

5-2012

Se la robaron (elopement) in central Mexico: An ethnographic case study from Santiago Tlacotepec

Susana Pelaez
University of Texas-Pan American

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/leg_etd



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pelaez, Susana, "Se la robaron (elopement) in central Mexico: An ethnographic case study from Santiago Tlacotepec" (2012). *Theses and Dissertations - UTB/UTPA*. 88.
https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/leg_etd/88

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations - UTB/UTPA by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

SE LA ROBARON (ELOPEMENT) IN CENTRAL MEXICO: AN ETHOGRAPHIC
CASE STUDY FROM SANTIAGO TLACOTEPEC

A Thesis

by

SUSANA PELAEZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF MAIS

May 2012

Major Subject: Anthropology

SE LA ROBARON (ELOPEMENT) IN CENTRAL MEXICO: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC
CASE STUDY FROM SANTIAGO TLACOTEPEC

A Thesis
by
SUSANA PELAEZ

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Margaret Graham
Chair of Committee

Dr. Shelia Pozorski
Committee Member

Dr. Thomas Pozorski
Committee Member

May 2012

Copyright 2012 Susana Pelaez

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Pelaez, Susana, *Se La Robaron (Elopement) in Central Mexico: An Ethnographic Case Study From Santiago Tlacotepec*. Master of Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS), May, 2012, 113 pp., 15 figures, references, 47 Titles, 1 appendices.

The social institution of marriage is found in almost all human societies. In the community of Santiago Tlacotepec, Toluca, Mexico, there are three types of marriages: elopement (el robo or se la robarron), which is the norm in the town; *pedimento* which is considered the ideal marriage; and *rapto* (bride theft), the least common. The focus of this thesis is elopement. This thesis investigates why elopement occurs in the community based on women's narratives about life before, during and after eloping. There are three main reasons women elope: youth and inexperience, fear of parental rejection of the union, and a lack of freedom and parental control over daughters.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my work to my family. My parents have instilled in me that by hard work anything in this world is possible. To my father who has always told me that an education was fundamental. To my mother whose encouraging words will forever be in the back of my mind telling me that, “tu puedes”, her motivational support has lifted not only my mind, but also my soul. To my grandmother, Maria Felix Vallejo Torrejon, who supported me in my work during my brief stay in Santiago Tlacotepec. To my sisters and brothers who in some way have helped me along the way, whether it was reviewing my Spanish terminology on the thesis or for their words of wisdom during this process. Also, I hope that in some way I have inspired at least one of my siblings to challenge themselves academically.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the community of Santiago, Tlacotepec, especially those who participated in my research. I am grateful for their time, for sharing some of their experiences with me about elopement, and for their hospitality. I would also like to thank my friends who gave me words of advice, gave me a few tips, and guidance.

I thank Dr. Margaret Graham who not only has been the chair of this thesis, but has also been in this long struggle with me; her words of encouragement have pushed me along the way. I thank Dr. Shelia Pozorski, whom I have known ever since my first year at the University of Texas Pan-American. She has always believed in me, given me advice and helped me in the years I have attended. I thank Dr. Tom Pozorski, who through the years of interaction has given me his guidance and from whom I have learned. Lastly, I would like to thank Señor Juan Trejo who, in my visit to his College of Anthropology in Toluca, Mexico, met with me and helped me with some references. I thank Dr. David Robichaux who met with me and gave me some information over the topic “muchas gracias por su allude y sus palabras”. También quisiera agradecer a Erik S. Hernández Morales y Gerardo Pérez Silva quienes me ha ayudado en el proceso del tesis. Muchas gracias ustedes son dos amigos que me han informado sobre la historia del pueblo. El pueblo de Santiago Tlacotepec siempre estará cerca a mi corazón.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of Study.....	1
Defining Marriage.....	3
Methodology.....	4
Conclusion.....	6
CHAPTER II. THE SETTING.....	7
Valley of Toluca.....	7
Prehistory and History of the Valley of Toluca.....	10
Spanish Conquest in the Valley of Toluca.....	13
Santiago Tlacotepec.....	14
Geography.....	18
Economy.....	19

Community Services and Education.....	20
Religion.....	21
Politics.....	23
Current Social Issue.....	23
Conclusion.....	24
CHAPTER III. HISTORICAL AND CROSS CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES	
ON ELOPEMENT.....	25
Aztec Marriage.....	26
Spanish Influences.....	29
Ethnographic Studies of Elopement in Latin America.....	32
Elopement in Other World Regions.....	41
Conclusion.....	42
CHAPTER IV. <i>SE LA ROBARON</i>	44
Women’s Narratives on El Robo.....	44
Reflecting Back with Regret.....	56
Conclusion.....	61
CHAPTER V. <i>EL CONTENTO</i> : THE COMING TOGETHER OF TWO FAMILIES.....	63
Women’s Narratives on the Contento.....	64
Conclusion.....	77
CHAPTER VI. MARRIAGE AFTER THE ELOPEMENT.....	79
Women’s Narratives on Machismo.....	80
Women Facing Dishonor and the Community.....	84

Conclusion.....	89
CHAPTER VII. DISCUSSION.....	90
Major Themes and Analysis.....	91
Youth and Inexperience.....	92
Fear of Parental Rejection.....	93
Lack of Freedom and Parental Control Over Daughters.....	95
Factors That Keep Women from Returning to their Home.....	97
Comparison of Tlaxcala and Santiago Tlacotepec.....	99
The Future of El Robo.....	101
Future Research.....	103
Conclusion.....	104
REFERENCES.....	106
APPENDIX A.....	109
GLOSSARY.....	110
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	113

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 2: Map of Mexico.....	8
Figure 2.1: Map of the Valley of Toluca.....	9
Figure 2.2: Tribute Provinces of the Triple Alliance.....	11
Figure 2.3: Map of Santiago Tlacotepec.....	15
Figure 2.4: Señor Santiago.....	16
Figure 2.5: Pictograph of Cuetzpallin.....	17
Figure 2.6: Nevado de Toluca.....	19
Figure 2.7: Cerro and Barranca.....	20
Figure 2.8: High School Opened in 2011 and Nevado de Toluca	21
Figure 2.9: Parish de Santiago Apostol.....	22
Figure 5: Cera (candle).....	67
Figure 5.1: Candle lit and Virgin de Guadalupe (Image of the Virgin Mary).....	67
Figure 5.2: Couple kneeling asking Forgiveness.....	68
Figure 5.3: Chiquihuite (large basket contains a variety of fruit).....	70
Figure 5.4: Chiquihuite and refreshments for Contento.....	70

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

This thesis explores the social institution of marriage in the Mexican community of Santiago Tlacotepec, which is located in the municipality of Toluca in the State of Mexico. There are three different types of marriages found in Santiago Tlacotepec. The first is a traditional type of marriage known as *pedimento*, which is when a man asks the woman's parents for their daughter's hand in marriage, and the parents accept. The second type is elopement (*el robo or se la robaron*), which occurs when the *novio* (boyfriend) and the *novia* (girlfriend) agree to flee to the house of a family member of the *novio*. The couple usually goes to the house of the *novio*'s parents where they will live together. The third type of marriage is bride theft, or *rapto*, which occurs when a woman or girl is taken against her will and does not have any other option but to go with her captor, her soon-to-be husband.

My focus for this thesis will be primarily on elopement or *el robo*; this form of marriage is widely practiced in the town of Santiago Tlacotepec. *El robo* occurs between the ages of 12 to 25 for both males and females based on the interviews that I conducted. Elopement in this community does not necessarily mean the couple marries immediately after the couple has fled. However, it is considered elopement because they flee together and are in a *de facto* state of marriage. Hence, they live in common law. Most couples will get married through the civil court

within 6 to 12 months after fleeing. That legally recognizes marriage may be followed a religious ceremony within a year to a year and a half after the elopement. The couple's economic status or the help of parents and *padrinos* (godparents) will determine the amount of time that elapses until the couple weds. Table 1 shows the sequence of events from courtship through elopement to marriage seen in this community.

I will be discussing the reasons for elopement in Santiago Tlacotepec. Some of the questions that drove my research on this topic are: what are the reasons that adolescents and adults elope? What is the sequence of events when one elopes? Does strict parenting play a role in elopement? What are the customs associated with elopement? Is there a tendency for families to come together once el robo has taken place? What are some of the behavioral norms that men tend to adhere to once they are married to their novia? Does chauvinism or (*machismo*) play a role in the lives of women? What is life after elopement like from a women's perspective? Is it different from the married life of a woman who does not begin marriage with elopement? How does elopement in this community compare to the practice in other cultures globally? Before I explore these questions, I would like to provide a general discussion of marriage from an anthropological perspective.

