and I was able to see the impact that the industrialized diet was having on the community, as there were plastic bottles everywhere.

Final Thoughts

Food in Villachuato is easily accessed. Women can walk to nearby butchers, *tortillerías*, green grocers, live poultry shops, and food stands. As in most towns, most of these food businesses are located along the main street. Built capital in Villachuato is distributed so all Villachuatans with financial capital can have access to it. Two main elements of built capital that allow them to have access to food in Puruándiro are the bus system and highways. Highways are maintained by the government to keep them passable. Social capital allows Villachuatans to have access to natural capital. When Valentina needed white corn for her dish or Vera and Valeria needed specific ingredients for dishes, their access to social capital through their relationships with brothers, sons, and daughters-in-law allowed them to have all the ingredients and food they needed on a daily basis. In Villachuato, social capital is mainly based on kinship.

Financial capital plays a very important role in access to food and natural capital. When money is available, Villachuatans can go to the nearby town to buy groceries for the week, and even to buy more than what they will need for the week if they have a refrigerator. Food can still be gathered from the wild in Villachuato, although the use of agrochemicals has made it more difficult and more risky.

CHAPTER 7. DAILY FOOD PROVISIONING OF VILLACHUATAN WOMEN IN MARSHALLTOWN

En México comemos más saludable. Aquí se presta pa' comer saludable pero no te dejan porque hay muchas carne. Hay muchas cosas enbotadas [sic]. Hay mucha pizza, muchas hamburguesas.

In México we eat healthier. Here you might be able to eat healthy, but it is not easy, because there is meat everywhere. There is a lot of canned food, a lot of pizza, a lot of hamburgers.

- Mariana, *Hijas* cohort

The possibility of comparing the circumstances of Villachuatan women living in Villachuato with those living in Marshalltown allowed me to identify food habits that these women learned in Villachuato as well as the ways they exercise resistance, reinforce their values, influence the legacy handed down, and what they do to maintain those habits, or the adaptations that they have had to make due to the different types of capital available.

Some of the Villachuatan women that shared their stories with me could describe, without thinking much, how they and their families had changed the way they eat since they moved to Marshalltown, while some others had a harder time identifying those changes, insisting that they kept eating the same way. Marisela said, “*Pues yo pienso que es lo mismo [lo que comemos], yo aquí igual que allá [Villachuato], tortilla también comemos igual.*” “I think we eat the same way, I eat the way I used to when living in Villachuato, I keep eating tortillas.” I asked Marisela if she kept making *tortillas* from scratch. She paused and then added, “*No, la compro en la Wal-mart.*” “No, I buy them at Wal-mart.”

Through our conversations, in which Villachuatan women described out loud what they ate, at what time they ate, and who sits at the table to eat, along with the explanations that they gave me about some of the ingredients that they had in their

kitchen when I was taking pictures of their kitchen cabinets, they realized that they had changed the way they eat.

The stories in this chapter are organized following the structure presented in Chapter 6 to help the reader to more easily identify how Villachuatans exercise resistance and maintain cultural continuity through food.

Food Production

In this section I describe the farming, gardening, and gathering practices of Villachuatan women living in Marshalltown, as well as their sources of food production: the gardens in their backyards. In Marshalltown they do not have an *ejido* or live in *solares*; however, in spite of these differences, Villachuatans have found ways to keep growing and sharing food with others.

Animals and Trees in the Backyard

Though I interviewed Magalí and her mother during the winter, their spouses were already discussing what they would plant during the next summer. Magalí's mother said, "*Si a él le gusta [tener un jardín], por eso dice que éste año va a sembrar puro tomatillos para la salsa, y pepinos para los niños que son los que piden pepino.*" "He likes to have a garden, which is why he says that this year he is only planting green *tomatillos* for salsa and cucumbers for the children, because that is what they like, cucumbers."

Villachuatans, when looking to connect to their roots through food, can be agents of change by growing their own food (Flora, Emery, Thompson, Prado-Meza, & Flora, 2012), sharing part of their harvest with family and friends (Thompson, 2011) and preserving food for winter. Therefore, Villachuatans are invisible allies and agents in the development of Marshalltown's local food systems.

All of the 10 Villachuatan women I interviewed in Marshalltown had gardens in their backyards during the summer. They grew staple foods that grow easily in their new home and allow them to continue cooking as similarly as possible to the way they cooked when they lived in Villachuato. Men were in charge of preparing the land and planting the garden, and they would also help with some of the daily care of the gardens. The

women helped with the harvest and were in charge of cooking and preserving some of the produce.

The three *Hijas* had gardens in their backyards. Mayra lived with her parents-in-law during the first years of her marriage, and she said, regarding growing their own food, “*Mi suegro plantaba jitomates, chiles, tomatillo, chiles jalapeños, y qué otra cosa, se me hace que nada más, era lo que más sembraban, sembraban pepino a veces.*” “My father-in-law planted tomatoes, peppers, green tomatillos, jalapeño peppers, and what else, I think that was it, that was what they planted the most, sometimes they planted cucumbers too.” Now Mayra and her family were living in their own home for first time, and she did not know if her husband would have a garden (the interview was completed during the spring), suggesting that it was men’s work to prepare the garden.

At Magalí’s they always had a garden during the summer, since her stepdad really enjoys growing some of their food. He grows tomatoes, cucumbers, green tomatillos, jalapeño peppers, and onions. If they have extra produce, they share it with relatives and preserve the rest in the freezer to use during the winter and spring. However, during the last two summers he had to downsize, because they were not eating all they were harvesting, in spite of sharing it with family and friends and freezing part of the harvest. Magalí’s mother did not like the taste of frozen roma tomatoes, which was why she had asked her husband to plant a smaller garden for the coming summer.

Magdalena’s dad always had a garden in the backyard. She explained that since everything they planted grew, her father kept expanding the garden, adding new varieties and increasing the quantity of planted products,

He had a giant garden in the backyard. He would plant cucumbers, lettuce, potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, little green tomatoes, *tomatillos*, whatever. I actually think he tried to grow corn once, and, aside from that, oh, *jalapeños*, of course, and for the first couple years, everything grew really good and everything. He would always send us out to go pick, and we would hate to pick them up just because of the mosquitos and stuff.

As with Magalí, Magdalena also complained about the increasing size of the garden, especially since it was her sister’s and her responsibility to maintain the garden—cleaning and harvesting all of the produce—and her mother was in charge of cooking and preserving. When they had a lot of extra produce, they shared it with family and friends,

but they also took some to the Catholic Church and put it on a table located in front of the main door. In this way, Villachuatan families shared what they had grown with those families who did not have a garden during the summer, allowing them to have access to fresh, free and locally-grown products.

Additionally, Magdalena also took an active part in caring for another home garden—her fiancé’s. She just had gotten engaged to her high school sweetheart, and, according to her, he was very interested in eating balanced and healthy meals. She said,

He is a really big freak on food. I think he is probably the bigger influence [for me]. He tries to eat everything healthy and like works out every day. So yeah, he has his own little garden at home. So, he is really hard core into eating right. I mean, ‘cause of his reasons to try and be healthy; I think is when he was younger he was overweight and chubby. It cost him a lot to lose a lot of weight, and I think that ever since then he’s just really, really careful and picky on what he eats. And just kinda, I think the thought of him going back to that scares him. So, I think that is probably why he’s so healthy, so.

All the *Hijas* had access to food grown in their backyard. Their parents or parents-in-law shared with them the benefits of growing their own food. Villachuatan *Hijas* had the opportunity to eat local and understood the amount of work necessary to grow their own food. Sharing food from their gardens was a result of several capitals coming together—human capital, as the knowledge used to grow and care for the garden; built capital, by having a space to grow food; and cultural capital, when deciding what varieties to grow, based on which items they like to eat, know how to cook, and are an essential part of their food habits.

However, the reasons for new generations of Villachuatans to grow their own food were slightly different than those of their parents. For their parents, it was important to have access to natural capital that strengthens their cultural capital. The *Hijas* cohort’s access to natural capital can transform their human capital, as it helps them to lose weight and provides a healthy and balanced diet.

Mercedes, from the *Hijas* cohort, told me about what her husband plants in their garden every summer, “*Oh sí, mi esposo siembra, si cuando es en el verano, él siembra jitomate, chile y tomatillo, pepino, y maíz, para las hojitas, para hacer tamales, torundas [risas] y cebolla.*” “Oh yeah, my husband has a garden, when the summer arrives, he

plants tomatoes, peppers, and green tomatillos, cucumbers and white corn, I use the corn leaves to make *tamales*, *torundas* (another type of *tamal*), [laughs] and onions.”

In Mónica’s backyard, besides growing a garden every year, Manuel also planted three peach trees. In a way, this resembles Mónica’s backyard in Villachuato, where they also had several peach trees.

In the case of the *Abuelitas*, none helped care for the garden. At Martina’s, her son-in-law was the person in charge of starting the garden, and her daughter was in charge of cooking and preserving some of the produce. Martina helped cook and she, therefore, received some of the produce. Melinda also helped cook. Along with using produce grown in the gardens, during summer she liked to walk around the house and harvest *verdolaga*, common purslane, and prepare it the way she used to in Villachuato.

Gardens allow Villachuatans access to natural capital and to maintain their cultural capital through food and meals that resemble what they used to eat at home in Villachuato. These gardens also permit them to strengthen their social capital by sharing their harvest with family, friends, and people from their church. Family meals utilizing produce from their gardens strengthens cultural and bonding social capital, but also their human and natural capital, since the ingredients are locally-grown, fresh, and chemical-free.

Of all the Villachuatans women who I interviewed in Marshalltown, there were two families, Mónica’s and Miriam’s, who had Australian parakeets; the rest did not have pets to consume leftovers, a common practice in their hometown. This was a change which I did not consider much at the beginning, but as I continued with the interviews and visited more Villachuatans’ homes, I realized that it had changed the way Villachuatans deal with cleanup/waste management, something that I will describe in more depth in the “Cleanup/Waste Management” section below. When I asked them why they did not have pets, Villachuatans women mentioned that most of the time they were out of the house working, thus they could not properly care for a pet.

***Ejidatarias*, (Female *Ejido* Members)**

The 10 Villachuatans women that I interviewed in Marshalltown were not *ejidatarias*; however, they have a lot of memories tied to the *ejido*. The conversations that

I had with them were about if their fathers were *ejidatarios* or not and the impact that that particular situation had on their life.

