STUDIES ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Since 1970, millions of people around the world have come to reside in countries in which they were not born, and the United States now ranks sixth in the world among Spanish-speaking nations. This superb collection of essays explores many dimensions of these "identities on the move" in North America and the Caribbean Basin. The collection is truly interdisciplinary, with contributions from internationally known anthropologists, sociologists, literary critics, writers, psychologists, and economists—at least half of whom are, themselves, bearers of transnational identities.

The most important contribution of this book lies in the delineation of new directions for social and literary analysis as the impact of the economic globalization and transnational processes is felt and incorporated into the national ideas of both sending and receiving nations. This book provides a glimpse of what the next century will look like.

Gary H. Gossen
DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY
AND LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY

ISBN 0-942041-18-6
9780942041187

GOLDIN

Identities on the Move

INSTITUTE FOR MESOAMERICAN STUDIES

Identities on the Move

Transnational Processes in North America and the Caribbean Basin

Edited by *Liliana R. Goldin*

Studies on Culture and Society

Volume 1. Gary H. Gossen, ed.
Symbol and Meaning Beyond the Closed Community: Essays in Mesoamerican Ideas

Volume 2. J. Jorge Klor de Alva, H. B. Nicholson, and Eloise Quiñones Keber, eds.
The Work of Bernardo de Sahagún: Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Aztec Mexico

Volume 3. Victoria R. Bricker and Gary H. Gossen, eds.
Ethnographic Encounters in Southern Mesoamerica: Essays in Honor of Evon Zartman Vogt, Jr.

Volume 4. John Gledhill
Casi Nada: A Study of Agrarian Reform in the Homeland of Cardenismo

Volume 5. Brenda Rosenbaum
With Our Heads Bowed: The Dynamics of Gender in a Maya Community

Volume 6. Mary G. Hodge and Micheal E. Smith, eds.
Economies and Polities in the Aztec Realm

Volume 7. Liliana R. Goldin, ed.
Identities on the Move: Transnational Processes in North America and the Caribbean Basin

1999

Identities on the Move

Transnational Processes in North America and the Caribbean Basin

Edited by
Liliana R. Goldin

Studies on Culture and Society
Volume 7

Institute for Mesoamerican Studies
Unversity at Albany
Albany, New York

Distributed by
University of Texas Press

Foreword

Since 1970, some one hundred million people around the world have come to reside permanently or temporarily in countries in which they were not born. In the United States, the number of such individuals is greater than at any time since 1920. Greater Los Angeles is second only to Mexico City in the numbers of urban inhabitants who claim a Mexican identity. The United States ranks approximately sixth in the world among Spanish-speaking nations. As of 1998, one in ten U.S. citizens is Latino. Transnational processes and identities will be among the major social, political, and economic phenomena of the twenty-first century.

Originating with a conference sponsored by the University at Albany in 1994, this superb collection of essays explores many dimensions of "identities on the move" in North America and the Caribbean Basin, including Mexico and Central America. The collection is truly interdisciplinary, with contributions from nationally and internationally known anthropologists, sociologists, literary critics, writers, psychologists, and economists—at least half of whom are, themselves, bearers of transnational identities. Methodologies and analytic styles range from ethnographic descriptions to autobiography, from statistical and documentary analysis to literary interpretation, from the testimony of U.S. Latino poetry to the extraordinary content of Mexican popular border art.

Identities on the Move is divided into two major sections. The first presents theoretical and conceptual foundations for approaching these new social and political spaces, which involve, often simultaneously, forces of both homogenization and differentiation. The second offers specific case studies of displacement, incorporation, and re-formulation of self and community in various transnational settings. The epilogue is a moving autobiographical portrait of a Mexican Jew who is also a United States Latino.

The most important contribution of this book lies in the delineation of new directions for social and literary analysis as the impact of the economic globalization and transnational processes is felt and incorporated into the national ideas of both sending and receiving nations. These essays document brilliantly

Goetz, Delia, and Sylvanus Morley (translators)
1983 *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiche Maya*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.
Kaufman, Wallace
1984 Introduction. In *El K'anil: The Man of Lightning*, by Victor Dionicio Montejo, pp. 6-13. Signal Books, Carrboro, North Carolina.
Lamming, George
1992 *The Pleasure of Exile*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
Las Casas, Bartolomé de
1989 *Brevísima relación testimonial de la destrucción de las Indias*. Ediciones Cátedra, Madrid.
Martin, Stoddard
1992 *The Great Expatriate Writers*. St. Martin's Press, New York.
Montejo, Victor D.
1984 *El Kanil: The Man of Lightning*. Signal Books, Carrboro, North Carolina.
1993 *The Dynamics of Cultural Resistance and Transformations: Mayan Refugees in Mexico*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Connecticut. Translated by Wallace V. Kaufman. University Microfilms, Ann Arbor.
Musgrave-Portilla, L. Marie
1982 The Nahualli or Transforming Wizard in Pre-and Postconquest Mesoamerica. *Journal of Latin American Lore* 8:3-62.
Nabokov, Peter
1991 *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-1992*. Penguin Books, New York.
Nolin Hanlon, Catherine L.
1995 *Flight, Exile, and Return: Place and Identity Among Guatemalan Maya Refugees*. Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Geography, Queen's University, Ontario.
Roys, Ralph L. (translator)
1933 *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*. Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication 438. Carnegie Institution, Washington D. C.
Stephens, John L.
1949 *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey.
Tedlock, Dennis (translator)
1996 *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Maya Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*. Simon and Schuster, New York.
Varese, Stefano
1996 Identidad y destierro: Los pueblos indígenas ante la globalización. *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 23(46):19-35.
Weiss, Timothy F.
1992 *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V.S. Naipaul*. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.
Worsley, Peter
1984 *The Three Worlds: Culture and World Development*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

11

Miracles on the Border

Retablos of Mexican Migrants to the United States

Jorge Durand and Douglas S. Massey

In recent decades the volume of migration between Mexico and the United States has risen dramatically, and a transnational movement has emerged as a major force binding the two countries. During the 1960s, legal Mexican immigration was at 430,000, and in the 1970s, this figure grew to more than 680,000 (U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1992). During the 1980s, the flow became truly massive: more than three million Mexicans were admitted to the United States as legal immigrants, and another 800,000 arrived without legal documents (Woodrow and Passel 1990). Over the same period, more than twelve million Mexicans entered the United States as visitors (U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1992), and more than 13 million people of Mexican origin now reside north of the border (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1991).

Although Mexican immigration has been the subject of many statistical and ethnographic studies, few have examined it from the viewpoint of the migrants themselves (for exceptions see Fernandez 1983; Gamio 1931; Herrera-Sobek 1979; Siems 1992). We seek to redress this gap by undertaking an analysis of migrants' *retablos*. Retablos are small votive paintings left at religious shrines to offer thanks to a divine image for a miracle or favor received. Typically they tell the story of a dangerous or threatening event from which the supplicant has been miraculously delivered through the intervention of a holy image. We consider the meaning these votive paintings hold for one group of people: Mexico-United States migrants.

Drawing upon texts and images from migrants' retablos, we attempt to construct a fuller picture of the complex process of Mexico-United States migration. In doing so, we depart from the usual mode of social-scientific analysis to follow a lead signaled two decades ago by Gloria Giffords, a leading scholar of retablo art (1974:124): "An examination of all the ex-votos [votives] in any one shrine or church would produce a fascinating record of the people's hopes and fears, their thoughts, lives, and experiences, a record more honest than the fullest statistical study."

MEXICAN RETABLO PAINTING

The word retablo comes from the Latin *retro-tabula*, or "behind the altar." Originally it referred to decorative or didactic paintings and sculpture placed behind the altar of Catholic churches in the early middle ages (Giffords 1974). Later it came to denote reliquary boxes placed at the rear of the altar (de la Maza 1950), and during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was generalized to refer to all painted altar panels and frontal pieces (Cousin 1982; Giffords 1991; Schroeder 1968). In a literal sense, therefore, retablos are religious paintings associated with the altar.

The practice of leaving objects to supplicate or thank a deity has very ancient roots (Egan 1991). Archaeological evidence reveals that the ancient Greeks, Romans, Etruscans, Iberians, and Gauls all possessed well-developed votive traditions (Decouflé 1964; Egan 1991). In these ancient cultures, it was common to acknowledge or pray for the restoration of health by leaving small figures of clay, wax, wood, or stone shaped like hands, eyes, arms, legs, feet, or vital organs. During the fifteenth century, however, these anatomical tokens gave way to a more elaborate display of gratitude: votive paintings.