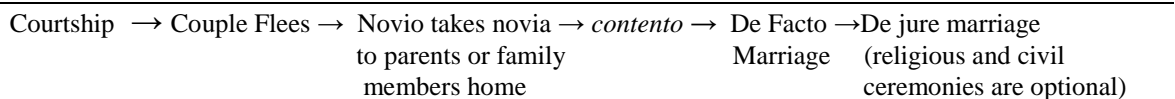


Table 1: Sequence of Events from Courtship through Elopement to Marriage

Defining Marriage

Marriage is the practices, promise, and obligations that spouses establish with their children and kin groups. In anthropology marriage is defined broadly as “a socially approved union between two or more adult partners that regulates the sexual and economic rights and obligations between them. Marriage usually involves an explicit contract or understanding and is entered into with the assumption that it will be permanent” (Ferraro and Andreatta 2012:208). This definition of marriage is general and allows for considerable variation depending on a society’s cultural beliefs (Murstein 1974:9). Marriage includes aspects of economy, social relationships, religion, and beliefs of a couple. These features form a cultural framework in which one is able to understand the variety of marriage forms. Marriage needs to be studied within a specific “environment and history” (Stockard 2002:2). Marriage roles and duties are not static, however, and change over time depending on changing political ideologies and economic conditions (Nanda and Warms 2007:206).

Almost every society recognizes the social institution of marriage defined this way and each has rules related to the number of spouses allowed, mate selection, and even the sex of the marriage partners. Marital social relations are not limited to the spouses but rather extend beyond them and include a wider network of kin. Marriage also consists of rights and responsibilities between spouses and their families. The institution of marriage is structured so families can benefit from the gendered division of labor so that the entire spectrum of resources and services are available to them. Marriage also provides a mechanism to expand social ties to other families and kin that allow people to communicate and work with one another for their survival (Nanda and Warms 2007: 206). Thus, marriage in many societies is an institution that unites individuals

and their families in ways that allow people to meet the challenges of life.

There are many societies that recognize a variety of marriage strategies. In these societies, like the one discussed in this thesis, a preferred form of marriage coexists with other marriage types. All of these forms of marriages are approved of socially although some may be preferred or more highly valued. Bride theft and elopement are two alternative forms of marriage that have been reported in different societies. Alternative forms of marriage are often underreported and understudied perhaps because they are not seen as the ideal type of marriage (Bates, Conant and Kudat 1974:234). As previously mentioned, elopement, an alternative form of marriage that has been described above, will be examined in depth and will be the focus of this thesis. Thus, this thesis attempts to fill in the gap in our understanding of the role of alternative marriage practices observed in societies today.

Methodology

I was first introduced to this topic of elopement when I was a young girl. Since I have family from this *pueblo* (town), I would hear stories from my aunts when I was an adolescent. They talked about how *ya se la robaron* (they have stolen her), referring to one of my cousins who had fled with her boyfriend and was to be married soon. As I thought about what kind of topic to base my thesis on, I realized that this was a phenomenon I was intrigued with so I decided to go to Mexico to study it for my thesis research. My research was approved by the UTPA IRB office.

Arriving at Santiago Tlacotepec in June 2010, I recruited my informants by speaking to the town's inhabitants. Since I have family who are from this area, people were more trusting and willing to talk about the issue. Some of my family referred me to people who were willing to

discuss this issue. Before beginning this process, I had to explain to the informants what the research project was about and the reasons for my research. Once they agreed to participate, they were given an oral or written explanation of the study and a consent form to sign. They were provided with contact information for the UTPA IRB office and my thesis advisor if they had any comments or concerns about the research. Since most of my informants were older women who were unaware of utilizing the internet, I had to find someone who was willing to be an assistant and could aid those who needed help reaching the IRB department. My assistant had earned her Bachelor's in Education and had agreed to further assist any person who needed to reach the IRB department.

I developed an interview schedule for my informants. I conducted semi-structured interviews with women between the ages of 18 to 75 and men between the ages of 18 to 65. People who had eloped were not the only people who I interviewed. I also interviewed those who had opinions about elopement in the community of Santiago Tlacotepec.

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions and lasted about thirty to sixty minutes. Interviewees were given pseudonyms in order to protect their identity. I conducted 28 interviews in all; 23 women and 5 men. Because of the limited access to men I will only use the interviews from the women for this analysis. The men were more difficult to interview because they usually leave early in the morning to work and do not return home till the late afternoon. Of these five men, one was a priest from the principal church, two were *fiscales* (workers from the church) and two were men who had eloped in their youth.

I began interviews by asking if in fact they have eloped and what they thought about elopement in the town. Once that was asked, they began telling me about how and why they

believe that elopement occurs at the age that it does. This also allowed the participants to discuss other issues that intertwined with elopement and provide information about other aspects related to marriage in Mexico. Aspects of machismo and women's and men's roles in Mexican society are topics that were mentioned. All the interviews were conducted in Spanish.

Conclusion

This chapter briefly discussed the three types of marriages that are found in Santiago Tlacotepec. The most common form, elopement (el robo) will be the primary basis of this research. I will attempt to explore and understand why women elope in this region of Central Mexico. I also defined marriage anthropologically, and mentioned how I was drawn to this topic of el robo. In the next chapter I describe the setting and history of the community of Santiago Tlacotepec.

CHAPTER II

THE SETTING

In this chapter I describe the community and region where I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork. After a brief overview of the town and area, I present a brief summary of the region's prehistory and history. That is followed by a description of Santiago Tlacotepec, the location of my research; it is a small town located a few minutes from the city of Toluca. The last section of the chapter will focus on the community's geography, economy, religion, community services, education, and politics as well as a current social issue that is under discussion by residents of the town. This chapter provides the reader with the historical and socioeconomic contexts necessary for understanding elopement in the community.

Valley of Toluca

The community of Santiago Tlacotepec is located in the Municipality of Toluca, formally known as Toluca de Lerdo. The city of Toluca is the capital of the State of Mexico (Estado de Mexico) which is located in the center of the country (see Figure 2.1). Its original name, Tollocan and is derived from the matlatzinca god Tolo (god of fire or sun). It means *dios inclinado de cabeza* (God who has his head bowed). Some of the indigenous languages present in Toluca are the Mazahua, Otomí, Náhuatl, Matlatzinca and Ócuilteco (Gobierno Mexico 2010:1). The population of Toluca is 819, 561 as of 2010 (INEGI 2010).

Toluca is 2,660 masl (meters above sea level). The central region of Mexico is quite hilly. The State of Mexico is divided in two parts, the north and the south, by a volcanic chain called the Eje Volcanico or Sistema Tarasco-Nahua. The Valley of Toluca (Figure 2.2) along with the river Lerma are located in the north.



Figure 2 Map of Mexico

The Balsas, Chalma, and Atenango rivers are located in the south. Toluca is the fifth largest metropolitan city in the country of Mexico and by far is the largest in the State of Mexico. Toluca is a center for industrial production in chemical, automotive, plastics, pharmaceuticals, textiles, food and beverages (Garcia-Martinez 2008:57).