Mercedes described the difference that the fact that her father was not an *ejidatario* made in their life,

No, primero [tuvimos una casa] de zacate, una casa asina, bien probes (sic), probes (sic) nosotros, pues para que te voy a echar mentiras, ‘tabamos bien probes, casi nomás comía uno chilito del molcajete; y mira que mi papá sembraba en el cerro su ecuarito, en su ecuarito se le daba mucho frijol, nos íbamos [todos los hijos] todos a ayudarlo a cortar el frijol allá al cerro y hasta bien tierno que no lo comíamos, lo cocía mi mamá el frijol, pues se lo comía uno bien a gusto, frito hasta con xoconostles, fíjate, con xoconostles [que recogíamos] de allá del cerro. Y luego, cuando ya estaba seco el frijolito pues nos llevaba mi papá a ayudarlo a cortarlo y a majarlo allá en el cerro, se le daban sus varios costalitos de frijol, y pues nos duraba mucho tiempo. Pero sí, nosotros sufrimos mucho, porque éramos bien pobres. We first had a house made out of grass, a house made out of that, we were poor, poor, we, well, there is no reason for me to lie to you, we were really, really poor. Most of the time the only thing that we had to eat was salsa made in the molcajete [the Mexican version of the mortar and pestle tool]; and my dad, he used to grow beans in the hills, in his ecuaro, he used to harvest quite a lot of beans, all his children used to help him to harvest the beans. We used to harvest the beans since they were super tender, my mom used to boil them or sometimes she would fry them with xoconostles [the fruit of a cactus] that we used to gather from the cactus in the hills. And when the beans were dry, my father would take us to help him with harvesting them, he would harvest several sacks of beans, and they would last for quite a while. But yeah, we suffered a lot, because we were really, really poor.

Mónica explained to me that she, like Mercedes, also grew up in poverty; she thought that one of main reasons was that her father did not inherit any land in the *ejido* from her grandfather. She said the following about the *ecuaro*,

Era un pedazo en el cerro, son puras piedras, y en cada hoyito donde hay tierra, escarban con un azadón, y ahí siembran los granitos del maíz, y así es donde se van dando entre las piedras. Cercan el cachito que según quemen el di, árboles, huizaches, cazahuates, y ahí eso es lo que ellos siembran cada año, y a la fecha todavía [mi papá crece maíz ahí]. It was a little piece of land in the hills, full of rocks, and in every single space where you could find dirt, you would dig with a hoe, and in there you would put a maize seed, and that is how the corn grows between the rocks. They put a fence in the piece of land that they are working, in which they have burned, trees, acacias, ipomeas, and in there is where my father plants white corn every year.

Access to natural capital has a direct impact on the kind of other capitals Villachuatans can have access to. In the case of Mónica and Mercedes, their fathers did not have access to land in the *ejido*, making it difficult for them to have access to financial capital or built capital, since they did not have the natural capital needed to grow for both subsistence and for sale to the public. This affected Mónica's and Mercedes's access to human capital, since neither of them could finish elementary school because they needed to help their parents to grow part of their food and also worked at the *ejido* helping the *ejidatarios* with the harvest. However, if we focus on the skills and abilities that they got from their childhood, they are now able to help their partners to grow part of their food in their backyards in Marshalltown; they know how to preserve their food, to cook it, and also share it with others; thus, they had access to cultural capital that has allowed them to influence the legacy handed down.

Comparing the situation described by Villachuatan women living in Villachuato with that described by those living in Marshalltown about the *ejido*, it is possible to infer that access to natural capital has a direct impact on the access to other types of capitals. Nowadays, the fact that Villachuatan men that are *ejidatarios* are still migrating to the USA, sometimes leaving their families behind, means that Villachuatan women have more duties to cover, but they are also gaining more access to political capital, something that was rare in the past.

Gender—Those Left Behind, Work, and Responsibilities

Melinda, from the *Abuelitas* cohort, used her skills and knowledge as a *sobadora*, a self-taught chiropractic, and treated many Villachuatans at her son's home, where she was living at the time. Melinda crossed the border without documents, accompanied by her now late husband. As soon as they moved in with their son, she started working as a *sobadora*. Villachuatans knew about her skills, since she had been working as a *sobadora* in Villachuato and in Mexicali, Baja California, where she moved to work harvesting tomatoes after getting married. When explaining to me about what she does, she said, “*yo no busco el trabajo, el trabajo me busca a mi*,” meaning, “I do not look for work, work looks for me.” Villachuatans working at the meatpacking plant were her main customers, especially because they spend from 8 to 10 hours a day on their feet, working in an

environment that is physically and mentally exhausting. The first time that I visited Melinda at her son's place, there was a family from Waterloo, Iowa, another meatpacking town located an hour away from Marshalltown, waiting for her to attend to the father.

Melinda's husband did not like life in the U.S. and decided to return to Villachuato. However, when they talked about returning to their hometown, she decided to stay, since she had an income that allowed her to send remittances to her children still living in Villachuato. Years later, her husband died in Villachuato. However, since she still does not have the proper documents to live in the U.S., she has never returned to her hometown. She did not regret her decision, though, as she was able to help her children still living in Villachuato, who were all married and had children of their own at the time of the interview. Melinda explained about sending remittances to Villachuato, "*A veces cuando puedo, que mis hijas me ayudan y ahí nos juntamos pa'darles una ayudita, allá no hay diario trabajo.*" "Sometimes when I can, for example when my others daughters help me, we all put some money together and send it to them, because they do not always have work there."

When Martina, also from the *Abuelitas* cohort, lived in Marshalltown, she liked to work. Usually, Martina could get a temporary job easily. At the time of the interview, she was working at a local factory, making Christmas wreaths. She also liked to save money and send it to her only son who was still living in Mexicali, where she, like Melinda, had moved to from Villachuato as soon as she got married. She liked to have some money of her own to go back and forth from Mexicali to Marshalltown. She explained to me that she liked to spend time with her son in Mexicali, who could not travel to the U.S. due to health problems.

Magali's mother from the *Hijas* cohort also explained how her family has been helping her husband's family in Villachuato for what she considers a long time now, saying,

Nosotros pagamos el Levantamiento de mi suegra, cada año, tengo diez años pagándole el levantamiento, porque no ajusta; nosotros [también] le mandamos por mes, que al principio era pelea tras pelea con mi esposo, porque dice uno, bueno yo a mis padres no les doy \$200.00 por mes, porque a los tuyos les mandamos \$200.00, [él dice] no, porque ellos están en México, [pero] eso no es diferente, mis padres, son mis padres también, pero ya se impusieron, ya cuentan con ese dinero. We paid for my mother-in-law's *Levantamiento*; I have paid for

it for 10 years because she does not have enough money for it. We also send her money once a month. At the beginning [of my marriage] I used to fight quite a lot with my husband because of it, because I used to tell him, “I do not give my parents \$200 dollars a month, why do we send \$200 dollars to yours?”, and he would say, “Because they are in México”; but that does not make a difference to me, because I also have parents, but there is nothing that I can do now. My parents-in-law are used to receiving that money; they take it for granted.

As soon as Villachuatan families moving to Marshalltown find a steady job, usually at the meatpacking plant, they have access to financial capital, one of the capitals that can be easily transformed into other forms of capital, such as having access to built capital by buying a house, or access to natural capital by buying food. However, this does not mean that they stop being part of the Villachuatan social network, as they still have to care for those who are left behind in Villachuato by sending remittances. As described in Chapter 6, financial capital sent to Villachuatans in Villachuato has allowed them to transform it into other types of capital: built capital by building concrete houses, or natural capital by buying seeds.

While I was analyzing and comparing the gathered data, I realized that Villachuatans appreciate what they have when living in Marshalltown, but there is a certain longing for their hometown, and some of them even have the belief that they should have never left Villachuato. For example, Mariana said,

Allá están mejor ellas que uno, las muchachas allá en el jardín andan más elegantes que uno, aquí uno se le va en trabajar, uno aquí luego sin nada. Y lo manda uno para allá [dinero] y allá si les luce el dinero, no ves tantas casas que haces. Yo si te vuelvo a repetir, si volviera yo a nacer, yo no me venía a este país, ya no, porque yo ahora comprendo que esta uno más agusto allá. Que a veces se viene uno que por el norte, que pa' conocer. Que pa'darle una vida a los hijos mejor y a veces los hijos [aquí] cambian más. There, they are better than us; the girls get together at the plaza and they dress up better than us. Here, the only thing that we get to do is go to work, then nothing. And we send the remittances, and they can make more over there with the money, you can build a lot of houses. See, that is what I am telling you: if I could be born again, I would not come to this country, not anymore, because now I understand that you live happier there. Because sometimes you come to the USA to visit, or to give a better life to your children, but [living] here, the children change a lot.

Nevertheless, in Villachuato, people have a similar impression, that perhaps their situation could be better if they had the opportunity to migrate. An example of this is the regular comments that Villachuatans made about my migratory status and the fact that I

had the proper documents to go the USA and return without much of a problem. Another example is what Viviana shared with me about not having the possibility of building their own house because they could not migrate due to the illness of her husband.

Food Processing

In the section about the celebration of *Levantamientos* in Marshalltown, I described the importance that cooking has for Villachuatan women and the lengths that they are willing to go to in order to maintain cultural continuity through food. In this section, in addition to reaffirming the importance of cooking for them, I describe how their food processing habits have had to change, how they have adapted to these changes, and I also describe their preserving practices.

Nixtamal, Molino and Fogón

Tortillas are still an essential element of Villachuatans' diet. Perhaps the clearest way to see the importance of this staple food is in its growing presence in big grocery chain stores, which sell several brands of commercially packaged, unrefrigerated *tortillas*. There is also a *tortilleria* in one of the Mexican grocery stores in Marshalltown that sells *tortillas* made out of *maseca*, but during the summer, white corn is used instead.

Mónica woke me one Saturday morning around 9:00 AM and told me she had a friend who she wanted me to meet. Macaria and Mónica met for the first time while both were living in Villachuato, and they met again in Marshalltown after almost 14 years. Macaria came at the beginning of 1990 to reunite with her son, who was working at the meatpacking plant and had just bought a house in Marshalltown. Since she crossed the border without documents, Macaria has never returned to Villachuato, but she dreams about returning to die in "*su tierra*" or her hometown. After we talked for a while, Mónica invited Macaria to stay and have lunch with us; she also called Mabel, a friend from work. Mabel was from Guanajuato and a Jehovah's Witness. Since it was the first time I met both Mabel and Macaria, the three ladies explained that even though they were not of the same religion, they respected each other's beliefs and were good friends.

We sat down at the table, while Mónica cooked enchiladas for the four of us and her 3-year-old son. Both Mabel and I asked Mónica if she needed any help in the kitchen,

but she said she was only making *enchiladas* for lunch. She boiled some potatoes, peeled, and mashed them. Additionally, she boiled some guajillo peppers with a clove of garlic and a pinch of salt, and placed everything into a blender to make a guajillo salsa. At the end, she started making *tortillas*, almost from scratch, using *maseca*, and with the *tortillas* she made potato tacos, dipped them into the guajillo salsa, and fried them. In less than 30 minutes, we were eating Villachuatan style *enchiladas*. For drinks, Mónica offered us Pepsi-Cola in cans.