The first such paintings appeared in Italy at the end of the 1400s. Growing out of the Italian Renaissance, this new votive practice spread rapidly throughout the Mediterranean and ultimately diffused to the rest of continental Europe and the New World (Cousin 1982; Egan 1991). Votive traditions were brought into Mexico by Spanish soldiers. Hernán Cortés himself, upon being bitten by a scorpion in Yautepec, Morelos, commended himself to the Virgin of Guadalupe and promised to prepare a votive if he survived his misfortune (Egan 1991). Cortez kept his promise and ordered the goldsmiths of Azcapotzalco to fashion a votive containing forty emeralds and two pearls set in gold box that housed the remnants of the poisonous creature that dared to attack the conqueror of Mexico (Valle Arizpe 1941).

In transplanting votive traditions to Mexican soil, of course, the Spanish did not encounter a cultural vacuum; votive practices were well known in Mesoamerica before the conquest. According to one sixteenth-century chronicler, "the most important duty of the priest, and the Mexicans' principal religious ceremony, consisted in making offerings and sacrifices on certain occasions to obtain a favor from heaven or thanks for favors received" (cited in Montenegro 1950:11). Prehispanic votive objects have been found in a variety of Mexican archaeological sites (Sánchez Lara 1990; Solís 1991; Townsend 1992).

Despite the existence of a prehispanic votive tradition, the practice of votive painting never took hold among Mexico's indigenous populations after the Conquest. Although expressions of prehispanic religiosity were tolerated by Catholic missionaries, they were not encouraged, and priests instead sought to insert European practices into the native spiritual milieu (Lafaye 1976). In regions of Mexico dominated by Indian cultures, evangelization encouraged native traditions of dance, music, and crafts, but it discouraged practices that competed directly with Christian rituals.

As a result, votive painting first took root among American-born Spaniards, or *criollos* (Giffords 1974:119). As in Europe, the practice grew out of altar paintings of Biblical scenes commissioned for didactic purposes. Montenegro (1950:11) explains, "when transforming the old religion the missionaries followed a tradition adopted from time immemorial by the nobles of Europe: they commissioned from artists pictures of miracles and included themselves in the pictures standing beside the saint and giving him thanks. Such was the origin of these votive pictures."

Dating the beginnings of retablo painting in Mexico is difficult because the earliest works were executed on perishable media such as canvas or wood that have not survived. A series of engravings of the Virgin of Guadalupe done by the Belgian artist Stradanus between 1604 and 1622 suggest that retablos were present in Mexico by the early seventeenth century. One of these engravings shows four painted retablos hanging to either side of the Virgin's altar, each containing an explanatory text recounting a miraculous happening (Genaro Cuadriello 1989; Orendain 1984; Sánchez Lara 1990).

Votive painting ultimately became associated with Mexico's mestizos—people of both Spanish and Indian origin in whom prehispanic sentiments were united with European styles and techniques in a way that did not threaten the sensibilities of the Catholic Church. The introduction of tin plate in the nineteenth century provided a cheap and versatile medium that displaced canvas and wood and opened retablos to broader social participation (Giffords 1974, 1991). Over time, the racial origin of the supplicants shifted from criollo to mestizo, and the geographic center of retablo painting shifted away from the Valley of Mexico toward the heavily mestizo, west-central region of the country. By the 1920s, the production of votive art was concentrated in a few key western states, notably Guanajuato, Jalisco, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas.

Mexican retablo painting thus represents the application of Old World techniques to a New World medium in order to satisfy deeply human desires for supplication that are rooted in the ancient cultures of Europe and America. Although votive practices have diffused widely throughout the Catholic world, painted retablos achieved their fullest development and greatest expression in Mexico, and only there have they continued to be practiced as a living artistic tradition (Durand and Massey 1992).

MEXICAN PILGRIMAGE SITES

On any given day, scores of retablos are on display at popular pilgrimage sites throughout Mexico, to the extent that the new arrivals create real problems of disposal for priests who must somehow cope with the excess (Giffords 1991). Out of the hundreds of icons scattered in sanctuaries large and small, we focus on votive works associated with eight specific images: four of the crucified Christ, one of the child Jesus, and three of the Virgin Mary. These images were selected because their pilgrimage sites all lie within a few hour's drive of Mexico's leading migrant-sending communities, which are scattered throughout the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacan, Nayarit, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas (fig. 11.1).

Together these states compose the most important migrant-sending region in Mexico (Dagodag 1975; Gamio 1930; North and Houston 1976; Ranney and Kossoudji 1983; Samora 1971), and the eight images together constitute the most important shrines in the area. Each site has a long history of votive supplication by U. S. migrants, so that by focusing on these eight images we ensure sufficient material for a detailed analysis of migrants' retablos.

The sanctuary of El Señor de Villaseca is located at Mineral de Cata, a silver mine situated on the outskirts of the modern city of Guanajuato, capital of the state of Guanajuato. According to legend, the image was brought from Spain in 1618 by the mine's proprietor, a wealthy hacienda owner named Don Alonso de Villaseca. Its materials and style of construction, however, point to a Mexican Indian origin sometime during the sixteenth century (Sánchez Lara 1990:58). Less is known about the origins of El Señor de la Conquista, located in the city of San Felipe Torres Mochas, also in Guanajuato. The icon was named for the "spiritual conquest" of the Indians during the sixteenth century. Although its exact date of creation is unknown, historical references suggest that it was installed in the sanctuary at San Felipe in 1585.

The image of El Señor del Saucito is of more recent origin. Its story begins in 1820 at a crossroads settlement located some four kilometers from the center of San Luis Potosí. In that year, a carpenter of modest means came upon a willow

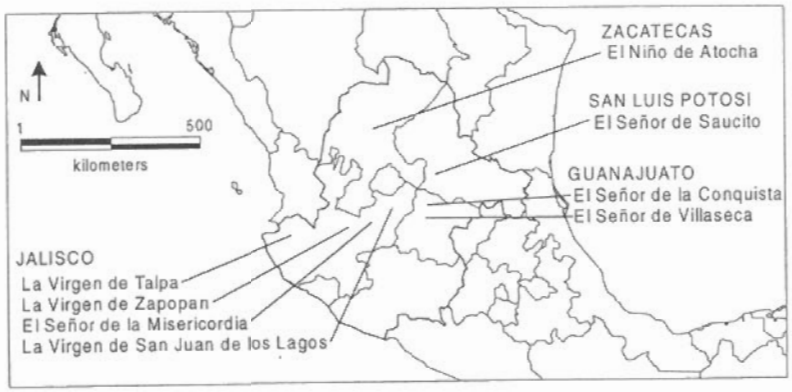

Fig. 11.1 The states of western Mexico and the locations of key shrines in Guanajuato, Jalisco, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas.

trunk with two branches that reminded him of a crucifix (the word *saucito* means "little willow"). He thereupon commissioned an Indian craftsman to carve an image of the crucified Christ from the trunk (Alvarez 1987). Within a few years, the image began to attract pilgrims from the city and surrounding countryside. In 1826, a professional sculptor, José María Aguado, was hired to rework the image and to smooth over its imperfections, giving the icon its present form.

El Señor de la Misericordia was likewise fashioned from a tree trunk early in the nineteenth century. The history of this image begins on September 6, 1839 in the rural town of Tepatitlán, Jalisco, when a poor farmer saw a strange light emanating from a gully near his home (Casillas 1989). Thinking that a neighbor was making charcoal, he approached the glow only to find an oak tree offering itself to him as a crucifix. Soon an itinerant wood carver mysteriously appeared in town and carved the crucifix (Casillas 1989). Little more is recorded about the miraculous image until 1852, when it was installed in its present sanctuary to accommodate the growing number of eager supplicants.

El Niño de Atocha provides a convenient transition to the three Marian images, since it is the only figure of the Christ child that we consider, and it is closely associated with a well-known image of the Virgin, Nuestra Señora de Atocha (see Giffords 1974:50). In Mexico, however, the child is separately venerated and has become "an overwhelming favorite among the representations of Christ in this folk tradition" (Giffords 1974:29).