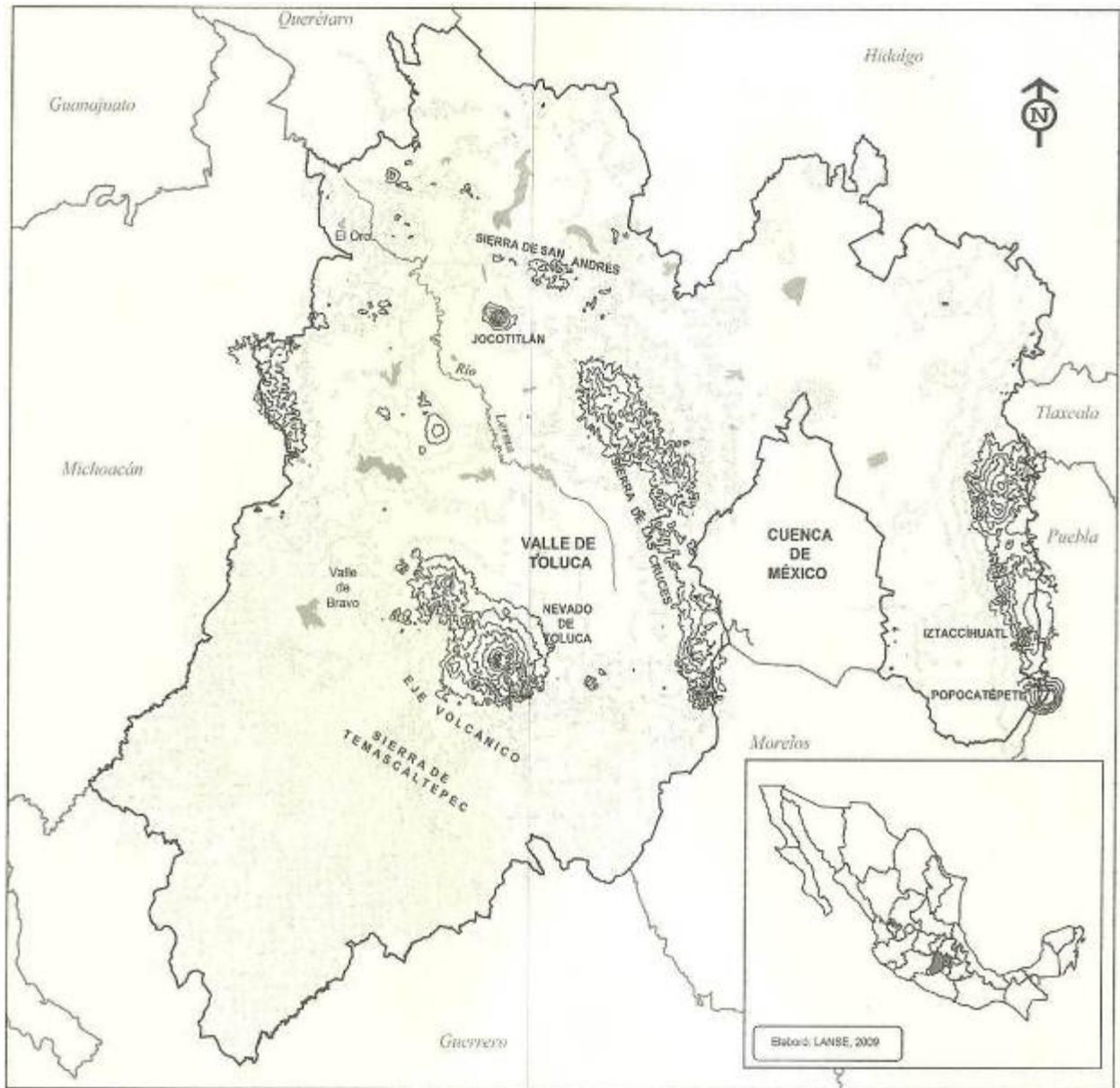


Figure 2.1 Map of the Valley of Toluca

Prehistory and History of the Valley of Toluca

The prehistory of Toluca is divided into six cultural phases. The first is the pre-classic (1500 B.C-300 A.D), second is Teotihuacana, third is the Tolteca, fourth is the Chichimeca, fifth is the Tepaneca, and sixth is Mexica (aztec). During the Pre-classic Period, José García Payón, a Mexican archeologist, believed there to be an overlap of cultures at the time (Hernández-Rodríguez 2009:35). He also mentioned that the ceramics from this period have been found in the region called Tecaxic-Calixtlahuaca (just northwest of Toluca) were from before the Matlatzinca culture. Pre-classic ceramics have been found in numerous places heading south in Metepec, Tenancingo and Malinalco (Figure 2.3). In the west, the region of Valle de Bravo is a zone that has not been explored in depth. However, there is evidence of pre-classic objects in Valle de Bravo. This place served as the headquarters for many towns in the area. It was also an important region for trading goods and a point of contact by indigenous people coming from the south and the east (Hernández-Rodríguez 2009:35).

The second cultural phase based on the ceramics and architecture is teotihuacana which was during the Classic Period (300 A.D-900 A.D). The Teotihuacana cultural influence extended to the Valley of Toluca. García Payón found objects that belonged to the “Teotihuacan III” period such as tripods, globe shaped vessels, and wide pans. The ceramics demonstrate the influence of the Teotihuacana culture in the Valley of Toluca. The third phase is the Tolteca. This influence came from Tula (about one hour north of Mexico City), which can be seen in the ceramics in the Valley of Toluca. The Tolteca period established a close relation between Tula (previously named Tollan Xicocotitlan) and the Toluqueña region (Toluca). It is logical that if a town receives material influence from another then it must also be affecting it in other domains

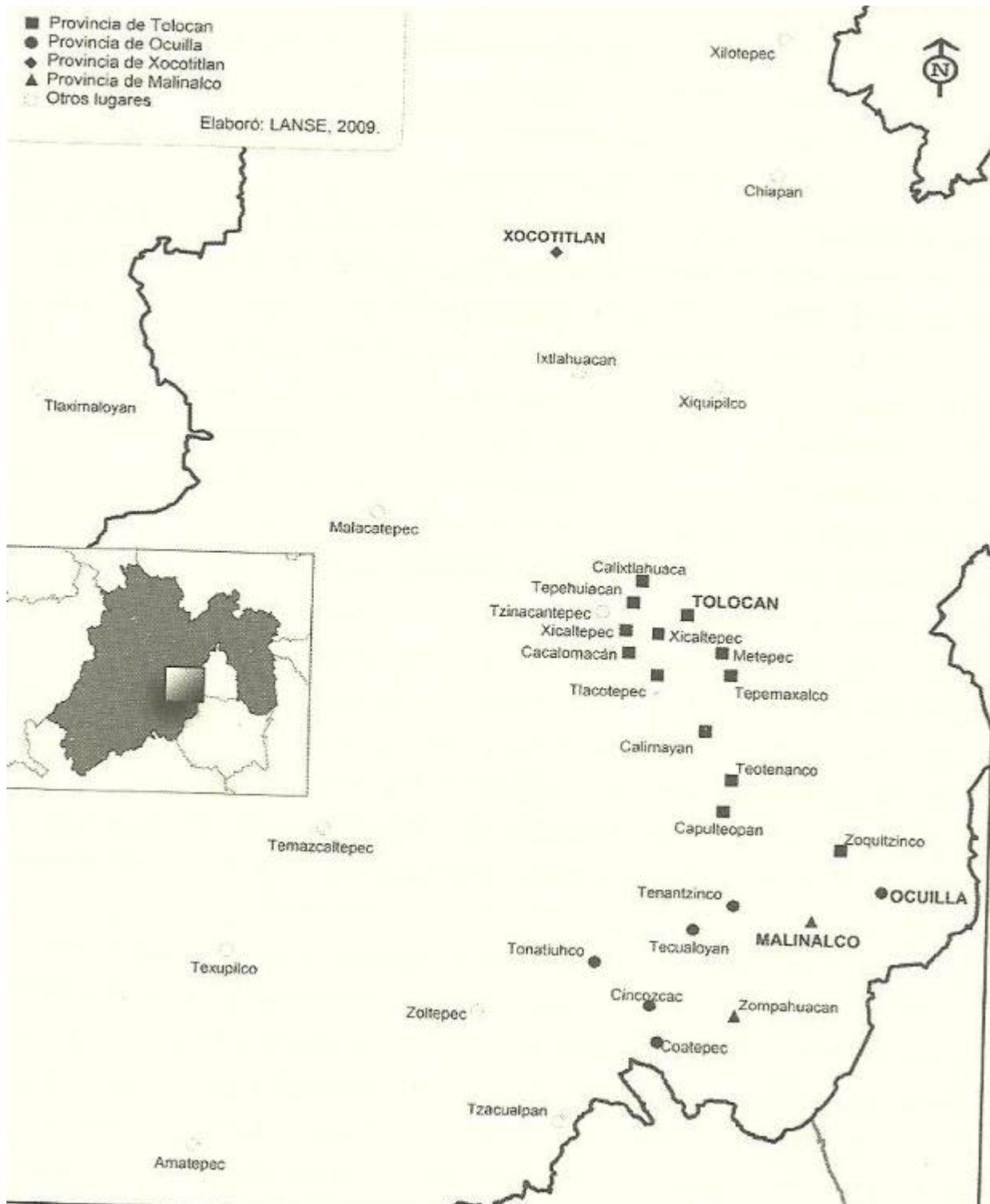


Figure 2.2 Tribute Provinces of the Triple Alliance

as well as the culture (Hernández-Rodríguez 2009:42). The destruction of the Tolteca empire caused many conflicts among between the towns of Mesoamerica, and it produced a series of migrations by people who were nomadic hunters and sedentary farmers.

The fourth cultural influence was the Chichimecas headed by Xólotl (king of the Chichimecas) who appeared and modified the situation in central Mesoamerica. Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, a chronicler, recounts that when Xólotl built the city of Tenayuca Mexico, he was determined to explore the land and take possession of it. He sent ambassadors to neighboring towns to ask the political authorities to come before him in 40 days or they were going to be considered traitors. Xólotl offered them protection and asked them to stop fighting because it was harmful to the population. Xólotl was a great politician and unifier; he wanted the tribes near his region to be under his control (Hernández-Rodríguez 2009:42).