After Macaria and Mabel left, Mónica began to explain how much she liked cooking food to share with friends. Since she had most of her weekends free from work, she did not mind waking up early on Saturday or Sunday to cook and have friends visit. This situation has not gone unnoticed among friends and relatives. Mónica shared with me that her aunt Melinda—also a participant in this study—had told her that “*tenía a todos sus amigos empicados de tanto invitarlos a comer a la casa, y que así nunca la iban a dejar,*” “your friends are never going to leave you, since you invite them over to eat at your place all the time.”

All the Villachuatan women that I interviewed from the *Abuelitas* and *Madres* cohorts know how to make *tortillas* using *maseca* and a *torteadora*, a tortilla press made with cast iron or wood, which they also called *máquina*, or machine. Mercedes explained,

Nomás en veces las hago [las tortillas] de MINSA, no pues [aquí] no hay masa, aquí les hago de MINSA cuando quiero, cuando no, no. Nomás me hago mi larguita en veces y me la llevo [al trabajo], les hago unas cuatro largas o unas cinco. Las largas son tortillas grandes, gruesecitas, para llevarme mis taquitos pa'la planta, Para cuando salgo a break, me las como. Tengo máquina de palo pa'cerlas [las tortillas]. Sometimes I make tortillas with MINSA (the company's name that makes and sells the tortilla mix), because here they do not sell *masa*. Here I make *tortillas* with MINSA if I feel like it; if I do not, well, I don't. Sometimes the only thing I make is *larguitas*, and I take them to work. I can make four or five *larguitas*; they are longer and thicker tortillas, and I make *tacos* with them, to eat them when I have a lunch break at the meatpacking plant. I have a *tortilla* press to make them.

Nixtamal, *molino* and *fogón* are staples of the Villachuatan cuisine, and the women that I interviewed in Villachuato talked about waking up early to take the *nixtamal* to the *molino* and then coming home to make the *tortillas* in the *fogón*. In Marshalltown they had to adapt these practices to their new reality, since there is not a

molino in town to which they can go. Additionally, having *nixtamal* in every household in Villachuato was easier because white corn is grown by most of the households there; it could be grown in the *solar*, in the *ecuario* or in the *ejido*. Thus families in Villachuato have easier access to natural capital in the form of white corn to have *nixtamal* to make *tortillas*. Some of the participants in the study said that at some point they had grown white corn in their backyards; however, it was not enough to make *nixtamal* for *tortillas* for the entire year. The *fogón*, a staple kitchen appliance in Villachuato, was not present in any of the Villachuatans' homes that I visited in Marshalltown. There were several reasons for this: first, the amount of time that Villachuatan women in Marshalltown had available to cook was considerably less compared to those who live in Villachuato, and to cook in the *fogón* meant being willing to spend quite a bit of time cooking. Additionally, Villachuatan women in Marshalltown had easier access to financial capital that allowed them to be able to buy gas and electricity, thus they could replace the *fogón* with an electric or gas stove.

Villachuatan women are maintaining some of the cultural continuity through food, in this particular case through *tortillas*; however, they have had to adapt the way they have access to them, modernizing their kitchen appliances from *fogón* to stove, and changing the ingredients from *nixtamal*, made from white corn grown on their land, to *maseca*, an industrially produced *tortilla* mix.

Comidas Saludables, Healthy Foods

When I asked Mariana, from the *Hijas* cohort, what she thought were *comidas saludables*, or healthy foods, instead of providing me examples of healthy foods, she said, “*En México comemos más saludable. Aquí se presta pa’ comer saludable pero no te dejan porque hay muchas carne. Hay muchas cosas enbotadas [sic]. Hay mucha pizza, muchas hamburguesas.*” “In México we eat healthier. Here you might be able to eat healthy, but it is not easy, because there is meat everywhere. There is a lot of canned food, a lot of pizza, a lot of hamburgers.”

Mónica, from the same cohort, said, “*Pues ya pa’ comidas sanas puras verduras, crudas o cocida, o jugo natural de verdura, es lo que me gusta más.*” “Well, healthy foods are raw or boiled vegetables or vegetable juice, that it is what I like the most.”

However, since I was staying at her home while doing my fieldwork in Marshalltown, I noticed what her 3-year-old son would usually eat. He typically liked to eat pizza and Maruchan ramen noodles and drink Capri Sun juices. Therefore, I asked her if she had talked with her son about healthy foods. She replied, “*Él ve lo que yo como, pero ahorita no le gusta casi nada de comida de esas, no quiere.*” “He sees what I eat, but right now he does not like any of those foods, he does not want to eat them.”

Another description that I was given about healthy foods occurred in the middle of a conversation that Mónica was having with Marisela, when the recorder remained on when I excused myself to use the restroom. The conversation went as follows:

Mónica: porque acá todo viene congelado, enlatado, y allá la carne la comes recién matada la res, el pollo.

Marisela: Es que si, aquí es bien diferente

Mónica: Un chile, si los dejas afuera [del refrigerador] ‘ta bien aguado, y cuando se agarra de la Mexicana, siempre están en el refrigerador, la lechuga luego, luego se mancha.

Marisela: Y allá no. La carne

Mónica: Las guayabas las compras bien congeladas, allá las cortas del árbol, recién cortadito. Un pepino de allá, te vas a la huerta, un melón igual

Marisela: Y aquí, dónde?

Mónica: Calabacitas, acelgas, quelites, verdolagas, aquí eso no se usa, pos porque aquí no cultiva, no se dan, ahí es mucha la diferencia, y son cosas más sanas

Marisela: Yo ahora cuando fui, me llevó Virginia un pollo, recién matado, te imaginas?

Mónica: Y tiene hasta otro color pues, pone uno el caldo uno en México y bien amarillito, y aquí no, ‘ta blanco.

Mónica: Because here everything is frozen, canned; and there you can get freshly slaughtered beef, chicken.

Marisela: Yeah, everything here is so different.

Mónica: A pepper, if you leave it out of the refrigerator, it gets all flabby, and when you go to buy peppers at the Mexican store they are in the fridge. The lettuce gets all spotty really quick.

Marisela: And there they do not. And the meat...

Mónica: The guavas in here we have to buy them frozen, and there you get them directly from the tree. If you want a cucumber you can go to an orchard, the same with melons.

Marisela: And here? Where can we go?

Mónica: Zucchini, chard, wild spinach, common purslane, we do not have those here, because they are not grown here, they just do not grow, that is the reason, and those are very healthy foods.

Marisela: I recently went to Villachauto, and there Virginia gave me a freshly slaughtered chicken, can you believe that?

Mónica: And even the color of the broth is different. When you make chicken soup in México, the broth is yellow, and here is not, it is white.

The main concern that Villachuatan women expressed about healthy food is that they do not have a way to know the origin of their food, while in their hometown they have the opportunity to go to the orchards and harvest the fruit, gather wild greens in the hills, or eat freshly slaughtered chicken, pork or beef. Thus, they can tell and know that their food is fresh, a sign that a food is healthy. However, most of the wild greens that Mónica and Marisela described as not available in Marshalltown can in fact be grown in Iowa during the summer, though only common purslane can be gathered in the wild. Villachuantan women in Marshalltown, then, have not had access to the human capital or knowledge that there are some greens that they used to eat in Villachuato that can be grown in their new home. The conversation between Mónica and Marisela provides examples of the efforts that Villachuatan women undertake to maintain their cultural continuity through food. They buy their cooking ingredients at Mexican grocery stores, but that also means that some of those ingredients have to be bought canned or frozen; their complaints about it are a sign that they are trying to resist the industrial food system. Access to human and cultural capital about what varieties can be grown in their new home could perhaps be an effective way to resist the industrial food system in a more active manner.

Kitchen Appliances

Mónica and Manuel were remodeling their kitchen. The contractor hired was born in a town located 20 minutes from Villachuato. Mónica had instructed him that the kitchen should be as similar as possible to what her sisters, Virginia and Victorina, had in Villachuato. While Marshalltown is a town that little resembles Villachuato, Villachuatan women have found ways to maintain their culture and traditions in the kitchen. When Mónica visited Villachuato a couple of years ago, she returned with her tortilla press, a *comal*, or cast iron plate to make *tortillas*, and a pan to fry the meat.

Another aspect I noticed in most of the homes of the participants is that their kitchens were decorated in a similar way to some of the Villachuatan kitchens—with cups hanging on the wall and a *molcajete*, or stone mortar, and clay cookware pots being

some of the cookware used for cooking. On the walls and the kitchen counters were religious images, with one of the most common being *The Last Supper* painted by Leonardo Da Vinci.

Refrigerators and freezers were also changing the food methods of Villachuatans. Mercedes, for example, had a big freezer in the basement in addition to the refrigerator in the kitchen. In the freezer, she was able to preserve the green tomatillos and tomatoes harvested from their garden and use them during the winter and spring. Moreover, it also impacted their grocery shopping patterns. Since both she and her husband worked at the meatpacking plant, they had employee discounts and bought large quantities of meat every time they found a good bargain.

In the case of Marisela, since she, her husband, and children have different schedules and therefore have some difficulty eating together as a family, she explained that she cooked large amounts of her children's favorite meal, *mole*, and put it in the refrigerator. Thus, her children and husband could eat *mole* whenever they wanted; they just needed to reheat the food in the microwave.

Disposable plates and cutlery were very common in the homes I visited. During the three *Levantamientos* I attended, only disposable plates, cups, and cutlery were used. Since these family events usually involved many guests, it made sense to use them. When Manuel and I had dinner by ourselves when Mónica was at work, he always insisted upon using disposable plates so that his wife would not have to wash many dishes. Thus, the use of disposable plates was a response to the unavailability of Villachuatans' human capital. Given that the kitchen is still the main responsibility of Villachuatan women and they have paying jobs outside the home, the women find ways in which to use their time wisely. Avoiding dishwashing as much as possible seemed a response to or result of their tight schedules. While I was tempted to ask if they had considered the environmental impact of using Styrofoam cups and plates, I decided against it, because I did not want them to think that I was judging their decisions.

Cultural capital plays an important role when Villachuatan women decide what kitchen appliances they need in their kitchens. They choose built capital that they know how to use when cooking particular dishes. A clear example is the *torteadora* or tortilla press.