The principal place of worship for El Niño is the small mining town of Plateros, near Fresnillo, Zacatecas. Although the origins of the image at this location are obscure, we know that by 1566 a small settlement had grown up

around the mine and that, sometime during the eighteenth century, the Spanish owner commissioned a replica of Nuestra Señora de Atocha, an image he had venerated in his homeland, to display in the local sanctuary (Juárez Frías 1991). During the Colonial period, homage was generally paid to the Virgin rather than the Child; but after the 1820s, patterns of veneration shifted, and El Niño acquired a separate identity and was given a special place in the Sanctuary above the main altar (López de Lara 1992). The image presently in use dates from 1886 (Giffords 1974:29).

Although images of Christ command devoted followings in many communities, the Virgin Mary is even more widely venerated throughout Mexico, and we have included three of the western region's most important images in our study. The first is the Virgin of Zapopan, whose story begins in 1541, when Fray Antonio de Segovia is said to have arrived in the village of Zapopan ("place of the zapote tree") just outside the present city of Guadalajara. With him was a small image of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception (Alvarez 1987), which was probably sculpted by Indian craftsmen in the state of Michoacan sometime around 1531 (Juárez Frías 1991).

The origins of the Virgin of Talpa also go back to the early Colonial period. Like the Virgin of Zapopan, it was created in the late sixteenth century by artisans from Michoacan; but the statue is smaller, only about 15 inches tall, and its underlying identity is that of the Virgin of the Rosary rather than the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception (Carillo Dueñas 1986). The Catholic Church confirmed the Virgin's miraculous status in a document dated 1670, a copy of which (from 1832) survives in the parish archives. The present sanctuary was built in the second half of the eighteenth century, and the facade and towers were completed during the middle of the nineteenth century.

Although each of the foregoing images has attracted significant veneration by some inhabitants of western Mexico, by far the most important icon in the region is the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos (Alvarez 1987; Olveda 1980). The town of San Juan is located in a region of Jalisco known as *los altos* (the highlands), aptly named for its high chaparral of windswept hills and dry pastures. Since early in the twentieth century, this area has been a center of migration to the United States (Cornelius 1976; Taylor 1933).

The legend of the Virgin of San Juan begins in 1542, when a small image of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception was brought into town by a Spanish priest, Father Miguel de Bologna (Alvarez 1987). Little else is recorded of the image until 1623, when legend relates that the young daughter of two Indians fell gravely ill but was miraculously cured by the Virgin (Alvarez 1987). After the miracle, the image acquired a distinctly Mexican identity, separate from that of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, and since that time it has been known simply as the Virgin of San Juan (Alvarez 1987; Oblate Fathers 1990).

The Virgin of San Juan also was sculpted in the early sixteenth century by Indian artisans from Michoacan. Standing about 20 inches tall, the Virgin is usually depicted in full view with her hands clasped in front of her breast (Alvarez 1987), in keeping with fifteenth-century iconography (Giffords 1974:48-49). The first stone of the present church was laid November 30, 1732, and construction continued for 58 years, but the Virgin was installed on her present altar on November 30, 1769.

RETABLOS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Retablos are usually painted on pieces of tin that have been reduced down from larger sheets by a progressive cutting in half (Giffords 1991:37-38). Most are rectangular in shape, with the largest about 280 square inches (14 x 20 inches) and the smallest around 18 square inches (3.5 x 5 in.). The most common sizes are 140 square inches (10 x 14 in.) and 70 square inches (7 x 10 in.) (Giffords 1974, 1991; Orendain 1948).

Mexican retablos are composed of three basic elements: a holy image, a graphic rendering of a threatening occurrence or miraculous event, and a text explaining what happened (Giffords 1974, 1991). The holy image is usually depicted suspended in clouds and located to one side of the composition. Although the representation of the holy image must bear some relation to official iconography, the rules of interpretation are loose rather than rigid. In order to function effectively within the context of a votive, a holy image need only convey identity in general terms. A variety of colors, styles, shapes, props, and levels of detail may be used to depict a holy image, as long as overall recognition is achieved. Strict reproduction of a holy image is not important because the action itself is the focus of the work and its raison d'être. Moreover, since votive paintings are left at specific shrines, the identity of the image is usually obvious from the context in which it is placed (votives to the Virgin of Talpa are not deposited before the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos, for example). Finally, any doubt about the identity of an image is often dispelled by the text, which mentions the image by name.

Textual material is generally found at the bottom of Mexican retablos. In addition to thanking the holy image, the text normally states the place of origin of the donor; the date, place, and circumstances of the event; and an account of the miraculous intervention by the holy image. Expressions of gratitude draw upon a standard vocabulary of faith and devotion that has evolved over scores of years and thousands of pilgrimages. Most begin with the words "*doy gracias*" ("I give thanks") and express a heartfelt need to "*hacer patente*" ("make known") the miraculous results of a divine intervention. In them, the supplicant states that at the moment of crisis, "*me encomendé a la Virgen*" ("I entrusted myself to the Virgin") and tells how "*me concedió el milagro*" ("she granted me the

miracle"). Texts often end with the simple statement that "*por eso dedico el presente retablo*" ("for this I dedicate the present retablo").

The largest and most important part of the pictorial space is given over to depicting the miraculous event. In rendering the dangerous or threatening circumstances under which divine intervention occurred, there are no rigid rules and few strict protocols. According to one art historian, "the imagination of the artist has ample scope to express the supernatural and divine intervention that is superimposed on logical reality and only is acceptable in terms of a blind and irrational faith" (Moyssén 1965:26). The principal desideratum is that artistic devices used in the execution of the votive heighten the emotional intensity of the moment and emphasize the ongoing drama of events. Although the choice of materials, styles, and methods is open and flexible, several techniques have become conventional.

First, Mexican retablos rely on bold, bright colors to augment the emotional effect of the scene. In order to convey the power of extreme circumstances, retablo painters make full use of the color spectrum, yielding luminous and vibrant works. Luxurious reds, deep blues, shining golds, pale pastels, translucent greens, pure whites, and bright yellows abound in votive paintings. Although scenes of family members gathered around a sick bed may occasionally be rendered in subdued tones, the colors are rarely dark. Actions and dramatic events are almost always presented in vivid colors. Background detail is frequently painted using divergent hues to add emotional power to the composition, and the actors themselves are often rendered in contrasting tones.

Second, Mexican votive paintings undertake a deliberate and self-conscious manipulation of space in order to underscore the drama of the unfolding events. Scale and proportion are sacrificed to intensify emotion. Angles become sharper and perspective awkward in order to increase the dramatic power of a scene. The helplessness of mortals in the face of a dire situation is captured by juxtaposing tiny human figures with larger-than-life holy images (in real life, sacred images tend to be small). The bewildering nature of the moment is enhanced by a surreal placement of figures, props, and background constructions.

Third, Mexican votive painting systematically segments, deconstructs, and reorders time. Events that occurred sequentially are broken down into representative instants and shown simultaneously. Different stages in the pro-gress of a miraculous event are arranged within a common pictorial frame. Supplicants shown in the throes of a dire circumstance in one part of a retablo are pictured offering thanks to the image in another. Actions occurring before, during, and after the miracle are shuffled and recombined for maximum psychological effect.

Fourth, theater props and stage motifs are used from time to time to emphasize the drama of unfolding events. Action takes place on crude stages erected magically in the picture space. Curtains are pulled back to reveal figures in critical situations and lush and lustrous fabrics are draped over walls and furniture as if in a set. Actors appear to perform before audiences of horrified on-

lookers. Cinematic techniques such as the flashback and fast forward are employed to move about in time.

Finally, over the course of the twentieth century, Mexican retablos have incorporated new materials and techniques in their construction to create collages that blend traditional painting with modern media. Photographs of family members are affixed to lend verisimilitude to painted scenes. Photocopies of documents are appended as proof of the divine intercession. A commercially printed image of the Virgin is glued to a spot on the retablo specially prepared for the purpose. Unlike santos, therefore, Mexican votives have not been threatened with extinction because of the advent of cheap, industrially produced products. On the contrary, the range of techniques available to retablo artists has multiplied and the genre has continued to evolve.

These conventions are combined in manifold ways to create the form and substance of modern retablos. From an aesthetic point of view, the artistic power of Mexican retablo painting comes from an economy of execution and an innocent intensity of emotions. "The drawing is naively painstaking, the color choices are odd, the perspective is awkward, space is reduced to a rudimentary stage, and action is condensed to highlights. Adherence to appearances is less important than the dramatization of the ghastly event or the miraculous encounter between the victim and the resplendent holy image" (Herrera 1983:151).