The Matlatzincas were an indigenous group that controlled the Valley of Toluca starting in the 12th century. Their name *matlat* signifies “net” which was used to fish. They would also call each other *temátlat*, which signifies another interpretation of their name meaning “sling or armed with a sling”. The fifth cultural influence, Tepanecas, was closely tied to the Matlatzincas. It was suggested that the Matlatzincas and the Tepanecas belonged to the same language family, the Otomiana (comprised of other family languages) (Instituto de Verano en Mexico 2010). Jimenez Moreno, a professor, said that around the year 1386 the *chalcas* (Tepanecas) were vassals for the Matlatzincas. In 1410 we see again the relationship between the Matlatzincas and the Chalcas with the formation of a confederacy by the towns that did not want to be subjected to the *mexiñcas* (Aztecs) (Hernández-Rodríguez 2009:46). The sixth cultural influence in the Valley of Toluca was the *mexica* (Aztecs). Itzcóatl was the fourth emperor and Moctezuma I

was the fifth emperor of the Mexica.

They both occupied and conquered the southeast of Mexico. Axayácatl who succeeded Moctezuma I began new campaigns in order to take control of more territory. He noticed once he got to the Valley of Matlazincos (this was known as the Valley of Toluca to the Matlatzincas) that it was fruitful and that the land was watered by the river Lerma, whose springs fertilized the land (Hernández-Rodríguez 2009:50). The division among the Toluqueños (people from Toluca) helped the Mexica conquer the Valley of Toluca. There were six *señores* (governors of towns or nobility) in the regions of Calixtlahuaca, Tlacotepec, Metepec, Zinacantan, Calimaya and Tenango. Some say that this was due to the rivalry between the sons of the señores. Others suggest that los señores principales (the main men) conspired against the main governor of Calixtlahuaca who was the most powerful man and he went to complain to Axayácatl, asking for help against his enemies. Toluca was conquered in 1473 by the Mexica and Axayácatl left Chimaltecuhtli as governor of Toluca. In 1475 the Matlatzincas rebelled, and it took 34 years for the Mexica to reestablish themselves (Hernández-Rodríguez 2009:54).

Spanish Conquest in the Valley of Toluca

Once the Spaniards arrived and occupied Tenochtitlán, the señores from the Valle of Toluca became upset with the Mexica for taking over their land. Messengers from the region Cuauhnahuac (Cuernavaca) presented themselves to Hernan Cortés to complain about the bad deeds of the people from Malinalco. The people of Cuauhnahuac had sided with the Spaniards; and the people of Malinalco were allied with Cuauhtémoc, the Aztec ruler of Tenochtitlán (1520-21) and cousin to Moctezuma II. Cortés and the people from Cuauhnahuac marched to Malinalco and fought, chasing the people to the hills of Malinalco. A few days' later, messengers of Cortés

complained about the Matlatzincas aggravating them and so the Spaniards marched to Toluca and began an extensive fight against the Indians. The Spaniards were victorious around 1522 (Hernández-Rodríguez 2009:83).

Santiago Tlacotepec

Investigator Roman Piña Chan gave a testimony about the foundation of the Tenotenango region (about 40 minutes southeast of Toluca), which dates to 800 B.C (Gil-Dolores 1991:15). It is suggested that all the neighboring towns were founded during the same period. The Valle de Toluca belonged to the groups Matlatzinca, Otomies and the Mexicanos. The first settlements were in Otztoztlan, Zalixtlahuaca, Talxomulco, Miltepec, and Tepaltitlan. The Mexicanos populated Santiago Tlacotepec, Totoltepec, San Juan Tilapa and Cacalomacan. Santiago Tlacotepec was a place of *guerreros* (warriors) and was prosperous around 800 B.C. There have been some archeological findings that show that there existed an outstanding culture in Santiago Tlacotepec in comparison to Tenotenango. One could appreciate the heights of the *cerro* (hill) where you find terraces and platforms where there could have been an archaeological site of the first people of Tlacotepec (Martinez-Garcia 2010:7).

The early presence of humans in Santiago Tlacotepec has been noted by Garcíá Payón, Piña Chan and Sodi Miranda among others. In particular, on the hill or cerro of Santiago Tlacotepec, they have found abundant ceramics that date to the Post-Classic (AD 900-1521) period culture known as the Matlatzinca. There is a collection of archeological artifacts that were excavated in Santiago Tlacotepec in the Field Museum of Chicago. That collection contains 1,400 pieces of ceramics in addition to stone, metal and obsidian artifacts which were excavated extracted between 1894 and 1896 by Dr. W.D. Powell who was sponsored by his associate,

MAPA DEL MUNICIPIO DE
TOLUCA Y UBICACION DE
SANTIAGO TLACOTEPEC

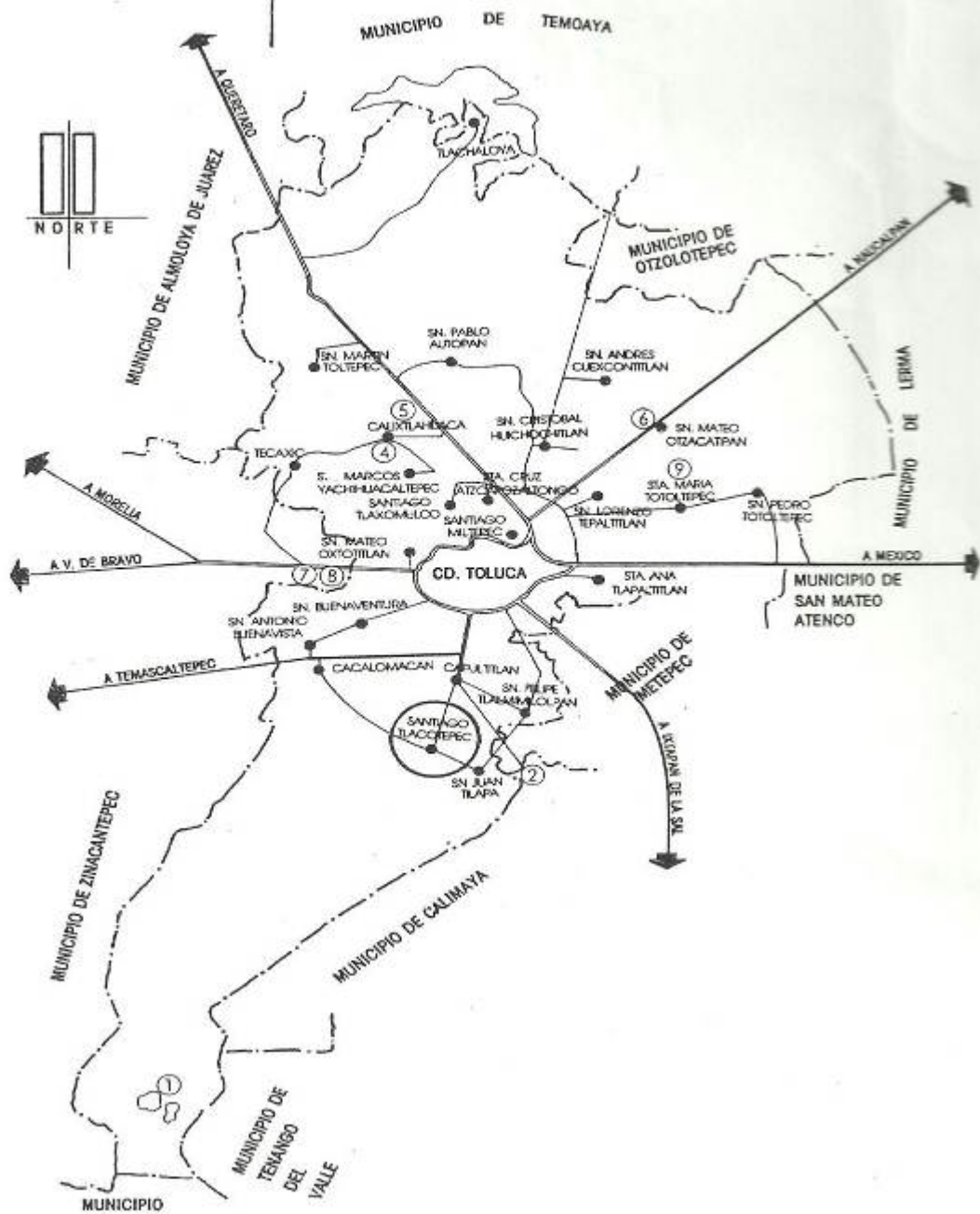


Figure 2.3 Map of Santiago Tlacotepec, Toluca Mexico

Professor Frederick Starr, anthropologist of the University of Chicago (Martinez-Garcia 2010:7).

Historians and anthropologist have not come to a consensus on how *Señor Santiago* (patron saint) came to be an important saint in the town of Santiago Tlacotepec. Some scholars argue that in the state of Puebla there existed a San Pedro Tlacotepec. On occasions there has been confusion with the population of the Mexiquense, whose saint is Santiago; he is also an important religious person in the history of Spain (Noguez 2010:7). The apostle Santiago was a disciple and a missionary who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was a fisherman and an apostle of Jesus of Nazareth. During the persecution of the Christians, Santiago was taken prisoner and killed by a sword ordered by Jewish King Herod Agrippa in the year 43 (Pérez-Silva 2010:4). Furthermore, it has been suggested by Spanish chronicles that Santiago appeared when the Spanish were defeating the Indians during the 16th century (Pérez-Silva 2010:8).