Food Access

Perhaps this aspect of the food system of Villachuatans living in Marshalltown is the one that is the most different from that of Villachuatans living in Villachuato. Villachuato is a very small town that can be traveled around on foot, and in the town there are a lot of grocery stores within walking distance, as well as a lot of street vendors that walk around the town yelling out what they sell. Additionally, going to Puruándiro, the biggest and closest town, to buy groceries for the week is rather easy, since the highway is well maintained, and there are buses going back and forth every 10 minutes. Furthermore, the weather is much more cooperative in Villachuato, where it is sunny most of the time and there are only two seasons, the dry season and the rainy one.

Grocery Shopping Patterns

All of the Villachuatan women I interviewed in Marshalltown had very similar grocery shopping patterns. They usually go to Wal-Mart and Hy-Vee to buy most of the food ingredients they will need for the week. However, they also visit several Mexican grocery stores in town to purchase those foods not sold in the big grocery chain stores. All of the women mentioned that meat is the main item bought at these locally-owned, family-operated grocery stores. Abarrotes Villachuato and Abarrotes La Salud were the stores mentioned most frequently by the interviewees. Both grocery stores are located downtown, close to Main Street. Magalí's mother explained,

La mayoría [de la despensa] pues [la compro en] Wal-Mart, la carne yo nunca la compro con anticipación, siempre la compro cuando la voy a usar, y pues normalmente en la [tienda] mexicana, porque creo es en donde, yo a lo menos he visto más limpia. Most of the groceries that I buy I get them from Wal-Mart; the meat—I never buy it ahead of time, I always buy it when I am going to use it, and I usually buy it at the Mexican grocery stores, because I think that the meat is cleaner there.

Additionally, she could talk with the butcher at the store and explain to him the cut of meat she needed and the quantity, and inquire about the quality of the meat. Mayra from the *Hijas* cohort said,

En las tiendas mexicanas [mi mamá] se surtía de carne y eso, pero como de lo demás iba a la Wal-mart o a esta otra tienda, Aldi, [compraba la carne en las tiendas mexicanas] pues yo pienso que por el corte, la venden pues del modo que

uno quiere, y en la Walt-mart que viene siempre en paquete, y una pura pieza, bueno, al menos a mi se me hace mejor [comprar en las tiendas mexicanas]. In the Mexican grocery stores is where my mom used to buy the meat, and the rest of the groceries she would get them from Wal-Mart, or this other store, Aldi. I think my mom liked to buy the meat from the Mexican grocery stores because of the cuts of the meat, and she could buy it exactly as she wanted, and in Wal-Mart they sell the meat prepackaged, and just in one piece; well, at least I think that it is better to buy the meat from the Mexican grocery store.

Unlike in Villachuato, grocery stores in Marshalltown are not within walking distance of the women's homes. Therefore, they needed transportation to purchase their groceries. Melinda and Martina from the *Abuelitas* cohort did not know how to drive. Thus, they relied on their children to drive them to the grocery stores weekly. Both women were still healthy, had active lives, and had jobs with steady incomes. Melinda explained,

Compramos el mandado cuando mi hijo esta [en la casa], pues ya ve cada fin de semana arriman el mandado ya nomás navega uno, que a veces se acaba una cosa, pero estando bien [el clima], me voy caminando de ´onde viva pos a la [tienda] Villachuato, y a la Salud, son las que más visito. A mi me gusta caminar, a mi me enfada estar así [en casa sin salir, por el invierno], en este tiempo si me desespero, pero cuando no hace frío, me la paso en la calle caminando, voy [a la tienda mexicana] una vez en la mañana o en la tarde, tan solo por caminar, caminar. We buy the groceries when my son is in the house, you know, every weekend, and we wait until then if we run out of something, but if the weather is nice I walk to the Mexican grocery store, I usually go to Villachuato or La Salud. I like to walk; I get bored of this weather because I can't get out of the house. But when the weather is nice, I spend the day walking outside, and I like to go the Mexican grocery store, once a day, it could be in the morning or in the afternoon, just to walk.

Martina, at the time of the interview, was working at a local factory, making Christmas wreaths. Thus, she had income to buy groceries. However, since she was living far from any grocery store, her daughter and son-in-law were the people in charge of buying all of the groceries for the household, which they would do once a week during the weekend.

In the *Hijas* cohort, all of the women except Marisela and Miriam knew how to drive; thus these two women relied on their children or husbands to purchase groceries during the weekends, when the husbands were not working or their children were not attending school. Because they had jobs, all of the *Hijas* had a steady income. While

Miriam had no proper documents to work in the U.S., she babysat nieces and nephews in her home, thus contributing to the family income. The other women worked in the meatpacking plant or as custodians in the Meskwaki Bingo Casino located in nearby Tama, Iowa.

When the *Hijas* were asked how they had changed their grocery shopping patterns or food habits since moving to Marshalltown, all answered that they worked really hard to maintain the same habits as when they were living in Villachuato. It was not until I asked permission to take pictures of the contents of their kitchen cabinets and refrigerators that they realized they were buying different kinds of ingredients or foods than they had purchased while living in their hometown. Marisela explained,

Ay, pues que yo me acuerde ni carne comíamos, yo ni me acuerdo que haya comido carne, en verdad de veras. Ya hasta que llegamos aquí comemos más, íbamos al lonche [comprar el mandado] y surtíamos el refrigerador y todo, y yo ay Dios, y luego él [esposo] me dice, pues aquí si come uno, y hasta le fecha pues. Hasta yo tomaba mucha soda de primero [que llegue a Marshalltown], tomaba bien mucha soda, pues estaba uno ganoso, si, estaba ganoso [lo que quiere decir que quería probar todo lo que no había podido de chiquita] y nos surtíamos de mucha soda. Um, as I remember, I do not think that we used to eat meat, seriously I do not remember a time growing up in which I ate meat. It was not until we got here that we were able to eat more. We used to go to buy the groceries, and we would fill up the fridge, and we could buy everything, and I used to say, “Oh my God,” and my husband would tell me, “Here, people do eat,” and it is the same up until now. At the beginning when I just got here, I used to drink a lot of soda, because I was so excited about having the opportunity to drink it, so excited, thus I used to buy a lot of soda.

Later, one of Marisela’s daughters started selling Amway, a direct selling company that sells a variety of products, primarily in the health, beauty, and home care markets (Amway, 2012). Then Marisela started buying a product to make flavored drinking water from her daughter.

Mercedes mentioned that one way in which her grocery shopping patterns have changed since arriving in Marshalltown was the amount of groceries they were able to buy. She said,

Pues es que tiene uno a veces la facilidad [de comprar mucho de todo], y tiene uno mejor las cosas ahí alzadas para cuando uno necesita las cosas. [Y en Villachuato] No, allá muy limitado, uhh sí, allá compra uno nomás lo que va a necesitar. Well, here, sometimes we have the opportunity to buy a lot of everything, and you have everything stored for when you will need it. And, in

Villachuato, no, everything is limited, uh, yeah, there you only buy what you need.

The *Hijas* cohort was more diverse regarding its grocery shopping patterns. Mayra came to Marshalltown when she was a teenager and married as soon she graduated from Marshalltown High School. She had an 18-month-old son and was 4 months pregnant at the time of the interview. Mayra explained that since she had the opportunity to go to school in the U.S., the foods she liked were different from what her mother used to cook. Additionally, she did not like to cook much. Thus, it was very common for her to buy take-out food, or order food delivery, as pizza is her favorite food. Nevertheless, like the women in the *Hijas* cohort, Mayra also liked to buy meat at the Mexican groceries. About her preferences, she said,

Por lo regular voy a la Wal-mart, como a surtirme de mucho mandado, casi los fines de semana voy a la Wal-mart, a la [tienda] mexicana, pues nada más lo que se me termina, y que a la carrera voy que ya [a comprar] y pues como le digo, que a veces pues la carne o eso, ahí en la mexicana. Usually I go to Wal-mart to buy the groceries on the weekends, I usually go to the Mexican store when I run out of something, and the meat; I get the meat from the Mexican store.

Magdalena, from the same cohort, was born in the U.S. and was living with her parents at the time of the interview. In her household, her mother was the person in charge of buying groceries. However, there were certain foods and ingredients she liked and had decided to start buying herself, since she had a job as a community liaison at a local radio station. Magdalena explained,

I get my own [groceries] sometimes, with my own money so, like there's different things that I get like, I'm obsessed with sour cream. I have to have sour cream on everything, which is probably not very healthy, but oh well. So, I always make sure there is sour cream. There is this kind of cheese, orange on the sides, so I always have to have that cheese, it is like Cheddar, the brand is Kraft, I get stuff like that and ice cream.

Magalí, also from the *Hijas* cohort, was still completely dependent on her parents. Her mother was the one in charge of buying groceries. Magalí's mother explained that she liked to go to Abarrotes La Salud to buy meat, since it was fresher there, and she could buy just the amount she needed to cook. She said, regarding the meat that she usually gets from those stores, "*Pues la [carne] de puerco la ordenan en Swift, la de res he visto cajas de IBP pero no le podría decir de donde exactamente.*" "Well, the pork is

from Swift, and the beef, I have seen boxes from IBP, but I could not tell you exactly where the meat comes from.” Thus, Villachuatans living in Marshalltown have a hard time knowing who raised the cattle and hogs for them to eat and how the animals were raised.

Social capital plays a decisive role in the grocery shopping patterns of Villachuatans women, especially in the case of the *Abuelitas*, and the *Hijas*, who are still dependent on their parents. While they have the human capital needed to obtain their groceries, since they are healthy and active, they do not have the built capital in the form of a car or a bus system available to go to the grocery stores. Thus, lacking built capital also means limited access to natural capital.

All women in the *Hijas* cohort had a job and income. Thus, they had access to financial capital, which in turn provided them access to natural capital. However, social capital was still important for them, since some did not own the built capital needed for transportation and had to be driven to the grocery stores. Additionally, some of the women in this cohort changed their grocery shopping patterns due to their interest in supporting family members, who were selling supplies for the home through a catalog. The availability of human capital was also affecting Villachuatans’ grocery shopping patterns. The long hours at work and their jobs with low salaries have resulted in a reduction in the amount of time available to spend on cooking and this has also increased their consumption of processed foods, with low nutritional values compared to fresh foods, which have become part of their food habits (Counihan, 2006).

The *Hijas* cohort had different grocery shopping patterns, since their human capital in the form of education was significantly different than their parents. First, the three *Hijas* had the opportunity to attend and graduate from high school in the U.S., while the women in the other cohorts barely finished elementary school or were illiterate. Thus, their human capital made a difference in determining their natural capital. However, their cultural capital and their identity as Villachuatans also impacted their grocery shopping patterns, and they also bought part of their groceries, especially meat cuts, from the Mexican stores. Additionally, Villachuatans’ financial capital influenced the variety of products offered in Marshalltown. Both Wal-Mart and Hy-Vee had incorporated Hispanic food aisles in their eagerness to attract and retain Latinos as customers.