Retablos thus condense the most extreme of human emotions—fear, sorrow, apprehension, gratitude, relief, horror—onto small sheets of tin painted in the most elemental of styles. Looking at people depicted in the throes of a circumstance that appears to have no earthly remedy, or facing an imminent personal loss so crushing and painful that all consolation seems hopeless, we not only share the intensity of the fear and sorrow, we also experience the relief of delivery and the unmitigated joy that follows an unbelievable stroke of good luck.

It is the rendering of such powerful and elemental human emotions in simple and unpretentious artistic terms that makes retablos so compelling as works of art. As the folklorist Frances Toor has noted, "*retablos* or votive offerings are the most important and popular aspect of folk painting at the present time. Many of these *retablos*—realistic pictures of super-realistic events—are painted with great sensitivity and profound recognition of a truth that makes a miracle of reality and of reality a miracle" (1947:67-68).

STUDYING MIGRANTS' RETABLOS

Our interest in migrants' retablos began in September of 1988, when we traveled to the church of San Juan de los Lagos to visit the Virgin and her famous paint-

ings. As we admired the colorful pictures and dramatic texts, we noted several that dealt with experiences in the United States. As students of Mexico-United States migration, our interest was piqued, and we began to look for more of these paintings. Within an hour, we had located a dozen votives left by U. S. migrants.

As we reflected on these works, it occurred to us that they might shed new light on a well-worn topic. Unlike other sources of information, retablos capture events as they were experienced by the migrants themselves. The pictures and texts provide a rich source of historical and sociological data on a subject that has been notoriously resistant to study. Because they depict salient events at the moment of their occurrence, moreover, they provide an immediate record of migrants' most pressing concerns. By scrutinizing these paintings, we can glimpse how U. S. migration felt and was understood by the people who experienced it.

During the period from September 1988 through December 1993, we sought out religious shrines known to support a votive tradition and scoured galleries and antique dealers looking for retablos that touched upon the subject of U. S. migration. In religious sanctuaries, we took photographs and transcribed texts whenever we came upon a retablo that dealt in any way with migration to the United States, and in private galleries, we purchased any such retablo that we encountered.

In all, we located 124 retablos painted or commissioned by U. S. migrants or their relatives. The scenes and texts contained in these votive works constitute the basic data for our study. In each case, we have a photograph of the painting and a transcription of the text, and in 64 cases we own the retablo itself. We include in our analysis any votive painting that we judged to have been left by a current or former migrant to the United States, or a member of his or her family.

All of the retablos were executed on a durable medium, in most cases tin. Of the 124 retablos we examined, 114 (92%) were painted on metal, five were on masonite, and three were on wood. Only two are executed on paper, and both are enclosed in a glass frame and mounted on durable backing. We chose to focus on durable media in order to control for the selective way that votive paintings survive. Although we can observe contemporary votive offerings on all sorts of perishable media, we can only observe past works that have survived. Thus, any view reconstructed from retablos of the past is likely to be more highly selective than a view pieced together from votive materials encountered in the present. In order to hold constant the degree of selection over time, we focused on retablos painted on tin, the most durable of materials.

Because votives sometimes address multiple icons, the 124 works contain 129 separate holy images, the distribution of which is shown in table 11.1. By far the most popular image is the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos, which comprises roughly half the icons referenced. No other image comes close to the Virgin of San Juan in attracting the devotion of migrants to the United States.

Table 11.1
Distribution of retablos by image

Sacred Image	N	%
Images of the Virgin Mary		
Virgen de San Juan	64	49.6
Virgen Talpa	5	3.9
Virgen de Zapopan	4	3.1
Virgen de Guadalupe	4	3.1
Virgen de los Remedios	1	0.8
Images of Christ		
El Niño de Atocha	10	7.7
Señor de la Conquista	9	7.0
Señor de la Villaseca	8	6.2
Señor de la Misericordia	5	3.9
Señor del Saucito	5	3.9
Images of Saints		
San Miguel	7	5.4
San Martín de Porres	4	3.1
San Martín de Terreros	1	0.8
San Francisco de Asis	1	0.8
San Judas Tadeo	1	0.8
Total images mentioned	129	100.0

The next closest figure is El Niño de Atocha, which comprises about 8% of the images, followed by El Señor de la Conquista (7%) and El Señor de Villaseca (6%). Closely related to the image of El Señor de la Conquista is that of San Miguel (comprising about 5% of the sample). This minor icon is located in a small chapel in the sanctuary of San Felipe Torres Mochas. In practical terms, San Miguel and El Señor de la Conquista constitute a single pilgrimage site. The Virgin of Talpa, El Señor de la Misericordia, and El Señor del Saucito each add another 4% of the images to the sample, and the Virgins of Zapopan and Guadalupe comprise another 3%.

THE CONTENT OF MIGRANTS' RETABLOS

Although U. S. migrants share many of the same problems as others who bring votives before a sacred image, the experience of international imigration yields distinct circumstances that distinguish them from other supplicants. A typology of retablos developed for general use, such as that of Creux (1979) is therefore of limited utility in attempting to comprehend and classify the range of problems experienced by Mexican immigrants. Although illness, catastrophe, war, fire, falling, work, and animal problems (Creux's categories) may befall migrants, the meaning of these problems is very different in a foreign context. In addition, Mexico-United States migrants face the pain of separation, the hazards of moving north, the risks of crossing the border, the fear of falling sick in a strange land, the threat of arrest and deportation, and the thorny, ever-present issue of documentation.

In view of these distinctive concerns, we developed our own typology of retablos that builds on the earlier efforts of Creux and others, but which takes

into account the unusual situation of U. S. migrants. The scheme contains six major headings and 16 detailed subcategories. The major headings follow the course of a migrant's journey to and from the United States. They include "Making the Trip," "Finding One's Way," "Legal Problems," "Medical Problems," "Getting by in the U. S.," and "Homecoming." Under these broad rubrics, we define a variety of subcategories that address particular topics.

In order to carry out a detailed content analysis of retablos, we classified each votive into one and only one of the 16 subcategories. In cases where more than one subcategory could have applied, we classified the retablo according to the subject that, in our judgment, was dominant. The results of this operation are shown in table 11.2. The first general heading is "Making the Trip," and it considers three salient issues involved in moving from Mexico to the United States. Difficulties encountered while travelling north fall into the first subcategory and those faced while crossing the border make up the second. The third subcategory focuses on the special problems that women face in going north. As table 11.2 indicates, nearly 15% of the retablos in our sample deal in some way with one of these themes.

Roughly 2% of the pictures fall into the subcategory "heading north." A good example under this rubric is the retablo left by a woman from León, Guanajuato, who was travelling north to the United States in October of 1946 when the roadway suddenly washed out and several of her companions were swept away. Fearing the worst, she called upon the Virgin of San Juan and entrusted them to her protection; later they miraculously turned up unharmed, a piece of good fortune the woman credited to the divine powers of the Virgin.

Another 3% of the retablos come under "women's issues." One such painting, dated November 19, 1989, was left by María del Carmen Parra, who gives "thanks to the Holiest Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos for having granted that [my] daughter could marry in the United States." For many women, marriage to a migrant, a Chicano, or an Anglo-American (from the retablo it is not exactly clear who her daughter married) provides a path of potential mobility to a better life, one free from the strictures of poverty and patriarchy in Mexico, and one to which mothers frequently aspire on behalf of their daughters (Goldring 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Reichert 1982). Whatever the case, the mother felt sufficient gratitude to commemorate the marriage with a retablo.

By far the most frequent subject mentioned under the general heading of "Making the Trip" is "crossing the border," a subject that concerns 9% of the retablos in the sample. As this relatively high frequency indicates, the risks of border-crossing loom large in the minds of Mexican migrants, who lack legal documents and must enter the United States surreptitiously. In addition to the risk of arrest and deportation (according to the latest estimates, the odds of getting caught are about 33% on any attempt—see Espenshade 1990; Kossoudji 1992; and Massey and Singer 1995), undocumented migrants also face the hazards of fraud, injury, robbery, thirst, hunger, and drowning. Those who make it through the gauntlet of border-crossing hazards naturally feel indebted to a holy image for watching over them, and for delivering them from danger.