Figure 2.4 Señor Santiago

During the evangelical period (16th century), many native communities adopted Saint Santiago (Figure 2.4) (Noguez 2010:7).

The toponymy of the name Tlacotepec has been interpreted in various ways, mainly because of the “cerro” (hill), which overlooks the city of Toluca. The root of the name Tlacotepec comes from the náhuatl name “tlacotl” or “place of the hill/rock-roses” (bush with flowers resembling roses) and “tepetl”, hill. Moreover, in the Codex of Santiago Tlacotepec there are not any glyphs; however, there is a pictograph that applies to the myth-history of Santiago Tlacotepec (Figure 2.5). It includes a hill with trees and a *calli* element (house). It also shows a masculine person who is named Cuetzpallin and who takes the form of an Aztec lizard. He will divert the nobles Matlatizincas who the governor had assigned a *magueyal* (agave plant used to make *pulque*, which is a source of liquor) and trouble stirred when a *macehual* of the origin nahua had taken over the territory (Noguez 2010:8).

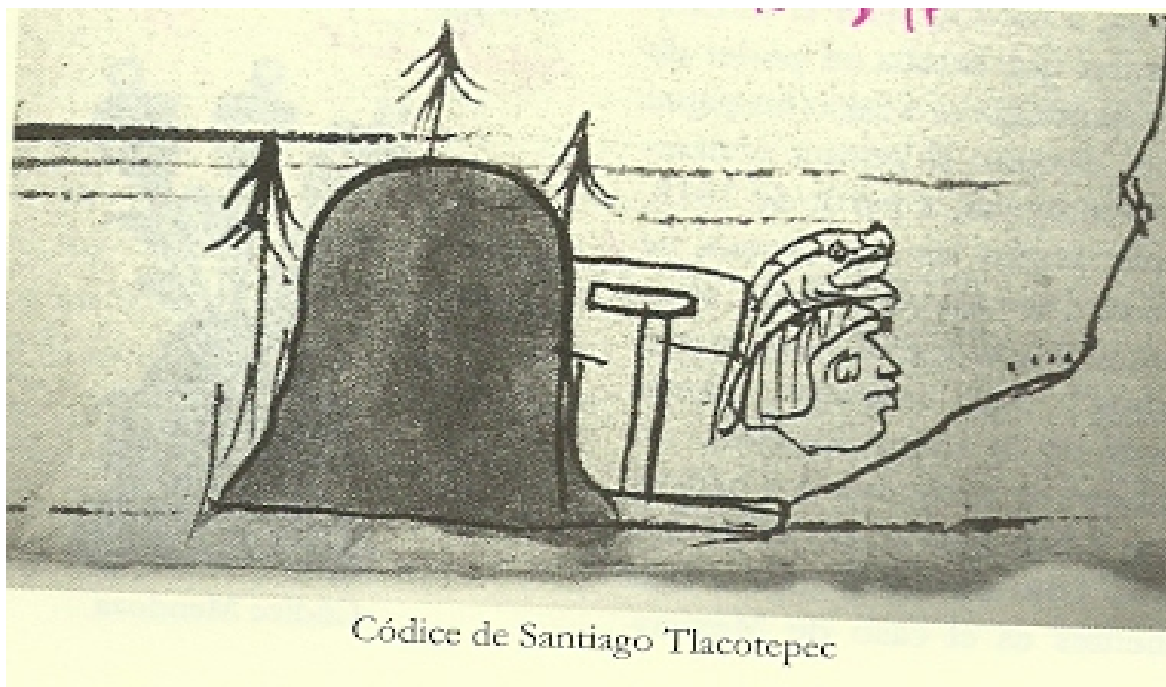


Figure 2.5 Pictograph of Cuetzpallin

Geography

The population of Santiago Tlacotepec was estimated in 2009 to be 19, 870 inhabitants, 53.6 percent of whom are women and 46.4 percent are men. Based on the Department of Asuntos Agrarios y Colonizacion data, Santiago Tlacotepec has an area of 6,719 hectare (1ha=10,000 sq meters) of land in general, 35 ha are integrated in the urban zone and 449 ha correspond to territories in the woods. The population of Santiago Tlacotepec sits on the skirt of the hill. The topsoil has an average texture that was apt for the construction of the urban zone where people settled (Ledezma-Rueda 2007:5).

The climate in the region is a combination of sub-humid, temperate cold and semi-dry with a period of rainfall during the summer. The maximum temperature during the year is 75°F with a minimum temperature is 28°F. The mild temperature is due to the Nevado de Toluca (Mexico's fourth largest peak) which rises above the Toluca basin (Figure 2.6). It is often referred to by the Náhuatl name *Xinantecatl*, which means "Naked Lord". The Nevado de Toluca has a summit .93miles wide that opens to the east (Ledezma-Rueda 2007) as well as two lakes known as the sun and the moon. The community of Santiago Tlacotepec may experience sporadic snowfall during the months of December and January.

Cultivated plants grown in this region are cilantro, lettuce, squash, potato, and onions. Fruit trees like plum, apples, peaches, *capulin* (species of cherries) and fig are also cultivated in this region. Near the cerro (hill) flowers such as gladiolas, roses, dahlias, carnations, geraniums, and hydrangeas are grown for the market. The fauna found in Santiago Tlacotepec include armadillos, rabbits, snakes, squirrels and raccoons (Ledezma-Rueda 2007:8).



Figure 2.6 El Nevado de Toluca

Before the federal government brought water, the community used the water from the *barranca* (deep break or hole caused by heavy falls of rain) (Figure 2.7) and the river flowing from the springs. The water would run from the floor under the soil and arrived to the places closer to the population. During the rainy season (summer) the water would form ponds and was used as drinking water by the game (Ledezma-Rueda 2007:7).

Economy

As of 2005, 54.40 percent of the population worked in commercial services including those in domestic homes or restaurants and in transport services. Also 35.77% worked in construction, electric companies, gas, water and manufacture industries. The smallest labor sector, with only 9.83% of the people working in it, consists of agriculture, livestock farming, mining, and fishing (Foro-Mexico 2011:1). Domestic animals such as cattle, hogs, turkey, chickens, and geese are particularly important to the economy of the town (Ledezma-Rueda 2007:16-17). Currently, most of the population in the town of Santiago Tlacotepec works in



Figure 2.7 Cerro and barranca

Toluca where there is a high demand for labor by the manufacturing sector because agriculture in Santiago Tlacotepec does not sustain a family. Many of these families who go to the city and work in factories and industrial production. People also work for the government. The town has become a “bedroom community” because families spend much of their time at work in Toluca (Hernández-Morales 2011 Personal interview).

Community Services and Education

Some of the services that are offered in Santiago Tlacotepec include 1 municipal center, 1 health center, 3 doctors, 7 pharmacies, 1 library, 1 auditorium that is located in the municipal center, 40 meat markets, 20 chicken markets, 90 open-air-stores, 2 mills, and 5 auto centers. Santiago Tlacotepec also offers transport services, taxis and buses. The first teacher, Pedro Mejia, arrived in 1887 and initiated the construction of the town’s first schools.

Today Santiago Tlacotepec has they has two day-cares, 4 pre-schools that serve an estimated six hundred children, 4 elementary schools, 2 secondary schools and 1 high school that was recently opened in 2011 (Figure 2.8) (Ledezma-Rueda 2007:18).

Religion

The new missionaries arrived in Toluca in 1524 in their efforts to evangelize the indigenous people. The religious order that was established was the Franciscana. As soon as they arrived, they began to preach to other towns. The first convent that was founded was San Fransisco in 1533. In 1558 in Santiago Tlacotepec an *érmita* (hermitage) was constructed by the Franciscanos.



Figure 2.8 High School Opened in 2011 and Nevado de Toluca

Because the friars would walk great distances they were considered true missionaries according to the indigenous population they were also good people because they would accept anything they offered them. During the 1980s, 98% of the population followed the Catholic religion; this percentage has since declined to 85%. There is one principal parish, is La Parroquia de Santiago Apostol (Figure 2.9), and five more churches in the region: Colonia de Guadalupe, El Refugio, Santa Juanita, Barrio del Calvario and Santa Maria. There are also protestant and evangelical churches in Loma Bonita and Cristo Rey (Ledezma-Rueda 2007:17). There are no dates for the beginning construction of the principal church of Santiago Tlacotepec; however, one date that appears is when the construction ended, which was in May 21, 1721 (Gil-Dolores



Figure 2.9 Parish de Santiago Apostol

1991:18).