Small Family Stores in Marshalltown

At the time of the study, there were three locally-owned, family-operated Mexican grocery stores in downtown Marshalltown. A few months later, I learned a fourth grocery store opened on Main Street across from City Hall.

Abarrotes Villachuato and Abarrotes La Salud were the stores mentioned the most by the participants as the businesses from where they purchased their groceries. Both stores were owned by Villachuatan families and were big compared to the corner grocery stores in Villachuato. Abarrotes Villachuato and Abarrotes La Salud offered a larger selection of products; both had a meat section attended by two or three butchers who cut meat according to their customers' orders. Besides selling beef, pork, and fish, they also sold Mexican traditional Mexican dishes, like *ceviche*, a large selection of Mexican sausages, and other marinated meats.

In addition to the meats section, there were produce, frozen food, and canned food sections. In the produce section, there was a large selection of fresh fruits and vegetables commonly used in Villachuatan cuisine. This included several types of green and dried peppers, such as poblano, Serrano, jalapeño, guajillo, and tree chiles, green tomatillos, roma tomatoes, radishes, cactus, key limes, white onions, cilantro, garlic, and white and purple corn, among other fruits and vegetables, in bulk.

In the canned food section, there was a lot of the same food that would be found fresh in Villachuato. Canned foods allowed Villachuatan women to have access to the necessary ingredients to cook their traditional meals and to reduce the amount of time needed to cook. Mónica, for example, buys boxes of *maseca*, a brand of instant corn flour, to make *tortillas* daily. In Villachuato, her sister, Virginia, goes to the *molino* daily to grind the maize to make tortillas. Magalí's mother, who has a full time job, was able to cook *pozole* for the *Levantamiento* by buying canned, white hominy.

In the frozen produce section, traditional fruits and vegetables are sold. When Mónica cooked for the *Levantamiento*, she purchased *tecojotes*, sugar cane, and guava for the *ponche* from this section in Abarrotes Villachuato.

In addition to these types of food, these stores also sell traditional candy, piñatas and over the counter medicine that is popular in México, with the instructions printed in

Spanish. Beside the register, there is an area where customers can send remittances and faxes to any country in Central and South America. Customers can also buy phone cards from a large variety of selections. These are among the many ways the Latino community maintains connections with its community of origin (Vertovec, 2004).

These grocery stores continue to grow over time and the owners have expanded their businesses. Abarrotes Villachuato's proprietors bought the shop next door and opened a Mexican restaurant. Also, they opened a new ballroom at the end of 2011, where the local bowling alley used to be. When I informally interviewed one of the owners of Abarrotes La Salud, he explained that one of their objectives was to also be known among the Anglo community, since they knew the merchandise they sold was not only for Mexicans or Latinos. However, they were still attempting to determine the best method to achieve this goal.

Villachuatans in Marshalltown are linked with food in several ways. They came to this Midwestern town to work year-round at a meatpacking plant, which allowed them to have access to financial capital. Financial capital, in turn, provided them access to built capital, and for some Villachuatans this has allowed them to be able to purchase shops in downtown and in other places around the town, providing spaces in which Villachuatans can have access to their cultural and natural capital, such as food.

Social capital is also an important part of spiraling up in the capitals process, since the Villachuatans community continues to grow annually due to their desire to reunite with family and friends. Thus, they contribute to the increase in demand for traditional ingredients and food. According to Nützenadel and Trentmann (2008), the driving force behind transnational food chains is not only globalized markets, but the migrants who have brought their traditions, cuisine, and consumption patterns (p. 9). Therefore, migrants become agents in the transnational circulation of food. In the particular case of migrants from Villachuato living in Marshalltown, they have stores where they can purchase some of the traditional ingredients to cook (though perhaps with a limited inventory compared to what is available in México). Despite undergoing changing food ways, Villachuatans in Marshalltown are agents in the transnational circulation of food. They increasingly embark on efforts to hold on to their cultural customs.

School Lunch Program and the *Hijas* Cohort

An institution named by the Villachuatan women as having a great impact on their food methods was school and its lunch program. The *Hijas* cohort was the group that made the most references to how different their food habits were compared to their parents. Mayra moved to Marshalltown when she was 13 years old. Unlike the other two *Hijas*, immediately after she enrolled in the local high school, she had the opportunity to grow up in both towns—Villachuato and Marshalltown. She explained,

Es que yo allá en la escuela... yo a veces aquí como muchas cosas americanas, porque en la escuela pues me acostumbré a comer, porque ya ves que en la escuela, son puras cosas americanas, y pos como que las hamburguesas, que el espagueti; todo de eso nos daban en la escuela, y allá [Villachuato] uno ni sabe de esas comidas, y aquí sí, y me gusta a mi todo eso. In school... sometimes I eat a lot of American food, because I got used to eating it at school, because you know that in the school they just serve American food. They gave us hamburgers and spaghetti. All those foods they gave us, and in Villachuato, we did not even know those foods, and here you do, and I do like it.

The other two women in the *Hijas* cohorts, Magalí and Magdalena, were born in the U.S. and had never lived in Villachuato. They only visited four times to attend *La Fiesta*. Thus, they had been eating school lunches since they started attending school. Magalí discussed the food that she eats at her school as follows:

Me gusta mucho, sus chicken patties, es nada más una hamburguesa de pollo, tienen como la fruta; son cuatro líneas [de comida], una de ensalada, una que puedes comprar lo que sea, y luego otra que es lo que hacen todas las escuelas (sólo menciona tres), y pues yo casi no voy a las que hacen todas las escuelas porque la comida no esta, esta, pues, a mí no me gusta; voy a la ensalada, o si no voy y compro, y en la ensalada siempre dan una fruta, leche. I like the chicken patties a lot. It is like a chicken hamburger. They also have fruit; there are four lines of food, one with salad, one in which you can buy anything, and then another one in which they have the food that they have in all the schools (she only mentioned three of the four), and that food is, is, well, I do not like it. I get the salad, and with the salad you get a fruit and milk.

Since Magalí was a senior, she was allowed to leave the school grounds during lunchtime to obtain her own food. When I asked her what kind of food she bought when she did not eat at school, she said “Hardee’s or Wendy’s,” but that she did not go out to eat lunch often.

Magdalena, the other *Hija*, was 18 years old when I interviewed her. She was finishing her second year of college at Marshalltown Community College. Magdalena has been trying to change her food habits, and had started to go home or to a friend's house for lunch, in order to eat healthier food. When I asked her why she had decided to change, she replied, "I found that when I eat a bunch of junk food and fast food, I get more tired, and I can't focus on my studies. I feel like crap, so [laughs]." Magdalena had a lot of experience with the effects of junk food, describing her eating habits while in high school in the following way:

Food in school, I do not know. My lunch in high school was probably a combination of Cheetos, French fries, and a yogurt, and that was the only thing that was mildly, mildly healthy. So, I mean that is what I remember eating every single day—French fries and Cheetos. So, when I came home I'd be like starving and ready for my dinner. And, I would mostly eat at school; occasionally I'd eat out. I mean we only had 40 minutes, and by the time we got everybody together, we had like 20 minutes left. If we're gonna go somewhere, it had to be fast food and you have to go super-fast and eat in the parking lot. So we rarely went out. But, I think in high school I'd probably be more prone to eat fast food than now in college. But yeah, I mean we had a salad bar there, and occasionally [making emphasis in the word, to denote that it was a rare event] I'd go and get a salad, but rarely.

Not only did the *Hijas* talk about how their food habits were different from their parents, but women in the *Madres* cohort also discussed this. Mariana explained about her children,

Pues yo todavía sigo comiendo lo que comía, pero mis hijos no, porque no les gusta. Allá comía uno mucho, el arroz blanco, morisqueta, este, torreznos de papa, la comida saludable, nopales, enchiladas, garbanzos, puras cosas saludables que comía uno, y ya aquí no. No, y deja de eso, luego, luego la carne, luego, luego a lo fácil. I still eat what I used to eat, but my children don't, because they do not like it. There we ate a lot of white rice, potato cakes, healthy food, cactus, enchiladas, chickpeas. We just ate healthy food and here we do not. And no, besides that, the meat, it is just about what it is easier to do.

One of Mercedes' sons was working at Burger King after school. While Mercedes did not like to eat out, her son ate hamburgers from work. When I asked her if he ate many of them, she said,

Pos él este, será cuando sale de break [sic] ahí yo creo [come] su hamburguesa. Pues cuando viene en veces nos trae un hamburguesa a cada uno, porque a ellos se la dan casi regaladas, pa' que triagan, se las dan a 65 centavos, y nos trae una

hamburguesa a cada uno. He, when he is on break, I think he eats a hamburger. And, sometimes when he returns from work, he brings a hamburger for each one of us, because they sell to them at a really low price. They cost 65 cents, and he brings a hamburger for each one of us.

Miriam, from the *Hijas* cohort, had eight children. While all were born in Villachuato, they came to Marshalltown with her in 1992 when they were little. When I asked her about her childrens' food habits, she said,

Los nopales yo nomás [los como] poquito porque a estos no les gustan, nomás a mi y a él [esposo]. A ellos no, pues casi no les gustan las cosas de allá [Villachuato], bueno a ver, casi nomás les gustan los puros frijoles. I do not eat a lot of cactus because my children do not like it, just me and my husband. To my children, well, they do not like the food from there [Villachuato] very much. Well, let me see, the only thing that they like is beans.

Choice vs. Necessity

The aspect of choice versus necessity for Villachuatan women living in Marshalltown is different than for those living in Villachuato. While in Villachuato the lack of financial capital pressed them to gather and hunt the foods they would eat, in Marshalltown the lack of human capital in the forms of time available to cook, to clean the kitchen, and to eat together as a family, were the main restraints when deciding what to eat, how to cook it, and with whom to eat.

Mariana, from the *Hijas* cohort, and her husband both worked at the meatpacking plant, though on different shifts. As a result, it was very difficult to cook and eat together, or even to have the time to cook. She explained,

Porque la puedes comprar [la comida], y mejor te vas a eso. No, digo que sea flojera, si no que no hay tiempo a veces, llegas [del trabajo] y esta la carne bien congelada y ya no tienes [tiempo de cocinar]. Because you can buy the food prepared, then you do that. I do not think that is laziness. It is just that sometimes you do not have the time to cook. You get home from work and the meat is frozen, and you just do not have the time to do it.

She added, “*Aquí cada quien lava su plato, hace algo [de quehacer], hasta los hombres, yo creo porque aquí todo mundo trabaja y se ayuda, y se tiene que hacer cada quien sus cosas, porque pues no hay tiempo.*” “Here everyone washes their plate, or does something around the house, even the men. I think that is because here we all have a job and have to help each other, and everyone has to do their part, because there is no time.”