Table 11.2
Distribution of retablos by subject
(Totals for categories shown in bold)

Subject	N	%
Making the Trip	**18**	**14.5**
Heading north	3	2.4
Crossing the border	11	8.9
Women's issues	4	3.2
Finding One's Way	**5**	**4.0**
Getting a job	2	1.6
Getting lost	3	2.4
Legal Problems	**18**	**14.6**
Arranging documents	8	6.5
Run-ins with the law	10	8.1
Medical Problems	**30**	**24.2**
Getting sick	22	17.7
Having an operation	8	6.5
Getting by in U.S.	**27**	**21.8**
War	7	5.7
Work accidents	5	4.0
Traffic accidents	12	9.7
Crime	1	0.8
Getting ahead	2	1.6
Homecoming	**22**	**17.7**
Grateful migrants	7	5.6
Thankful relatives	15	12.1
Unnamed Miracles	**4**	**3.2**
Total retablos	124	100.0

Angelina García Solís, for example, left a votive addressed to El Señor del Saucito "for the miracle that he granted me in the year 1949. Finding myself drowning in the waters of the Rio Grande in el Norte in the company of other friends, in the most desperate moment I invoked his help after I had given up hope. I give him a thousand and one thanks, and also to God, that through his mediation He did me such an immense favor." Another anonymous votary thanked the Virgin of Talpa for saving "me from death on the twentieth of September of 1948. Upon wishing to cross the Rio Grande, two friends were killed but I was able to save myself."

After a migrant has entered the United States, new difficulties arise and these form the subject of the second heading, "Finding One's Way," which comprises 4% of the retablos in our sample. Getting lost in a strange setting is a problem treated in about 2% of the retablos. Frequently, this misfortune befalls migrants from small towns who arrive in large U. S. cities, but it also occurs in the countryside, often in arid parts of California, Texas, or Arizona, where migrants travel for work. Ponciano Guzmán did not give details on his retablo of September 4, 1951, he just gave "thanks to the Virgin of Zapopan for having gotten us out of this desert without harm."

A big part of finding one's way is getting a job, for without work migrants cannot repay the expenses of the trip, support themselves, or send money back

home to family members in Mexico (Massey et al. 1987). About 2% of the retablos treat this theme. One of them was left by J. Melquides Murillo of Puerto de Loja, Guanajuato, who in 1961 gave "thanks to Holiest Mary of San Juan de los Lagos, because I prayed to Her that I might go and come across the border and that I might be hired."

The third major heading is "Legal Problems," the subject of roughly 15% of the retablos in our sample. First and foremost in this category is the problem of documentation since without a legal residence card, or some other form of legal documentation, a person's tenure in the United States is insecure and can end at a moment's notice. As a result, undocumented migrants are vulnerable to exploitation and are confined to an underground economy of unstable, poorly paid jobs.

Nearly 7% of the retablos we sampled concerned the issue of documentation. One of them was left by Luz Bravo Magaña, who on November 8, 1945, simply offered "thanks to the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos for the miracle of having obtained without difficulty my passport from the American consulate." (Anyone who has ever waited in line to get a visa at a U. S. embassy can appreciate how "miraculous" this event seemed.) In 1989, another man left a retablo giving thanks to the Virgin of San Juan "for having acted on the petitions that I made to you for my brother to get his visa."

A second subcategory, comprising another 8% of the sample, focuses on encounters with law enforcement officials, the most feared of whom are immigration officers. Migrants occasionally run afoul of other authorities, however, and at times end up in jail. For such people, the usual problems of loneliness and fear are magnified; incarceration isolates them in a strange culture and prevents them from seeing loved ones who remain in Mexico. Thus, Juan Jaime Delgado addressed his retablo to the "Lord of Villaseca that is venerated in the Sanctuary of Mineral de Cata. I give infinite thanks for helping me get of jail in the United States and for arriving safely in the city of Guanajuato in the year 1986." In his retablo, José Gutiérrez likewise gave "thanks to the Lord Saint Michael for having saved me from a sentence of 20 years in a prison in Chicago, U.S.A., releasing me after only 8 months."

The fourth general heading, "Medical Problems," is the largest subject category in our sample. Getting sick is especially terrifying when one has no friends or family nearby, when one does not speak the language, and when one lacks money or insurance to pay doctors' bills. About 18% of the retablos we sampled mention sickness in the United States. The gratitude that María de Jesús Torres felt after her daughter got well was such that she traveled all the way to Jalisco from her home in National City, California to "offer infinite thanks to Our Lady of San Juan for having given health to my daughter, Teresa Torres, who suffered from asthma and epileptic attacks for several years." Facing an operation is also threatening when one cannot communicate effectively with the medical staff, or when one does not fully understand the medical system or its technology.

About 7% of the retablos in our collection explicitly give thanks to an image for the supplicant's survival of a surgical procedure performed in the United States. On January 3, 1962, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for example, Concepción González Anderson underwent a surgical procedure in which "they did an examination to see if I had cancer. Thanks to the Holiest Virgin of San Juan, I was spared from this sickness for which I give infinite thanks for the miracle she gave me."

While living and working in the United States, Mexicans face a variety of additional issues related to well-being that are grouped under the fifth general heading, "Getting by in the U. S.," which comprises 22% of the retablos examined. Unlike Mexico, the United States is a global power with many foreign commitments, and entering its armed forces carries the very real risk of going to war in a far off place. Legal immigrants, as well as children of Mexicans born in the United States, are subject to the U. S. military draft (including the children of undocumented parents), and Mexican immigrants have fought in all major wars of the twentieth century, most recently in the Persian Gulf. Among the 124 retablos we assembled, 6% thanked an image for a safe return from war. The oldest such retablo in our sample was prepared by the uncle of Angel Turburán and deposited in the Sanctuary of El Señor de Villaseca on July 19, 1917. Referring to his nephew's service in World War I, the text states that "having been mortally wounded in the war, his uncle Roberto Rodriguez, from...New Mexico, commended him to the Holiest Lord of Villaseca that he should not die. ... Having cured him from his sickness he makes public this miracle."

Aside from the extreme case of warfare, Mexican migrants face other risks while abroad. One is accidents at work. Migrants tend to be employed in agriculture, construction, the garment industry, and small-scale manufacturing, hazardous sectors where employers are under intense competitive pressure. In order to keep expenses low, companies invest little in safety devices or new equipment, thereby increasing the risk of work-related accidents. Some 4% of the retablos in our sample mention an accident at work. One such retablo was left by Manuel Reyes, who was picking cotton near Brawley, California during the fall of 1954 when he got his hand caught in some machinery. At this moment, he invoked the image of San Miguel, who intervened to free him, "losing a finger but saving my life, and in proof of gratitude I dedicate the present retablo." Another 10% of the retablos in the sample revolve around traffic accidents, a danger especially prevalent among migrants travelling to large urban areas in the United States. In 1954, one grateful migrant gave "thanks to the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos for having saved me from an automobile accident in which four persons were left dead and four injured that occurred in San Francisco, California."

For Mexican migrants living in large U. S. cities, such as Los Angeles, crime constitutes another hazard of life, and one retablo in our collection deals with this issue. But getting by in the United States is not simply a matter of surviving negative experiences such as crime and car accidents. Ubiquitous

among the votive objects left in Mexican sanctuaries are tokens of some foreign success: a driver's license, a report card, a high school diploma, a college degree. Although it is less common to find retablos commemorating these events, we did encounter two votive paintings that give thanks for a personal achievement in the United States. One offers thanks to the Virgin of Zapopan for "having been able to obtain a nursing certificate in the U.S.A." Another, from a migrant in Los Angeles, simply thanks this Virgin for "a miracle obtained in the artistic world some years ago."

The last phase of the migrant journey, Homecoming, involves the return of migrants to the warmth of their families and familiar soil of their birth. Given the many hazards and difficulties faced in the course of a U. S. trip, migrants and their families are often overcome with gratitude when a long separation finally comes to an end. The strength of this emotion is such that a votive of thanks is commissioned and left at a local shrine. Roughly 18% of the retablos in our sample fell under the general heading "Homecoming," with 12% expressing the gratitude of family members and 6% offering thanks from the migrants themselves.

Typical of the grateful migrants is Tereso López, of Rancho de la Palma, near Silao, Guanajuato, who contributed a retablo on the occasion of his return to Mexico from the United States. He "gives thanks to the Holiest Virgin of San Juan. Finding himself in the United States and commending himself to the Virgin he asked that upon arriving on his soil he would go to visit her." Another retablo illustrates the relief felt by family members left behind when a loved one returns. Candelaria Arreola of El Grullo, Jalisco, was praying for her son's return in 1955 when he miraculously arrived. As she explains, "I give thanks to the holiest Virgin of Talpa for having brought my son home from the United States, where he stayed for a long time. I began to pray your novena and I hadn't even finished when he returned. Thank you my mother!"