Politics

Even though Santiago Tlacotepec belongs to the municipality of Toluca, the town is still isolated from the urban city. This past year, in 2011, Eruviel, Bravo Mena and Encinas were running for governor. However, they did not campaign in Santiago Tlacotepec. The representatives of the runners-up went to the town to present their propositions for the election. What was bizarre about this election is that there was a strong vote for the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, Mexican political party) party in Santiago Tlacotepec. This is strange because the majority of the people are apolitical. Tlacotepec is a place where only 60 newspapers are sold to a population of almost 20,000. Edgar Franco, a graduate student of public politics, mentioned what surprised him was the strategy that was used in order to win votes for the PRI. Franco said that every so often a group of women would go to the polls. Supposedly, this group got together a few days before at the home of a coordinator over a discussion about “cancer” which never existed. The particular participants of Santiago Tlacotepec observed a video about the Eruviel campaign and promised to register for a social program and in return were given a card for benefits by members of the Eruviel campaign. The coordinator had the responsibility to get people to vote for Eruviel. Franco saw a loss of democracy during the 20th century, and he saw a “sick” democracy in the initial 21th century. Perhaps one day there will be a true democracy (Franco 2011:6)

Current Social Issue

Recently, in Capultitlán, which is at the entrance to the Santiago Tlacotepec, a large supermarket opened. This store is closer to the small towns than any other large supermarket,

and people do not have to travel very far so they enjoy it. However, the downside of this supermarket is that it has affected business at the *tanguis* (open-air market) and small businesses (Pérez-Silva 2011 Personal interview). In a *tanguis* (open-air market) there is a sense of closeness to one another, and people can talk to the other person. But in a supermarket you do not recognize each other anymore. According to the townspeople, the store also affects the traffic and the transit, and the idea of the community as a “pueblo” is being lost. In Santiago Tlacotepec the *tanguis* is a source of employment for people and some families live off of what they earn selling produce there (Pérez-Silva 2011 Personal interview). Because the *bodega* (supermarket) is a national store, their products are priced low, and people are going to want to buy from the supermarket (Hernández-Morales 2011 Personal interview). “To be more radical we see the formation of people. The store is used and creates the idea of wanting more and more, the idea of having things. “*El super los ahoga sin meterlos al mare*” (the supermarket drowns you without being taken into the ocean) (Pérez-Silva 2011 Personal interview).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the region of the Valley of Toluca. I go on to discuss the different stages of cultures that were influential in the prehistory of the Valley of Toluca. I have also described the community of Santiago Tlacotepec which is where I did my research. In the next chapter I will discuss the historical and cross cultural perspective on elopement. Elopement is known to occur in Mesoamerica and in other world areas as we will see.

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL AND CROSS CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON ELOPEMENT

Marriage, and the different ways people get married, is a subject of long-standing interest to anthropologists. This chapter reviews some of the historical and cross-cultural research that has been conducted on marriage in Mexico. The practice of elopement, specifically marriage by elopement, the topic of this thesis, is less well studied but it has been observed and analyzed in Mexico as well as other regions of the world. I begin the chapter with a description of marriage in the Aztec world. I believe it is important to begin there in order to see the changes in marriage intentions that have occurred over time, like elopement (el robo), which will be mentioned in further detail later. For the Aztecs marriage negotiations were a family affair. Once both families came to an agreement, the boy and girl would be married. This form of marriage was considered ideal for the Aztecs. However, over the course of time, alternative marriage forms such as elopement would become widespread in Central Mexico.

One important source of change were the Spanish influences during the sixteenth century that altered marriage customs in Mexico. During this period the church courts believed in the doctrine of free will (Seed 1988:18). The couples had absolute authority over their spousal choices. It was not until the seventeenth century that the Spanish crown seized power over the church courts and overturned the policy of free will. The crown later became more influential in

people's lives and took over matters of matrimony. Wealthy families would seek the help of royal officials in order to veto the marriage of their children if they believed it was "undesirable." In the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century individuals would again obtain their rights in choosing their spouses.

Throughout Latin America elopement has been known to occur; it is often referred to as *el robo* (elopement). Robichaux's mentions this phenomenon in Tlaxcala. There are also other regions in Mesoamerica where *el robo* occurs such as the state of Mexico, Guerrero, Puebla, Oaxaca, Guatemala, and Cuba to name a few. *El robo* also is found in other world areas such as Central Thailand, Pakistan, and East Africa. This practice is not concealed in these areas. Although, they might have different reasons for eloping, as we will observe throughout this study, *el robo* still occurs today. In this chapter we will find that some of the causes for *el robo* may be similar in some regions.

Aztec Marriage

During the Aztec Post Classic period (900-1521), marriage was considered fundamental. Marriage also allowed men and women to set their gendered roles (Pennock 2008:93), and was an important rite of passage for both men and women in the lives of the Aztecs. One Aztec saying describes getting married as discovering the sun. "The Sun was a glorious focus of the Aztec life and the heart of religious and state ideology; the sun-spouse analogy lends high esteem to this very personal bond" (Pennock 2008:93).

The age at which a young man was considered ready for marriage is not completely clear, but seems to have been around 20 (Pennock 2008:93). Permission from parents was needed in the Aztec world; however, parents took into consideration what the boy thought about the girl.

“Despite hints of courting, close supervision of young men and women made it unlikely that most Aztecs selected their own partners” (Pennock 2008:93). Parental approval was also necessary and it was rare to see children defy their parents (Pennock 2008:93).

Marriages were negotiated among the family members of the son. A proposal was taken to the family of the girl. The parents and other kin discussed who would be the young girl that they chose. The young man was included in the discussion of choosing a spouse, but the choice of a spouse was a matter for family discussion (Pennock 2008:94). Once the family came to a consensus about which girl the boy would marry then the following would happen. A ritual of marriage negotiations would occur for four consecutive mornings. During this process the elder woman who was the matchmaker would make a ceremonial approach to the young woman’s parents. The first three days her family declined the proposal. On the last day, the young girl’s parents said to the matchmakers: “The maiden hath caused you trouble. To what purpose doth she deceive our humble man? For her uncles, her aunts are in agreement” (Pennock 2008:94).

The day after the matchmaker leaves, the family of the girl discussed the proposal. It is suggested that it was a tranquil process during the negotiations, and that no one disputed the proposal. “Finally, when an agreement had been reached, the parents of the girl said: It is good, may it be consummated” (Pennock 2008:95).

Refusals were considered to be part of a “formal system of contracts that served to establish a relationship between the two families” (Pennock 2008:95). These *tecihuatlanque* (matchmakers) illustrate that women had a significant influence during this period. These older women were the matchmakers who had some authority, and were responsible for arranging the marriage and negotiation between the families (Pennock 2008:95). Parents and family members

were a part of this important marriage process.

Once the parents chose a day for the marital union, they would prepare a celebration for the couple's new beginning. The wealth of the family would determine how extravagant the celebration would be. Marriage was an occasion for festivities at every level of society. Invitations would be sent out to family and friends. The women would go without sleep because of the preparation of the celebration. "On the dawn of the wedding day, the guests arrived at midday bringing gifts, food, tobacco, flowers and capes" (Pennock 2008:96).

As the evening got closer, the bride was washed and decorated. Her arms and legs were decorated with red feathers and her face painted in yellow if she was a young lady. The bride's future father-in-law and his male relatives then spoke to the woman, preparing her to leave her home. She was covered with a black cloth; the young woman was lifted onto the back of a strong woman and was taken to her new household. Both families were a part of this procession and the eyes of the whole community were on the girl (Pennock 2008: 97). The young woman was then embraced by her future husband's relatives; she became their daughter. She would move to her husband's home and family on the day of her wedding and although, the young girl resided with her husband's family she was not abandoned by her parents (Pennock 2008:96). The procession symbolized her movement out of her natal home to that of her husband and her change of gender role.

In this section we can note that parents and family members played an important part in the lives of their children especially when it came to marriage. The boy's parents were the ones who decided who they would choose for their son's wife. The marriage process and ceremony were led by both parents and family members. They contributed in some form to the young boy's

and girl's marriage, supporting their children in this stage of their lives.

Spanish Influences

In this section I will be discussing the importance of Spanish influence on marriage in Mexico during the Colonial Period (1521-1810). This will help us gain an understanding of the institution of marriage and how it gradually developed. The Spanish and the Catholic Church have had a tremendous impact on marriage customs in Mexico. To begin, the Catholic Church during the 16th century believed in individual choice so men and women were able to choose who they wanted as their spouse. However, this changed during the 18th century when the Spanish King took control from the Catholic Church and made parental consent a mandatory requisite for marriage.

When Hernan Cortes and his troops arrived in Mexico in 1519 they brought soldiers, nobles, culture, history, and tradition. For 301 years after Cortez's arrival in Mexico, the foreign power that shaped life in Mexico was the Crown of Castile and Leon. Anthropologist George Foster suggested that a "cultural crystallization, which is the rapid selection of Hispanic traits and adaptation to new conditions by means of conscious and unconscious choices made during the highly fluid initial decades of contact" (Seed 1988:18).