One of the biggest changes Mariana had experienced in her food ways was the time available to cook and the income to buy food. About the latter, she explained,

Aquí se compra más [carne]. Se come más grasa aquí. Será también porque hay más posibilidad de comprarla y allá a veces no alcanzabas para comprarla; pos allá a veces uno no tenía ni pa' nada, nomás pa' los frijoles. Allá la [carne] la puedes comer a veces, nomás una vez por semana. Here you buy more meat. Here you eat more fat. I think that it is because we have the possibility of buying meat, and there you did not have enough money to buy it. There, we did not have money, just enough to buy beans. There you can eat meat once in a while, just once a week.

Magdalena, from the *Hijas* cohort, was studying at the community college and working at a local radio station as a community liaison. She explained the importance of having time to eat.

Last semester was just the worst semester of my life, super, super stressful, like no sleep, no food. I have the tendency of not eating when I'm in a hurry. So, I just go for, like, whatever. I'll go through breakfast and lunch, so yeah.

Mercedes, from the same cohort, explains that besides not having a lot of time to cook, her work is tiring and stressful.

No, vieras que me canso re te harto de la rabadilla, de estar yo creo parada, ay en verdad me duele mucho la rabadilla. Esta uno de pie ocho horas, en veces hasta nueve horas, ahí 'ta uno que ya no aguanta estar parado, de los pies y las rodillas, porque no circula [la sangre], 'ta uno de una pieza ahí. Y, el frío, un frillazo que 'ta haciendo que ay. No, you should see, I get tired, super tired, ay, my coccyx really hurts, because I am standing the whole day. My coccyx really, really hurts. I am on my feet for 8 hours, sometimes even 9 hours, and sometimes you feel like you can't be on your feet anymore. Your feet and your knees hurt, because your blood does not circulate, you just have to stand the entire time. And, the plant is cold, really cold, ay.

Financial capital has played a significant role when deciding what to eat or what ingredients to buy. Villachuatan women talked about how their refrigerator was always full and about the increase in their consumption of meat. Some of the women mentioned they ate it on daily basis and even got tired of eating so much meat each week.

Food Consumption

Gender, Informal Networks, Work, and Responsibilities

Both *Abuelitas*, Melinda and Martina, arrived in Marshalltown after their children had moved to this Midwestern town and bought houses. They left their hometown in México to reunite with their children, who had steady jobs, and to be with their grandchildren, who were enrolled in the local schools.

Martina also lived in Mexicali; at the time of the interview she was dividing her time between Mexicali, where she moved after she got married, and Marshalltown, where she came to visit her two daughters after one of them arranged her visa. When living in Marshalltown, she worked for a salary for the first time in temporary jobs that did not require her to speak English.

Marisela from the *Hijas* cohort recalled the first months when she moved to Marshalltown. Her husband and her brother, Manuel, were working at the meatpacking plant and living in Manuel's home. She moved from Villachuato with her eight children, and told me, "*Fue en el '92 porque nos venimos en Noviembre y no dejé a ni uno [hijo] allá, y no tenía ni un papelito, [crucé la frontera] con coyote.*" "We came here in 1992, in November, and I did not leave any of my children there. I crossed the border without any papers, just with a coyote." When I asked Marisela how a mother with eight children could decide to cross the border without proper documents, she explained,

Pues él aquí estaba, mi esposo aquí estaba, se vino con Manuel mi hermano, porque aquí Manuel, fue Manuel pa'lla [Villachuato] y le platicó pues a este hombre [el esposo] que se viniera pa'ca que estaba la planta, que si había trabajo y dijo, 'no pues si me voy hasta allá', y se vino pa'ca pues. Well, it was because my husband was already here. He came here with my brother, Manuel. Manuel went to Villachuato and told my husband to come here to work at the meatpacking plant, because here there were jobs, and my husband said "then I will go all the way there," and he did.

Villachuatans' first expression of social capital manifested when they started to reunite with friends and relatives in Marshalltown. The access that some Villachuatans had to financial and built capital when they first moved to Marshalltown provided them a means of strengthening their social capital by sharing their homes with those who were just arriving in Marshalltown and did not have money or a job yet. These were the first

steps in their creation of a transnational community. While Villachuatan women, especially those in the *Hijas* and *Abuelitas* cohorts, came to Marshalltown to reunite with their partners or children, all of them had a job and were contributing to the family's income and housework.

One evening while visiting a possible participant to explain about my project and to invite her to take part in the study (she declined to participate in the study), I had an informal conversation with one of her sons. When he learned about my research, he said,

Sabe, cuando llegamos aquí nos venimos sin ellas [esposas y madres] y nosotros teníamos que cocinarnos todo. Siempre era chile con carne y carne con chile [risas], pero en cuanto llegaron ellas, dejamos de cocinar, ellas ya se encargaron de hacer todo [en la cocina]. You know, when we got here, we came without them [wives and mothers] and we had to cook everything. It was always meat with *chiles* and *chiles* with meat [laughs], but as soon as they got here, we stopped cooking, and they took care of everything [in the kitchen].

Villachuatan men had to learn to cook and take care of the kitchen while their wives and mothers were still living in their hometown. However, as soon as they moved to Marshalltown, Villachuatan women completed housework in addition to their jobs. Mónica works at the casino as a custodian during the evening shift. She leaves the house around 2:45 P.M. and arrives home around 12:45 A.M. Regardless of how tired she may be, every morning she makes tortillas from scratch, and likes to invite friends and relatives to have lunch in her home when possible. Mónica explained that since her husband worked the morning shift and she worked the evening shift, they had to eat alone most of the time. For this reason, every time she could eat with her husband or with family and friends, she did, explaining

Desde que yo llegué [invito a mis familiares a venir a comer a mi casa]. Desde hace cinco años, porque [ellos] no eran así, a ellos no les gustaba ser así. Dicen que, como te dijera, que ni que tuviera la gente tanto dinero pa' andar hacer y hacer comidas, me dicen que a mi me gusta mucho gastar, le digo no me gusta gastar, pero me gusta mucho convivir con la gente. Eso es lo que me gusta. Since I got here I started inviting my relatives to my house to eat. 5 years now, because they weren't like this, they did not like to be this way. They say, how can I explain it, they say that I do not have the money to make and make meals. They tell me that I like to spend my money a lot, and I tell them that I do not like to spend it, but I like to socialize. That it is what I like.

Mariana, Mercedes, and their husbands worked at the meatpacking plant, but they worked different shifts from their partners. As a result, during the week they did not see each other much. The only time they could eat together as a family was during the weekends. When I visited Mercedes to interview her, it was a Saturday night. She had worked the evening shift at the meatpacking plant. When she returned home, her husband had already cooked dinner and was waiting for her to have dinner together. Mariana explained that her husband sometimes helps cook or she calls and asks him to buy some food.

In the *Hijas* cohort, both Magalí and Magdalena stated that their parents are willing to cook and help in the kitchen. However, Magalí's stepfather is a little more reluctant to help. She said, "*Si él cocina, es blanquillos con winnies y frijoles y tortillas [risas], si no ordenamos algo, y si no es carne dorada con frijoles, es algo simple, cuando él cocina.*" "If he cooks, he cooks scrambled eggs with sausage, and beans and tortillas [laughs], or we order food, or he fries meat and serves it with beans. He cooks simple meals." Magali's mother added,

Tenemos que estar en un aprieto total [para que él ayude en la cocina]. Cuando le digo no voy a llegar, darle de cenar a los niños, pero él, él depende mucho de ellas [de las Hijas], porque [les dice] 'mija, vamos y compramos una pizza', o les agarra una pizza o una hamburguesa mientras llega tu mamá, pero si, él confía mucho en mí, aunque trabajo yo. We would have to be in a total predicament for him to help in the kitchen. When I tell him I won't be at home on time, please give the kids dinner, but he, he relies on my daughters a lot. He tells them, let's go and buy a pizza, or he buys them hamburgers; but yeah, he relies on me a lot, even though I also have a job.

However, not all Villachuatan women complained about the little help they receive from men in the kitchen, with Magdalena explaining,

I do not know if it has to do with Villachuato or what, but it's a little different at my house, meaning how that whole stereotype. I do not know if there is a stereotype, machos and Mexicans or whatever, well, at my house is a matriarchy, so my mom is kinda the head you know. My dad works. He asks her what to do and I mean, I don't see that as necessarily bad. He cleans, I mean, even though he works, he cleans, helps and cleans the house. He does laundry. He cleans the bathroom every once in a while. He cooks; he does cook a lot actually. He makes his own food, for lunch, for work, and stuff. I think a lot of that has to do, when he came, when he immigrated by himself, he came with a bunch of friends.

Family gatherings are an opportunity for Villachuatan women to have an active social life while enjoying traditional food. However, these gatherings do not occur as often as they would like, since they have a busy schedule and still must complete the housework. Some of the Villachuatan women do receive help from their husbands in the kitchen, with some helping them cook, or going with them to buy the groceries. However, this is limited help. Women are still in charge of most of the activities in and around the kitchen.

For Villachuatans, sharing their homes and food with other Villachuatans and caring for the elderly is nothing new. This practice still exists in both communities and has allowed them to strengthen their social capital and to create a transnational community. Nevertheless, the practice of taking care of others and sharing is more noticeable among the *Madres* and the *Abuelitas* cohorts. The women in these two cohorts have financial, built, human, natural, cultural, and social capitals that allow them to provide care for others and to share. The members of the *Hijas* cohort may have natural and social capitals, but they lack access to the built and financial capitals needed to share space and food with others.

Cooking for Others, Eating Together

Marisela, from the *Hijas* cohort, stated,

Es que cuando estamos descansando [del trabajo] pos decimos, ‘vamos a hacer algo aquí pa’ comer todos [como familia]’, [cocinamos] unos tacos; que a veces vienen los muchachos [porque saben que es mi día de descanso], como ellos pues ya están todos aquí [en Marshalltown], llegan. Y me gusta hacer [de comer] porque a veces no vienen a visitarme, pues ya les ofrece uno taco, por eso casi no, yo en verdad casi no salgo [a comer a restaurantes]. When I have a day off from work, we say ‘let’s cook something to eat together as a family.’ We make tacos. Sometimes my children visit, since they know that it is my day off, because now all of them live here in Marshalltown. And, I like to cook for them, because they don’t always visit me. I offer them tacos, and that is why I do not go to restaurants.