A systematic analysis of the content of migrants' retablos thus provides a glimpse into the special problems and difficulties faced by Mexican immigrants. If we simply list those subcategories with relative frequencies of 5% or more, we see that crossing the border, arranging documents, and avoiding encounters with legal authorities are principal preoccupations of U. S. migrants, and that getting sick, having an operation, getting drafted, and experiencing traffic accidents are major risks of life in the United States. When they manage to overcome these problems and return home safely, migrants and their family members are filled with gratitude.

Additional insight can be gained by classifying the subject of migrants' retablos according to the period in which the trip took place, a task that is carried out in table 11.3. This analysis employs five temporal categories: (1) from 1900 to 1939 represents the Early Years of Mexico-United States migration; (2) from 1940 to 1964 corresponds to the Bracero Era, when the U. S. government sponsored a

temporary labor program that brought some 4.5 million Mexicans into the United States to work (see Craig 1971; Samora 1971); (3) from 1965 to 1979 encompasses the Growth Years, a time when Mexico-United States migration was growing rapidly; and (4) from 1980 to the present is the Modern Era. A residual fifth category contains retablos whose dates could not be firmly established.

The largest number of retablos (27%) come from the Bracero Era, followed in frequency by the Modern Era and the Growth Years (at about 19% each), and the least frequent period is the Early Years (around 9%). Roughly 26% of the retablos could not be dated with certainty. Given the limited number of retablos in our sample, we only examine temporal shifts in the main subject categories.

Issues surrounding Homecoming appear to be significant in all periods, with the exception of the Bracero Era, when Medical Problems dominate. The problem of Getting by in the United States is notably salient in the Early and Growth Years of U. S. migration. Although this category is also prevalent to some extent during the Bracero Era, it is underrepresented during the Modern Era. As

Table 11.3
Distribution of retablos through time.
(Percentage by subject and by supplicant's gender and destination, N=124)

	Period of Migration				
	Early Years 1900-1939	Bracero Era 1940-1964	Growth Years 1965-1979	Modern Era 1980-1993	Undated Retablos
Subject Matter					
Making the trip	18.2%	20.6%	4.4%	16.7%	12.5%
Finding one's way	9.1	8.8	4.4	0.0	0.0
Legal problems	9.1	5.9	13.0	29.1	15.8
Medical problems	0.0	41.2	17.4	16.7	24.9
Getting by in U.S.	36.3	17.6	39.1	8.3	18.8
Homecoming	27.3	5.9	21.7	16.7	24.9
Unnamed miracles	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.5	3.0
Gender of Supplicant					
Male	50.0%	48.5%	47.8%	66.7%	52.0%
Female	50.0	51.5	52.2	33.3	48.0
U.S. Destination of Supplicant					
Border area	9.1%	20.6%	4.4%	12.5%	6.3%
California	0.0	26.5	26.1	16.7	15.6
Texas	18.2	14.7	21.7	12.5	9.4
Other	45.4	17.6	4.4	16.7	15.6
Unknown	27.3	20.6	43.4	41.6	53.1
Total retablos	11	34	23	24	32
Percentage	8.9%	27.4%	18.5%	19.4%	25.8%

transnational movement has become routine and institutionalized, therefore, issues relating to "Getting by" have receded into the background, since, unlike their predecessors, migrants arriving after 1980 can count on a host of friends, relatives, and compatriots, as well as a range of formal and informal contacts, to facilitate their entry and employment within the United States (Massey et al. 1994).

Perhaps the most striking trend over time is the increasing salience of Legal Problems, in particular those related to documentation. From the Early Years to the Modern Era, the percentage of retablos dealing with legal problems increases from 9% to 29%; and after 1980, issues related to the acquisition of legal documents dominate all others. This trend reflects the fact that, since the late 1970s, U. S. law has become increasingly restrictive with respect to Mexican immigration. In 1976, Mexico was placed under a quota of 20,000 immigrants for the first time, and in 1978 it was forced into a worldwide ceiling of 290,000 immigrants, which was subsequently reduced to 270,000 in 1980 (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990:28-29). These changes have made fewer immigrant visas available to Mexican nationals, causing those who do manage to acquire papers to be very grateful when they get them.

Retablos also provide important clues about the geographic origins and destinations of U. S. migrants, as well as their sex. It is common for supplicants to end a votive text with their name, community, and state of origin, information that can be used to discern the gender and geographic origins of migrants to the United States. Votive texts also commonly relate where the miraculous event occurred, and this information can be used to discern U. S. destination sites. Table 11.4 shows the distribution of retablos in our sample broken down by gender, Mexican origin, and U. S. destination of the supplicant. In most cases, the gender of the supplicant could be established from the picture or the text. In general, men and women are about equally represented among votaries. Among the migrants who left paintings at the shrines we considered, 46% were men, 42% were women, and 12% were classed as gender unknown. Among those whose gender could be established from information included on the retablo, 53% were men and 47% were women.

A large number of the votive texts and paintings contained no information about geographic origins or destinations. Some 58% of the works provided no state or community of origin in Mexico, and 38% gave no geographic data about the destination in the United States. Frequently a U. S. destination was indicated only by the initials "E.U." ("Estados Unidos") or U.S.A., or by vague references to *"el norte."* The large frequency of unknown places in Mexico probably reflects an assumption by votaries that unless the state of origin is named, it is implicitly understood to be that where the image is located. Since roughly 60% of the retablos in our sample are dedicated to images in Jalisco, a large share of the "unknown" retablos probably originate in that state, one that is notably under-represented in the frequency distribution (only 2% of the retablos

Table 11.4
Distribution of retablos by gender, Mexican origin, and U.S. destination of supplicant (Totals for geographic categories shown in bold, N=124)

Gender or Place	N	%	Gender or Place	N	%
Gender of Supplicant			*U.S.Destination*		
Male	57	46.0	Border Region	**14**	**11.3**
Female	52	41.9	California	**24**	**19.4**
Unknown	15	12.1	Los Angeles	10	8.1
			Other	14	11.3
Mexican Origin			Texas	**18**	**14.5**
Guanajuato	**36**	**29.0**	Other	**21**	**16.9**
San Luis Potosí	**6**	**4.8**	Arizona	2	1.6
Other	**10**	**8.1**	Colorado (Denver)	3	2.4
Aguascalientes	1	0.8	Florida	1	0.8
Baja California	1	0.8	Idaho	1	0.8
Durango	1	0.8	Illinois (Chicago)	6	4.8
Jalisco	2	1.6	Kansas	1	0.8
Michoacan	2	1.6	Michigan	1	0.8
Tamaulipas	1	0.8	Nebraska	1	0.8
Zacatecas	2	1.6	New Mexico	3	2.4
Unknown origin	**72**	**58.1**	Ohio	1	0.8
			Wisconsin	1	0.8
			Unknown destination	**47**	**37.9**

in the sample refer explicitly to Jalisco), especially given this state's prominence as a migrant-sending region. Even allowing for the under-representation of retablos from Jalisco, however, the number of votive paintings from the state of Guanajuato is remarkable, testifying to its importance as a cradle for this popular artistic tradition. Nearly 30% of all the retablos in our collection, and nearly 70% of those whose origins are known, were prepared or commissioned by someone from Guanajuato, despite the fact that around 80% of the offerings were made to shrines in Jalisco, San Luis Potosí, or Zacatecas (see table 11.1). A large number of supplicants must therefore have left Guanajuato to pay their respects to an image in another state, even though Guanajuato itself has several shrines with well-established votive traditions.

The state of Michoacan is notable for its absense in table 11.4. Despite being situated in the heart of the west-central region, and although it traditionally has been one of the most important migrant-sending states in Mexico, only two retablos in the sample give Michoacan as a place of origin. This relative absence probably reflects, at least in part, the Indian heritage of the state, the homeland of the Tarascans. As discussed earlier, votive painting took hold most

strongly in mestizo areas that were not directly evangelized by colonial priests. The only hint of a votive tradition in Michoacan is that surrounding Nuestra Señora de la Salud, in Patzcuaro (Giffords 1974). Although this icon supported an active tradition of retablo painting before 1900 (see Montenegro 1950), it has now died out.

Apart from Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, the home of El Señor del Saucito, is the only other state of origin mentioned with any frequency (about 5% of the retablos in our collection). Other states that receive mention are the western states of Aguascalientes and Zacatecas, and the northern states of Baja California, Durango, and Tamaulipas. The community names listed on the retablos typically refer to tiny rural hamlets, often with poetic names such as "Coesillo," "Rancho de la Palma," or "Rancho el Saucillo," suggesting the rural, campesino origins of many migrants to the United States.