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, marriage was common among the Spaniards. The Indians had their own beliefs and traditions when it came to marriage and so Spaniards allowed them to retain those practices. "For most of the Colonial Period, the principal institution ensuring the enforcement of a combination of ecclesiastical and Spanish traditions from the old world, in regards to marriage, was the Catholic Church" (Seed 1988:28).

For most of the Colonial Period it was the Catholic Church not the Spanish Crown that

controlled marriage. The Catholic Church taught two fundamental beliefs. “First, was the sacredness of marriage and second was the importance of personal will in creating a marriage bond” (Seed 1988:31). The Council of Trent (1545-63) transformed the church’s earlier doctrines on marriage and it reemphasized the importance of individual and personal will. “Canon 9 of the Council’s session on marriage stated that no civil authority could use penalties or threats to force a couple to marry” (Seed 1988:34). During this period there were situations in which wealthy parents could not do anything in order to prevent their daughter’s marriage to someone whom they believed was unsuitable; this was about to change because of the King Charles II new policies.

After 1665, the situation reversed itself and the Church officials had to obey the king’s orders. The Council of the Indies challenged King Philip IV, who did not allow any type of promotions in church rankings. However, King Charles II policy challenged King Philip’s decree. During the first decade of the 18th century King Charles II had control over all appointed bishops and so if a wealthy family was dissatisfied with whom their daughter would marry then they would seek the help of the appointed bishop (Seed 1988:167). We can note that this was going to cause drastic problems between the King and church because now who-ever was appointed to become bishop had to comply with to the king and his officials. “Church officials relied on the high court to enforce church orders and were being evaluated by the same royal bureaucrats; church officials could ill afford to be on bad terms. Hence, marriages opposed by members of the high court were rarely protected by the church after the beginning to the 18th century” (Seed 1988:168).

Because of this Mexican church officials started a new policy and began making secret

weddings available. They recorded the marriage in a separate book which was kept out of the hands of the crown officials (Seed 1988:169). When balance between religious and royal authority began to shift, wealthy families began to use the royal courts to prevent marriages that they viewed as socially unacceptable (Seed 1988:170). This favored the wealthy families and went against the initial doctrine of the Catholic Church which strongly believed that a person had the free will to choose a spouse.

Children opposed their parents because they were not able to marry the one they loved. Parents found a way to exile their children in order to prevent them from marrying the person whom they believed as “socially unacceptable”. Sons and daughters were unfairly accused of being disobedient and so were sent to jail, deported or daughters were sent to reformatories. (Seed 1988:171). Religious officials were not able to fight against the royal authorities because of the new policy made by King Charles II.

In the Fourth Provincial Council (1770-71) the Spanish church had moved away from their traditional ideologies of marriage and free will. The council agreed to give parents an opportunity to a hearing when children planned to marry against their wishes. This had never before been done but now the parents had an opportunity to separate the couple with this hearing. The children’s marital choice became the parent’s choice. This resulted in two major changes within the Mexican ecclesiastical tradition. First was that the couple had to be equal in wealth and status. Second was that father’s authority was “derived from divine, positive law” (Seed 1988:197). The church council had clearly shifted from the couple’s decision to parental authority during this period and it was highly unlikely that a couple would marry if parents disapproved.

In 1776, the Spanish king declared that marriage would be based on parental consent for all children under the age of twenty-five. It was not until this period that the church courts of Mexico began “uniformly” to accept the parent’s wishes. The cause of this legislation was in part because the king’s brother married a woman of low social status. It was not until the 19th and 20th centuries, that children would be the decision makers in choosing their own spouses as it had been in the sixteenth century (Seed 1988:225).

Currently, in present day Mexico only civil marriages are legal and valid. People under the age of 18 years need parental consent to marry. Boys must be at least 16 years old and girls must be at least 14 years old and have parental consent. People who desire to have a religious ceremony can do so; however, this will not have any legal effects. Religious ceremonies are not recognized by the Mexican government. The dominant religion in Mexico is Catholicism so they also require many formalities and can be very expensive. This can become problematic to some people seeking to be married through church (Penner and Associates 2011: 1).

Ethnographic Studies of Elopement in Latin America

Marriage by elopement has been reported in other communities in Mexico. Social anthropologist David Robichaux conducted fieldwork in Acxotla del Monte and Tepeyanco in the state of Tlaxcala. Robichaux reports that new couples begin living together when the groom arrives with the bride at this house. Robichaux said this custom is known as el robo (a steal) despite its literal meaning. He stresses that this custom is not seen as an abduction, but as an elopement. The same is true for Santiago Tlacotepec where the term el robo is also used for elopement.

The elopement often takes the young boy’s family by surprise. In Robichaux’s study he

mentioned that when the groom arrived with his bride and presented her to his mother as her new “daughter-in-law” the mother was surprised. The following step is for the groom’s family to notify the bride’s family about her whereabouts. Next, what usually happens is the *contento* (Robichaux 2005:10). The *contento* is an event in which both families try to establish a relationship after the couple has fled together and moved into the husband’s family’s home. The groom’s family is trying to please the future bride’s family. The *contento* is also the process in which the groom’s family will ask forgiveness from the novia’s family for their son’s actions.

Robichaux mentions that throughout this ritualized ceremony the groom’s family presents significant items such as a candle and a basket that contains bread, a bottle of brandy and flowers. This is offered to the daughter’s family in order to please them. The parents from both families give a formal speech. Once the families have agreed on the terms of marriage such as when they will have a civil and religious ceremony, they toast and celebrate the union of the couple. Robichaux’s work is particularly useful because his study of this ritual is very similar to the one I observed in Santiago Tlacotepec. I present a comparison of the two *contento* rituals in chapter VII.

In another study, Julia Pauli, a social anthropologist, reports that new couples began married life with *el robo* in the state of Mexico. Pauli’s research suggests that the women here tried to escape the excessive work in their household “only to find a very similar situation under the orders of their mother-in-law” (Robichaux 2005:12). Although girls elope with their novio and believe that somehow their situation at home will change, they instead find themselves in the same situation that they were in at their own homes, now they are living at their in-laws, and are taking their orders their husbands, not their fathers.

Mariana Goloubinoff discusses elopement and argues that it is an early stage of development for young girls. She also mentions the importance of what she refers to as physical and social virginity in the region Rio Balas region of the northern region state of Guerrero, Mexico. Goloubinoff mentions that when a robada, a girl who elopes, might not give all her consent if she is not sure about her feelings. She allows herself to be robada because she feels she has no option. Goloubinoff refers to el robo as an established consensual union or cohabitation between a man and a woman without any form of legal or religious marriage ceremony. It is important to note that el robo is the beginning of matrimony. La fuga (the fleeing) represents the attempt against the authority of the parents; this is a strategy for marriage. Goloubinoff believes that el robo has reached the status of the norm. She believes it is a mutual agreement between the novio and novia, which is far from the deviation of the common rule or is a narrow opening for an alternative system of marriage (Goloubinoff 2003:244).

Goloubinoff explains that girls are brought up to take care of all the domestic work at home. Boys were taught about the exterior of the home and how to fish and work the land (Goloubinoff 2003: 237). According to Goloubinoff the adolescent years are more problematic for girls than they are for boys. From the ages of 10 or 11, girls begin to feel pressured by the surveillance of those around them. Their movements are more controlled and their friendships are viewed with suspicion; girls are becoming women and begin to be desired by boys. The young girl finds it difficult for her to have a relationship with a boy that will be acceptable. The young girl paints an image of boys that has left her unsettled. The girl's depiction of him is that of a macho, with which she is not at ease. She understands that most boys want to play with them and knows that they do not take responsibilities for their actions (Goloubinoff 2003:239).

In order to avoid traps and prevent abandonment, the girls' mothers insist that their daughters be respected by boys. They also want their daughters' virginity physically and socially to be respected. The act of talking frequently with a boy is viewed as an intimate relationship. If the boy says, "*le hablo a tal muchacha*" (I talk to a girl) that meant that he has had a sexual encounter with the girl. This did not mean a promise to marry. This is where the danger could come if the boy says that "*he hablado*" (has talked to her). Her reputation then has been tarnished, and what she has to say does not have any value (Goloubinoff 2003:240). Goloubinoff's work will help us see some of the same issues as the physical and social virginity in Santiago Tlacotepec which I will discuss in chapter VII.

A girl who has been cheated on or failed in a marriage finds herself living with her parents. A girl who no longer is a virgin or is no longer considered a married woman will be considered "used" because she has been with someone, and a young man will not want her. The only way to get around this is to arrange a marriage or for her to get married with a widower. In other cases, if the man gets the girl pregnant and does not want to get married, he has to pay her a compensation. For all these reasons, girls are watched by others. They also sometimes regret getting married at a young age for these reasons (Goloubinoff 2003:241).