Mariana, from the *Hijas* cohort, explained,

Todos juntos [comíamos], y aquí no, aquí yo creo que se desintegra la familia, cada quien llega a un horario, que la otra trabaja; [por ejemplo] yo a mi esposo no lo veo hasta mañana. Pos nomás [comemos juntos] los domingos, o los sábados, los sábados que no trabaja él, y a veces, y los domingos, pero el

muchacho llega más tarde, él se levanta más tarde. Y allá durábamos [comiendo] como dos horas, tres [risas], y aquí, rápido a comer, rápido come uno. Los domingos a comer y vámonos al mandado, o vamos a misa. There, all of us ate together, and here we do not. I think that here the family disintegrates. Every one gets home at a different time, like me. I won't be seeing my husband until tomorrow. We only eat together as a family on Sundays, or Saturdays, the Saturdays that my husband does not have to work, and sometimes on Sundays, but my son, he gets home late, so he wakes up late. And there we sat down at the table to eat and we talked for 2 or 3 hours, and here, we eat too quickly, we eat fast. On Sundays we have lunch, and then we have to go to do the groceries or to go to church.

Mercedes also works at the meatpacking plant, and at the time of the interview she was working the evening shift from Monday to Saturday. Thus the only day in which all the family could get together to eat was on Sunday. She said,

Pues nomás el fin de semana, si, los domingos, porque ahorita trabajamos los sábados. Lo que me gusta ahorita, es el fin de semana que estamos todos juntos ahí. Ese es el gusto. A mi me da mucho gusto que estamos ahí, rodeando la mesita, comiendo bien a gusto, platicando. Eso es lo que yo siento. Only on the weekends, yeah, on Sundays, because right now we are working on Saturdays. What I like is that we are all together on the weekends. That is what makes me happy. It makes me very happy that we are all there, sitting around the table, eating, chatting. That is what I like.

Magdalena, from the *Hijas* cohort, explained,

It is hard to try to get everything, everyone out of the house and on time in the mornings. So everybody kind of eats their own breakfast at their own time, so, but lunch is the same. I mean I'm at school. So we usually, we actually eat a really early dinner which is kinda weird. My dad gets home from work around 2:00, usually the table is served by 4:30. So it's kinda early, but that's usually when everybody eats, and it really bothers them when everybody is not there. I haven't been there for about 2 weeks I think. Usually I eat with them on Saturdays or Sundays, because I work, so.

Mayra, also from the *Hijas* cohort, explained that growing up in Marshalltown, her family never seemed to have the time to eat together,

Es que a veces unos trabajan, como trabajan unos un horario y a veces unos ya estaban en la casa, so, comían los que estaban en la casa y pues los otros trabajando nunca se juntaban todos, así a comer todos juntos. Sometimes they have to work, and they have different schedules, so at home we never all gathered to eat together. We never ate, all of us together.

Melinda, from the *Abuelitas* cohort, worked as a *sobadora* at home. However, even though she worked at home, it was difficult for her to find a time in which all the family would come together to eat. She stated, “*Los fines de semana que no hay trabajo [comemos en familia], ‘tan todos reunidos, a veces pa’ hacer un menudo, una carne enchilada, o hacer un caldo o algo.’*” “We eat together on the weekends because they do not have to go to work. We are all together, and we make *menudo*, meat in chili, or a stew, or something.”

One of the main changes that Villachuatans living in Marshalltown experienced was the amount of time available for both cooking and eating together. All the women that I interviewed who were born and raised in Villachuato mentioned that when they lived there, they used to cook and/or eat together as a family at least once, and sometimes twice, a day—brunch and lunch were the most common meals they had together. Now they were living in Marshalltown, and their time available to cook or sit down at the table to eat together had reduced drastically, since both husband and wife worked, and in most cases, they had different shifts. Additionally, the children were in school and some of them also had jobs. As a result, the only meal that most Villachuatans eat together as a family is lunch on the weekends.

Cooking also proved to be a challenge, due to time restrictions. All the women I interviewed were very active in the kitchen, even Magalí and Magdalena, both from the *Hijas* cohort, who were single and still living with their parents. Magalí and Magdalena helped their mothers in the kitchen, a practice they had started when they were around 10 years old. While their mothers were still primarily responsible for cooking, both helped when needed. The eight remaining women included in this study all cooked on a daily basis, at least once a day. Dinner was the meal cooked most often. When I asked them about the average time they spent cooking, Villachuatan women mentioned they tried to cook as quickly as possible, with the average time spent being between 1 hour and 1 and a half hours.

Human capital plays an important role in the food ways of Villachuatan families. The decline in time available to cook and to eat together as a family has resulted in some cases where only one meal is cooked, usually dinner.

Cleanup/Waste Management

In Villachuato, giving leftovers to pets or the animals being raised in the *solar* was a common practice; there were even some women who would put the fruit peels on the plants as compost to help them grow. In Marshalltown the situation was very different; the use of super heavy-duty black trash bags was common in all the houses that I visited. All the women that I interviewed mentioned that they threw away all of their leftovers, and sometimes they would even have to throw away food in the refrigerator that went bad because they did not eat it.

Mónica and Manuel told me that once, while they were living in Marshalltown, they tried to burn some of their trash, including wooden sticks, which is a common practice in Villachuato. However, their white neighbors called the police, who came to their house and explained that this could not be done.

Final Thoughts

Villachuatans are helping the meatpacking plant in Marshalltown to stay in business, enabling the plant to sell pork and beef at very cheap prices, which shapes the food consumption of most of the people who buy their food from supermarket chains. However, the food consumption patterns of Villachuatans are also affected. The long shift hours, little time to cook, and low salaries affect the kinds of food that Villachuatans can access. The processed foods that shorten the preparation and cooking time but provide low nutritional values, compared to fresh food, therefore become part of their food habits (Counihan, 2006).

The women in the *Madres* cohort are the ones who likely recall more differences in their food habits. All the women I interviewed in this cohort were married with children and decided to migrate so their families would be together in one place. Some migrated with their husbands, and others joined later, when their partners were able to send sufficient money.

The fact that these women migrated as adults to the United States meant they learned to cook in Villachuato. All but one of the *Madres* recalled growing up in very poor homes, where both parents had to work extremely hard to provide food for their

families. Everyone remembered growing food for their own consumption. They talked about helping their parents on the farm or on the piece of land they had in the hills. The father was the person in charge of growing part of the food for the year. Everyone talked about growing white corn and beans and helping dad with weeding and harvesting from a very early age. However, when they moved to Marshalltown, most of the women started a year-round job with a steady income and benefits. Their income increased, thus they were able to fill their refrigerators, and purchasing food was no longer the problem. Nevertheless, a full fridge does not necessarily translate into better nutrition. Now, since both parents work, they have less time available to cook and to have dinner together as a family. They rely more on take-out food, they have fewer meals together as a family, and they tend to buy more canned food, since it is convenient and shortens the cooking time.

Moreover, after moving to Marshalltown, Villachuatans stopped gathering greens and other foods, though most of them had a garden during the summer. The husbands were usually in charge of growing and caring for the garden, with green peppers, green tomatillos, roma tomatoes, white corn, white onions, and cucumbers being the most common vegetables grown in the families' backyards. Some of the women also mentioned carrots and cabbage, but these crops were less common. While the husbands were in charge of taking care of the garden, the women were the ones in charge of preserving, cooking, and also sharing some of the harvested goods.

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation examined the ways transmigrant women exercise resistance to maintain cultural continuity through food. I analyzed the degree to which transnational migration of Villachuatans to Marshalltown, Iowa, U.S., changed their food ways and the mechanisms transmigrant Villachuatan women use to resist cultural pressures for an unhealthy, but easily accessible, diet. The towns of Marshalltown, Iowa and Villachuato, Michoacán, México provided a context for understanding the central role of transmigrant women in the food system and how transnational extended family dynamics intersect with food habits and the food system.

Villachuatan women, as subjects, were the center of my investigation. I sought to use food ways to understand how these women construct and reconstruct their local and national identities in a transnational community (Nützenadel & Trentmann, 2008, p. 9) and to understand how food helps them to identify themselves as Villachuatans. I conducted multi-sited participant observation field work, where I utilized in-depth interviews, informal interviews, participant observations, and photographs of women with different migration histories, ages, and current residences to identify those food habits Villachuatan women try to maintain, the importance of their legacy, and the lengths they are willing to go to retain these habits.

The stories that Villachuatan women shared with me were analyzed using the Community Capitals Framework (CCF), which allowed me to understand how food for resistance and cultural continuity change the balance of the capitals and which ones lead in facilitating food possibilities and food choices. Cultural capital became much more important and explicit in the Marshalltown context.

Villachuatans who have chosen Marshalltown, Iowa as their new home are able to maintain their ties to their home, families and community. As migrants, they reconfigured their lives to create a transnational community, developing their agency and influencing life in both their Marshalltown and Villachuato communities at the same time. Now Villachuatans are agents in the transnational circulation of food, which results in the reshaping of the food ways of Villachuatans living in Marshalltown, but also impacts the food ways of those who are living in Villachuato.

Food is intimately bound with social relations, including those of power, inclusion, and exclusion, as well as with cultural ideas about classification (including food and non-food, the edible and the inedible), the human body, and the meaning of health, where migrants become agents in the transnational circulation of food by bringing with them their traditions, cuisine, and consumption patterns (Caplan, 1997, p. 9).

When I began this study, I wanted to understand the connection between food and the agency of Villachuatan women, and how food helps these women to reinforce values, to influence the legacy handed down, and to exercise resistance to maintain cultural continuity through food. My personal views of the Mexican women and their roles in the kitchen have drastically changed. Villachuatan women teaching me how to cook their favorite meals allowed me to understand the pride they have in cooking. They like to cook their children's favorite meals. When they serve you a dish, they observe you carefully to discern your first reaction—did you like it? They asked this almost immediately, and from this point, one can have an entire conversation: how the ingredients blend together, how the recipe has changed over the years, and how they have taught their children to cook this particular dish. The kitchen allows Villachuatan women to express their creativity, to strength their social network, and to keep memories alive. Villachuatan women in Villachuato like to talk about the favorite dish of the absent father or husband, and Villachuatan women in Marshalltown like to recall how certain recipes tasted different when they cooked in Villachuato. Food allows them to be nostalgic about their hometown, but at the same time, to feel they have a piece of home in their new home in a new country. Food helps them to connect past with present and future.

Our conversations about food were both happy and sad. Villachuatan women would start crying as they remembered a childhood of poverty, where going to school was not an option, since all family members had to help to raise, gather, hunt, and cook their daily food. Interestingly, they also grew sad when they realized that a refrigerator full of food does not mean they are doing better. Husbands and wives in Marshalltown see each other for a few hours a day and families can only come together to eat during the weekends. The long conversations about the day have been exchanged for short phone calls or text messages. In some of the families that I interviewed in Villachuato, husbands and wives see each other only for a few weeks a year, but they try to call each other every

day. Nevertheless, they smile and laugh when remembering their flocks of pigeons flying away or when sharing with younger generations their use of dry cow dung as fuel for the *fogón*.