The distribution of U. S. destinations mentioned in the retablos (see table 11.4) illustrates the uneven regional concentration of Mexican migrants to the United States (Bartel 1989; Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990). California and Texas together account for about 35% of the retablos in the sample, and 57% of those in which destinations could be ascertained. The most important single destination is Los Angeles (8% of the retablos in the sample), followed by Chicago (5%) and Denver (2%). Some 12% of the texts make a vague reference to some location along the border; and the remaining destinations are scattered throughout the Midwestern states of Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, Ohio, Wisconsin, or among the Southwest states of Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. One person mentions a place name in Florida.

We can shed additional light on U. S. destinations when we examine them by period (see table 11.3). During the Early Years, migrant destinations were diverse and scattered, and California had not yet emerged as a significant area of attraction. A diversity of destinations is typical of migration flows during their early stages of development, before social networks and strong connections to employers arise to channel people to specific sites (Jones 1981; Massey et al. 1994).

The shift to California occurred during the Bracero Era, when the U. S. Department of Labor recruited large numbers of Mexicans for specialized work in that state's expanding agricultural economy. The dominance of California continued through the Growth Years as the relative importance of other states declined. Although destinations appear to have become more diverse again during the Modern Era, interpretation is clouded somewhat by the rather large number of retablos in the unknown category.

Trends in the gender composition of migrants across periods also are shown in table 11.3. In general, sex ratios are relatively even as one moves from the Early Years through the Growth Years of migration. It is only in the Modern Era, after 1980, that the sex composition becomes unbalanced, with a pronounced upward shift in the prevalence of men. The parallel increase in the frequency of

legal problems suggests this shift may stem from the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, which authorized a legalization program for undocumented agricultural workers, a group that is heavily male. By requiring migrants to prove that they had worked in U. S. agriculture during 1985 or 1986, the program put a premium on documentation and produced a bounty of retablos after in 1989 and 1990 from grateful men who had managed to qualify for legal status.

One last way to shed light on the nature of Mexico-United States migration is to cross-tabulate gender and destination by subject category, an exercise carried out in table 11.5. In general, men and women appear to be equally concerned with the problems of Making the Trip and Getting by in the United States. Within these categories, the sex composition of votaries is about even. Among retablos dealing with Legal Problems and Medical Problems, however, female votaries are somewhat more prevalent, comprising about 60% of the votives mentioning these themes. Except for the most recent period that included IRCA, therefore, women appear to face legal issues in migration more frequently than men.

Two categories were dominated by males, however. All of the votive paintings that dealt with Finding One's Way in the United States were prepared by males, and 58% of those who expressed gratitude for Homecoming were likewise men. When the latter category is broken into votives left by migrants and those left by family members, however, a pronounced gender disparity arises. All of the homecoming retablos left by migrants were commissioned or executed by men, but 62% of those offered by family members were left by women. To a considerable extent, it seems, men migrate while women remain behind and wait.

When destinations are classified by subject categories we find, not surprisingly, that retablos concerned with Making the Trip are dominated by refer-

Table 11.5
Distribution of retablo subjects by gender and U.S. destination of supplicant

	Subject of Retablo					
	Making the Trip	Finding One's Way	Legal Problems	Medical Problems	Getting By	Homecoming
Gender of Supplicant						
Male	50.0%	100.0%	40.0%	42.3%	45.8%	57.9%
Female	50.0	0.0	60.0	57.7	54.2	42.1
U.S. Destination of Supplicant						
Border Region	66.7%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.4%
California	0.0	20.0	0.0	36.6	37.1	4.4
Texas	11.1	20.0	16.7	26.7	14.8	0.0
Other	0.0	20.0	16.7	26.7	18.5	13.0
Unknown	22.2	20.0	66.6	10.0	29.6	78.2
Number	18	5	18	30	27	22

ences to the Border Region (67% of all cases). In contrast, those focusing on Legal Problems refer to Texas or other states; and retablos dealing with life abroad generally mention Texas or California. Among votive works covering Medical Problems, for example, 38% are by migrants from California and 28% by migrants from Texas, together comprising roughly two-thirds of the sample. In the "Getting by" category, 37% are from California and 15% are from Texas (yielding a total of 52%). In the category "Finding One's Way," however, U. S. destinations are evenly distributed.

Remarkably, retablos that touch on the theme of Homecoming generally do *not* mention specific U. S. place names: 78% of these retablos were coded as destination unknown. This high figure reflects the isolation of migrants from their family members. A majority of the homecoming retablos were left by parents, sisters, or brothers, not the migrants themselves, and these people frequently do not know the exact whereabouts of their loved ones until they actually return, and then often only vaguely.

CONCLUSION

Many earlier studies have documented the remarkable degree to which U. S. migration has been incorporated into the social life of western Mexico (for a review see Durand and Massey 1992). This finding is hardly novel. Most prior works, however, have relied on the standard tools of social science: ethnographic fieldwork, statistical analyses, and case studies. These approaches lead to an abstract understanding that is divorced from the emotional reality of the underlying behavior. Retablos provide a more tangible and compelling view of the complex phenomenon of international migration, one that packs considerably more punch than mere statistics. Although we can reproduce only one of them here (see front cover), the 40 color plates contained in Durand and Massey (1995) give a hint of the emotional power of retablos as compelling works of popular art.

Retablos reveal unambiguously and unequivocally the degree to which U. S. migration has become a core part of the collective experience of the Mexican people. Working in the United States is now an institutionalized feature of that nation's culture and society. It has been interwoven into the rituals of daily religious life and has itself transformed those rituals. In western Mexico, seeing a retablo signed in Los Angeles, Dallas, or Chicago is as natural seeing one from Guadalajara, Morelia, or León.

At present, hundreds of thousands of families in western Mexico have a member on "the other side" and know firsthand about the joys, privations, sorrows, and devotions of migratory life. Migrants customarily maintain close ties

with their relatives at home, and while working abroad, they dream of returning to build a house, open a store, buy land, or retire in luxury. And if these dreams remain elusive, at least they can look forward to making a visit to the local shrine to pay homage to a venerated image. Each year thousands make such a pilgrimage to appear before images of the Virgin located in Zapopan, Talpa, and San Juan, or to thank images of Christ in Mineral de Cata, San Luis Potosí, San Felipe, or Plateros.

Retablos are important because they depict a side of migration usually not told in statistical reports or even in detailed interviews with migrants. Going to *el norte* has become a rite of passage for young men, synonymous with adventure, excitement, and personal esteem. It represents a source of pride and satisfaction for those who return with goods and money. Success in the United States is a frequent subject of boasts and exaggerated stories. In this atmosphere, those who have not fared well are apt to remain silent. They do not want people to think they were lazy or afraid. Only to a sacred image can they tell the truth and reveal their true stories of sadness, fear, and apprehension.

Retablos testify to the feelings and experiences of people who migrate back and forth to work in a strange land. In Diego Rivera's (1979:55) words, they are "the one true...pictorial expression of the Mexican people," and they get at the heart of the matter in a way that academic reports never can. After looking at the pictures presented here, and seeing how deeply migration has become rooted in the popular culture of western Mexico, one intuitively grasps why simply passing a new law or changing a bureaucratic regulation will not easily end the ongoing flow of people across the border. For better or for worse, international migration is pulling Mexico and the United States closer together and blending their peoples and cultures in new and exciting ways. The process of binational union is now far too advanced to be controlled easily by the political and economic actors who set it in motion. Whatever one's feelings about it, the cultural synthesis embodied in these retablos is probably the way of the future.

REFERENCES CITED

Alvarez, José Rogelio
1987 *Enciclopedia de México, Tomo XII*. Secretaría de Educación Pública y Enciclopedia de México, Mexico City.

Bartel, Ann
1989 Where do the New U. S. Immigrants Live. *Journal of Labor Economics* 7:371-91.

Carrillo Dueñas, Manuel
1986 *Historia de Nuestra Señora del Rosario de Talpa*. Impresos Alfa, Mexico City.

Casillas, Luis Alberto
1989 *Apuntes para la historia del Señor de la Misericordia*. Editorial Privado, Tepatitlán, Mexico.