The life stories and transnational experiences that Villachuatan women shared with me provided me with the opportunity to understand the influence these transmigrants have had in the transnational circulation of food and the role this ‘food migration’ has played in the formation of their identity. Food has helped them to construct their Villachuatan identity in their changing self-understanding of a transmigrant community. The food that Villachuatans cook, grow, share, preserve and throw away shapes their family and communal relationships through its changing routines and rituals. The *Levantamientos*, for example, provide Villachuatan women the opportunity to maintain their traditions, to pass them to the new generations, and to strengthen their social capital; they are willing to spend long hours cooking so that family and friends can share and celebrate together. The food cooked and served at these events also allows them to display the financial, human, cultural, and natural resources they have available to celebrate. Thus, while the *Levantamientos* help them strengthen their identity as Villachuatans, they also allow them to differentiate themselves from others. Food is, then, a particularly potent symbol of personal and group identity, forming one of the foundations of both individuality and a sense of common membership to the Villachuatan transnational community (Wilk, 1999, p. 244).

I also had the opportunity to participate in *La Fiesta* in Villachuato. Both events, *La Fiesta* and the *Levantamiento*, helped me understand the community relationships that span borders and are supported through remittances, visits, and symbolic commitments to transnational identities, regardless of residential location or immigrant status (Lauer & Wong, 2010, p. 1054), allowing me to understand what food traditions are important for Villachuatans and which of these are passed to the new generations, as well as what new knowledge they share with family and friends in Villachuato and in Marshalltown.

The desire of Villachuatans to gather to celebrate one of their most popular and ancient traditions is the engine that makes *La Fiesta* possible. Cultural capital in the form of clothing, music, and customs, such as *Las Mojigangas*, the rodeo, the *castillos*, and the collective community food preparation events, are all part of a socialization process that

serves to transmit the Villachuatan values from one generation to the next (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 56), and also from one place to another, in this case from Villachuato to Marshalltown, and vice versa.

La Fiesta is, then, a celebration made possible because new generations of Villachuatans, regardless of their current residence, think it is important to preserve their identity and shared ancestry and to convey pride in their heritage (Flora & Flora, 2008, pp. 76-77).

In the case of Villachuatan traditions in Marshalltown these are continued, but adapted to carry them on without experiencing hostility from the Anglo population. These customs are a creation and a re-creation, which reaffirms their identity as Villachuatans. In their reconstruction and reinterpretation of traditions (Flores Tondo, 2010, p. 227) and shared video recordings, Villachuatans have found ways to *ser y estar aquí y allá*; by adapting these traditions to new places of celebration, they provide new generations with the legacy and pride of what being a Villachuatan means. Their food practices influence the food stocked in Marshalltown grocery stores. It is a cycle, where their food ways help to reproduce as well as to construct their identity, and, in turn, their identity and alimentary symbolism significantly affect Villachuatans' food choices (Jones, 2007, p. 130), both in Marshalltown and in Villachuato. For Villachuatan women, family gatherings and traditional celebrations serve as an important method to keep and continue their traditions.

Villachuatan women put a lot of effort into big gatherings that require a lot of planning, financial resources, and hard work in the preparation of elaborate meals in order to make the rituals as similar as possible to those in their hometown. These events “symbolize the integrity of the family and provide concrete memories of sharing in an activity. The memories help create the sense of solidarity and commitment to the common aims of family that make it a special unit” (Daniels, 1987, pp. 411-12 as cited in Alicea, 2007, p. 611). Women have an essential role in preserving and passing on the Villachuatan traditions to the younger generations, regardless of their current residence. The women are willing to endure all of the organization, execution, and even the cleaning after a family or community event because the preservation of these traditions is so significant to them.

Food helped the *Hijas* cohort and the younger generations of Villachuatans to differentiate themselves from their mothers (*Madres*) and grandmothers (*Abuelitas*), especially those living in Marshalltown, Iowa. *Hijas* can have access to both their Villachuatan and Mexican cultures, but also to their Marshalltown and U.S. cultures. They are accustomed to eating both cultures' foods, and they are in a position to choose. However, the diversity of choices excludes them from full belonging or inclusion in the Villachuatan food system. Mothers (*Madres*) complain that their children do not like all the food they cook; children (*Hijas*) complain that their mothers do not buy their favorite foods; thus, they have to buy their own groceries. Their identities as transmigrant Villachuatans are directly connected to their experiences of ethnicity, as well as religion, and hence, to their experiences as Americans (Nagel & Staeheli, 2004, p. 19).

Growing their own food has provided Villachuatans with an opportunity to strengthen their identity. They grow food they like and know how to cook, and they share it with others. Ironically, while most of the Villachuatans in Marshalltown can only grow a small garden during the summer due to their lack of built capital, at the same time, they are contributing to a very similar problem in their hometown. Remittances are used to build concrete houses, decreasing the space available to grow food or to raise animals for direct consumption. Thus, financial capital, in the form of remittances, is insufficient to solve their food problems; there are certain things that money cannot buy.

One of the advantages of having a purposive snowball sample and studying a transnational extended family, where family members have various residential statuses—U.S.-born or naturalized citizens, documented or undocumented residents—was that I could understand that while financial capital seemed to benefit the entire community, in reality, remittances were helping to widen the gap between those who receive remittances and those who do not. This especially affected the *Abuelitas* cohort. Villachuatan women with access to remittances can make some of the kitchen tasks less burdensome by acquiring kitchen appliances or ready to use ingredients, but those with no access to financial capital had no choice but to rely on their social and cultural capital, relying on relatives to help them to have steady access to food.

Food is also an indicator of gender equity. In Villachuato, all the women I interviewed mentioned that rarely and almost never do their husbands or sons help in the

kitchen or indeed know how to cook. In some cases, men even get upset when asked to change their food habits due to illness. Only Violeta's husband helped her cook when she was teaching me to cook her favorite dish. He later explained that when he was living in Des Moines, Iowa, he had worked in a restaurant, and that was where he learned to cook. For Villachuatans in Marshalltown, the fact that both husband and wife work at the meatpacking plant or had worked there led some men to help with domestic tasks and softened the gendered division of work within the family (Miraftab, 1996, p. 75). The extreme work pressure on women becomes a motivation for men's participation in housework, especially when men are present at the site of women's double burden, for example, some men help buy groceries, clean, and sometimes even cook. Nevertheless Villachuatan men living in Marshalltown explained that when their partner or mother was still living in their hometown, men had to learn to cook and to take care of all the activities in the kitchen, but as soon as their wives, mothers, and daughters started migrating to Marshalltown, they stopped cooking or having such an active role in the kitchen. Therefore, arguing that immigrant women experience more freedom in the United States because of the unique aspects of the migration experience oversimplifies women's contradictory experiences. While gaining some forms of freedom because of paid work, they still have the primary responsibility for subsistence work that sustains their families and communities (Alicea, 1997).

The grocery shopping patterns of Villachuatans living in Marshalltown have also changed. They now buy in stores where the average size and range of products is increased compared to the grocery stores in which they used to shop in Villachuato. Aside from buying some of their groceries at Wal-Mart and Hy-Vee due to convenience and cheaper prices, Villachuatans continue purchasing at locally-owned, family-operated Mexican grocery stores in town, because most of their staple foods and ingredients are not sold in the big grocery chain stores. Additionally, all the women said that meat is the main item bought at these Mexican grocery stores. They might visit these stores more than once a week, as they like to buy the meat when they will need it and also buy from specialist butchers who can provide specific cuts and quantities. Villachuatans living in Marshalltown still maintain some of the grocery shopping patterns from their hometown.

In summary, international migration has changed Villachuatans' food systems in both Marshalltown and Villachuato. Remittances are a source of international development and at the same time, negatively affect local cultures through the introduction of consumerism into traditional communities. Financial capital from the earnings generated by migration facilitates the purchase of highly processed food, changing food habits in both Villachuato and Marshalltown. Yet, food security and food sovereignty of the sending transnational community are eroded, as the families with remittances become dependent on them, and those without remittances find their ability to gather and grow their own food reduced.

Limitations of the Study

There were some limitations during the study; I had to adapt the methodology for the second half of my fieldwork after determining time was a scarce resource for Villachuatans living in Marshalltown. However, I was able to adjust to these changing conditions, an advantage of the reflexivity and flexibility of the multi-sited participant observation fieldwork methodology, and I decided to rely more on the photographs I took and on attending family events. Also, the number of interviews was small, and though they were in depth, more insights might be gained from a larger sample.

Another limitation was that I conducted my fieldwork in different seasons of the year. I conducted my research in Villachuato during the summer, which allowed me to visit *solares*, *ecuaros*, and the *ejido* to see the food that Villachuatans grow for their own consumption or to sell. In Marshalltown, I conducted fieldwork during the winter. Therefore, there were no farmers' markets or gardens for me to visit. However, I did accompany families to buy their groceries in local Mexican grocery stores and big chain grocery stores. Direct observation helped me to better understand what they said, what they did, and to contextualize my research findings.

Additionally, while my research initially was aimed towards one-on-one, in-depth conversations with the interviewee, I never really had the opportunity to achieve this. In Villachuato, all the interviews I conducted with the participants were in the company of other women; only Viridiana was interviewed by herself. I believe the reason for this was

that I arrived at their homes unannounced and the other women—close friends or relatives—were already there most of the time. The Villachuatan women I visited would gather to watch TV and see Mexican soap operas while knitting or crocheting table cloths, baby clothes, pillow cases, or cloth napkins.

When I explained I was there for an interview, they would invite me to sit with them to begin our conversation. Thus, I rarely interviewed them alone. However, it was clear I was conducting an interview to only one person in the room and the others would remain silent most of the time. On a few occasions, the interviewee would ask others to confirm something they just said, ask for clarification, or be reminded about an unclear date or fact. To be around the other women was useful for my research, especially when talking about the migration stories of relatives, because the interviewee and her guests would start remembering who left first, when and with whom, helping each other recall the specifics. However, the fact that the interviewee was with others could have impacted the information they shared, as the interviewees might have been censoring themselves. They could have felt embarrassed to share certain details in the presence of family or friends.

Future Studies

Future studies could include re-appreciation of the importance of food in the Villachuatan transnational community, and how that can assist in strengthening local food initiatives, or in decreasing the levels of obesity and obesity-related diseases among the Latino community migrating to the Midwest. Other studies of immigrants should include food and its meaning, particularly the sharing of food preparation, eating, and cleaning up, as part of the acculturation/resistance process. Food is an important mechanism for identity keeping and identity sharing.

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