Cornelius, Wayne A.
1976 Outmigration from Rural Mexican Communities. *Interdisciplinary Communication Program Occasional Monograph Series* 5(2):1-39.
Cousin, Bernard
1982 *Le Miracle et le Quotidien: Les Ex-votos Provençaux, Images d'une Societé*. Sociétés, Metalités, et Cultures, Paris.
Craig, Richard B.
1971 *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy*. University of Texas Press, Austin.
Creux, René
1979 *Les Ex-Voto Racontent*. Editions de Fontainnemore, Geneva.
Dagodag, W. Tim
1975 Source Regions and Composition of Illegal Mexican Immigration to California. *International Migration Review* 9:499-511.
Decouflé, Pierre
1964 La Notion d'Ex-Voto Anatomique chez les Etrusco-Romains. *Latomus, Revue d'Etudes Latines* 72:5-41.
de la Maza, Francisco
1950 Los retablos dorados de Nueva España. *Enciclopedia Mexicana del Arte*. Ediciones Mexicanas, Mexico City.
Durand, Jorge, and Douglas S. Massey
1992 Mexican Migration to the United States: A Critical Review. *Latin American Research Review* 27:3-42.
1995 *Miracles on the Border: Retablos of Mexican Migrants to the United States*. University of Arizona Press, Tucson.
Egan, Martha
1991 *Milagros: Votive Offerings from the Americas*. Museum of New Mexico Press, Santa Fe.
Espenshade, Thomas J.
1990 Undocumented Migration to the United States: Evidence from a Repeated Trials Model. In *Undocumented Migration to the United States: IRCA and the Experience of the 1980s,* edited by Frank D. Bean, Barry Edmonston, and Jeffrey Passel, pp. 159-181. The Urban Institute, Washington D. C.
Fernandez, Celestino
1983 The Mexican Immigration Experience and the Corrido Mexicano. *Journal of Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 2:115-130.
Gamio, Manuel
1930 *Mexican Immigration to the United States*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
1931 *The Mexican Immigrant: His Life Story*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
Genaro Cuadriello, Jaime
1989 *Maravilla Americana: Variantes de la Iconografía Guadalupana*. Patrimonio Cultural del Occidente, Guadalajara, Mexico.
Giffords, Gloria K.
1974 *Mexican Folk Retablos: Masterpieces on Tin*. University of Arizona Press, Tuscan.
1991 The Art of Private Devotion: Retablo Painting of Mexico. In *Catalogue to the Exhibit "The Art of Private Devotion: Retablo Painting of Mexico"*, pp. 33-63. InterCultural Institute and the Meadows Museum, Dallas-Fort Worth.

Goldring, Luin P.
1995 Gendered Memory: Reconstructions of Rurality among Mexican Transnational Migrants. In *Creating the Countryside: The Politics of Rural and Environmental Discourse*, edited by E. Melanie DuPuis, and Peter Vandergeest, pp. 303-329. Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
Herrera, Hayden
1983 *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo*. Harper and Row, New York.
Herrera-Sobek, María
1979 *The Bracero Experience: Elitelore vs. Folklore*. UCLA Latin American Center, Washington D. C.
Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierette
1992 Overcoming Patriarchal Constraints: The Reconstruction of Gender Relations Among Mexican Immigrant Women and Men. *Gender and Society* 6:393-415.
Jasso, Guillermina, and Mark R. Rosenzweig
1990 *The New Chosen People: Immigrants in the United States*. Russell Sage, New York.
Jones, Richard D.
1981 Channelization of Undocumented Mexican Migrants to the United States. *Economic Geography* 58:156-176.
Juárez Frías, Fernando
1991 *Retablos Populares Mexicanos: Iconografía Religiosa del Siglo XIX*. Inversora Bursátil, Mexico City.
Kossoudji, Sherrie A.
1992 Playing Cat and Mouse at the U. S.-Mexican Border. *Demography* 29:159-180.
Lafaye, Jacques
1976 *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531-1813*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
López de Lara, J. Jesús
1992 *El Niño de Santa María de Atocha*. Fourth edition. Santuario de Platerios. Fresnillo, Zacatecas.
Massey, Douglas S., Luin P. Goldring, and Jorge Durand
1994 Continuities in Transnational Migration: An Analysis of 19 Mexican Communities. *American Journal of Sociology* 99:1492-1533.
Massey, Douglas S., Rafael Alarcón, Jorge Durand, and Humberto González
1987 *Return to Aztlán: The Social Process of International Migration from Western Mexico*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
Massey, Douglas S., and Audrey Singer
1995 New Estimates of Undocumented Mexican Migration and the Probability of Apprehension. *Demography* 32:203-213.
Montenegro, Roberto
1950 *Retablos de México/Mexican Votive Paintings*. Ediciones Mexicanas, Mexico City.
Moyssén, Xavier
1965 La pintura popular y costumbrista del Siglo XIX. *Artes de México* 61, Año XIII.
North, David S., and Marion F. Houstoun
1976 *The Characteristics and Role of Illegal Aliens in the U. S. Labor Market: An Exploratory Study*, Linton,Washington D. C.

Oblate Fathers
1991 *A Short History of the Virgin of San Juan del Valle Shrine*. Pamphlet. Oblate Fathers, San Juan, Texas.
Olveda, Jaime
1980 La Feria de San Juan de los Lagos. *El Informador* 7 September. Guadalajara, Mexico.
Orendain, Leopoldo
1984 Exvotos. In *Cuarto Centenario de la Fundación del Obispado de Guadalajara, 1548-1948*, pp. 279-290. Artes Gráficas, Guadalajara, Mexico.
Ranney, Susan, and Sherrie Kossoudji
1983 Profiles of Temporary Mexican Labor Migrants to the United States. *Population and Development Review* 9:475-493.
Reichert, Joshua S.
1982 A Town Divided: Economic Stratification and Social Relations in a Mexican Migrant Community. *Social Problems* 29:411-423.
Rivera, Diego
1979 *Arte y Política*. Editorial Grijalbo, Mexico City.
Sánchez Lara, Rosa María
1990 *Los retablos populares: exvotos pintados*. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Mexico City.
Schroeder, Francisco Arturo
1968 Plateresco. *Retablos Mexicanos: Artes de México* 106, Año XV.
Siems, Larry (editor)
1992 *Between the Lines: Letters Between Undocumented Mexican and Central American Immigrants and their Families and Friends*. The Ecco Press, Hopewell, New Jersey.
Solís, Felipe
1991 *Tesoros Artísticos del Museo Nacional de Antropología*. Editorial Aguilar, Mexico City.
Taylor, Paul S.
1933 A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico. *Ibero-American*, vol 4. University of California Press, Berkeley.
Toor, Frances
1947 *A Treasury of Mexican Folkways*. Crown Publishers, New York.
Townsend, Richard F. (editor)
1992 *The Ancient Americas: Art from Sacred Landscapes*. Prestel Verlag, Munich.
U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service
1992 *1991 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*. U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington D. C.
U. S. Bureau of the Census
1991 The Hispanic Population of the United States: March 1991. *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 455. U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington D. C.
Valle Arizpe, Artemio
1941 *Notas de Platería*. Editorial Polis, Mexico City.
Woodrow, Karen A., and Jeffrey S. Passel
1990 Post-IRCA Undocumented Immigration to the United States: An Assessment Based on the June 1988 CPS. In *Undocumented Migration to the United States: IRCA and the Experience of the 1980s*, edited by Frank D. Bean, Barry Edmonston, and Jeffrey S. Passel, pp. 33-76. The Urban Institute, Washington D. C.

12

Puerto Rican Transnational Migration and Identity

Impact of English-Language Acquisition on Length of Stay in the United States

Azara L. Santiago-Rivera and Carlos E. Santiago

Our conception of transnational migration is of a process in which individuals and/or their families cross borders, leading to the emergence of significant communities of migrants (and return migrants) in the regions of origin and of destination. Upon reaching a threshold level of immigration, the process of migration and return to the country of origin takes on a unique dynamic that fosters continuous migratory movements that are independent of the original causes of migration. This interpretation is consistent with Massey et al.'s (1994) view of cumulative causation in migration.[1] Thus, transnational migration is fundamentally transformative, impacting the regions of origin and of destination as well as the migrants themselves.

At an aggregate level, transnational migrants serve as agents of societal change. There are two fundamentally important features. First, the process of transnational migration leads to the establishment of communities of emigrants and immigrants whose numbers have surpassed a threshold level such that they impact surrounding nonmigrant communities—in effect, moving beyond the enclave. Second, these communities are continually fed by new participants in this process of mobility, creating a back and forth syncretized transmission of ideas, attitudes, and cultural behaviors.

The nature of transnational migration implies an increase in the importance of the role of language acquisition and maintenance compared with the