Aubeterre Buznego who wrote about el robo in her book *El Pago de la Novia*, discusses several ethnographies of indigenous marriages in the highlands of central Mexico. The indigenous achieve this by means of el robo. This strategy represents an alternative that permits some to be liberated and, reduces, or at least postpones the costs of, a traditional ceremony. A variety of authors highlight the sharp increase in the use of this strategy among Nahuas, Mixtecos, Totonacos, Tzotziles, ethnic groups of the region that share similar principles

with respects to matrimony practices (D'Aubeterre Buznego 2000:227).

One of the first communities that Aubeterre Buznego discusses in her book the town of San Miguel Tzinacapan a Nahuatl community in the mountains of northern Puebla. It is rare that girls are pedidas and the novio is able to give the *tasojkamachani* which are donations of firewood, meat, bread and salt. The novio would give these offerings to the parents of the girl before the parents delivered their daughter to the novio. In the last decade, *la fuga concertada* (what I refer to as el robo) of the couple is a more frequent practice which establishes unions. Also in the same region in Xochicuatzla, a ranch Totonaca, and in the municipality of Ahuacatlán, Ana T. Cortés refers to an unusual increase of raptos (abductions) and la fugas concertadas (robos) between the couples. "The idea of love and liberation to choose your partner, before was not common, now it is the norm among adolescents" (D'Aubeterre Buznego 2000:228). Victoria Chenaut, who is an anthropologist, said that among the Totonacas the most common is el robo, marriage by consensus, which the community accepts and is considered legitimate (D'Aubeterre Buznego 2000:228).

Hugo G. Nutini discusses el robo in the State of Tlaxcala in San Bernardino Contla (southeast of Mexico City). Nutini conceives el robo like an institution, a socially sanctioned form that initiates a new family (D'Aubeterre Buznego 2000:229). In San Miguel Acuexcomac (southeast of Mexico City) during January 1990 through January 1994, 58 marriages were registered, including 12 which united people foreign to the region. Among the 46 remaining, 30 unions were a result of unions of the fugas concertadas (robos) types that were later formalized, 6 were pedidas, and 6 legalized their marriage. There was insufficient information about the remaining 5 unions. These data help us to recognize the importance of el robo (D'Aubeterre

Buznego 2000:232). La fuga concertada is not something new and it worries parents and family members of the stolen girls. When this practice occurred, a couple in love would not ask permission from the parents and would meet secretly. It is possible that the majority of people in the past adopted the same strategy. Parents, family members and neighbors comment on the couples' action to flee with a hint of disapproval (D'Aubeterre Buznego 2000:248).

Danielle Dehouve said that during the mid-1970s the Nauhas of Xalpatlahuac, in the State of Guerrero (south of State of Mexico), marriage by means of el robo was reserved for the orphans and mestizos whose parents for some reason or another did not reside in the area. In Zinacantán (at the far end of the country in the State of Chiapas) el robo, which is socially frowned upon, was still a practice was becoming that increasingly widespread and tolerated (D'Aubeterre Buznego 2000:227). The perdon and *el concierto* (what I refer to as *contento*) between the parents of the couple make up the aspect of an assimilated ritual. This will repair an insult and restore a relationship between families (D'Aubeterre Buznego 2000:265).

Kathryn A. Sloan did her research in Oaxaca, Mexico on elopement. She tells the story of Enrique and Carmen who wanted to marry, but faced parental opposition. Carmen's mother refused to give her permission for Carmen to marry. The mother believed Carmen was too young. Later, Carmen and Enrique found themselves in a courthouse defending their elopement. Carmen said that she had fled because Enrique had promised to marry her. She also wanted to escape her mother's physical abuse. Carmen had to confront her mother and her public shame (Sloan 2008:32). The mother's opposition to her daughter's marriage triggered her to flee with Enrique and live a happy life far from the abuse.

“The elopement of Carmen and Enrique unfolds like any other timeless story of underage

lovers running away together to satisfy their sexual and emotional longings, in spite of parental objections and their tender age” (Sloan 2008:33). Elopement occurs everywhere because young girls and boys want to be the ones to decide who will be their spouse. They also want to overcome all opposition especially that of their parents. Couples elope because it is an opportunistic strategy (Sloan 2008:33).

Josefina B. Aranda conducted research in social anthropology in Santo Tomás Jalietz, a Zapoteca community located south of the Central Valley of Oaxaca. Aranda finds that there are few couples that initiate marriage by legal means. Los robos by means of physical violence (what I refer to as rapto) have declined significantly but la fuga concertada (el robo) of the couples, *el ponerse de acuerdo* (agreeing), is a widespread form used to initiate a union (D’Aubeterre Buznego 2000:228).

In San Pedro la Laguna in Guatemala, for young girls, the action of running away in order to defy their parents was seen as an opportunity for them to be free of parental control. Therefore, a girl ran the risk of closing herself off from her parents; and, if she found herself overwhelmed by the domestic work at her husband’s home, she would have a hard time returning to her parent’s home. It is important to note that girls were supervised and were not trained to weigh the pros and cons of their decisions and consequences (Paul and Paul 1963:144). Poor decision-making is one of the components that triggered women to flee in Guatemala.

Alternative forms of marriage have existed in San Pedro for an extended period of time. There are three patterns of marriage that can be seen in this community. The traditional pattern, which prevailed until about 1900, consists of courtship, and parental petitioning. “Elopement has occurred way before time; this mode of marriage at one point was the dominant form of marriage

during 1900 to 1950 and beginning in 1950, church marriages had become universal” (Paul and Paul 1963:133).

There have been occasions when a boy “stole” the girl away from her parents, and elopement has been an option for marriage for quite some time. Couples have faced a number of obstacles, including overcoming parental objections, and not only in San Pedro, but also in other parts of Mesoamerica. By 1941 the majority of marriages began with el robo. In most cases the couple reached the boy’s house without being confronted. There have been several instances when two or more couples that are friends elope on the same night and give each other moral support. The girl’s parents usually have no idea who the boy might be so the girl’s family will not be able to find their daughter. In an effort to strive for the pursuit of happiness couples use this alternative form of marriage (Paul and Paul 1963:142).

Once the bride moves in with her in-laws she will be required to help her mother-in-law in the household. The new couple stays in separate beds, while the husband’s family sleeps on other beds. Once the couple bears children, the newlywed’s family may move to different headquarters in the same house or will move to a small room across from their parent’s home. The home structure is constructed around a patio in order to enlarge their patrilocal family. The family is also able to get more freedom and privacy. The husband works the fields until his father passes or until his father chooses to divide the property (Paul and Paul 1963:146).

During the Colonial Period (1521-1810) in Mexico abduction and elopement were considered “distortion of the normal course of courtship” (Lavrin 1989:65). This method of abduction and elopement were used to force a relationship on either the family or an individual. This bypassed the traditional sequence of marriage and which challenged the church. One of the

frequently reported reasons for elopement during the Colonial Period in Mexico was to overcome socio-religious opposition. Elopement was sometimes resorted to because of the inequality of the man; however, in some cases they belonged to the same “socio-ethnic group”. “The words used to describe the physical removal of a woman is *sustraer* (steal), *extraer* (remove) this conveyed the idea of theft” (Lavrin 1989:66). The woman may have left by her own will and the family’s inability to protect her questioned the family’s honor and caused rage among the relatives (Lavin 1989:66).

Once the couple was living together for a few weeks, the man would request the approval of the church in order to repair the woman’s innocence. “Both family and church were forced to accept a de facto marriage” (Lavrin 1989:66). In one case a Tarascan Indian (from the northwestern region of the Mexican state of Michocán) repeatedly eloped with several women. An attorney argued that the Tarascan women freely left with any man who proposed it, “since women lacked much understanding of the implications of their actions” (Lavrin 1989:67).

In Cuba during the 19th century, elopement was related in part to parent’s opposition to the marriage. The girl’s parents wanted someone who was educated, a hard worker, and who had a high status. Even before the couple eloped, parents oppose relationships that they may find unfit. Once the daughters have eloped, parents may allow them to marry. As one parent said, “in view of the elopement, he is no longer opposed to it, but rather on the contrary the marriage should take place the sooner the better, so that public virtue does not remain unredeemed” (Martinez-Alier 1972:103). Elopement was very much a triumph when it came to overcoming parental dissent. The loss of a daughter from her family was heartbreaking for her family and in order to compensate for the loss, the boy had to marry the girl (Martinez-Alier 1972:102).

However, a man's prestige did not suffer in any way, shape or form. "In addition, the legal sanctions on elopement-marriage, or alternatively endowment and expatriation-must have contributed to its efficacy" (Martinez-Alier 1972:104). The sexual virtue that was lost and the loss in social value of the family was what made the elopement and later the marriage a total success (Martinez-Alier 1972:104).

Elopement in Other World Regions

In addition to the occurrences of elopement in Mesoamerica, elopement is seen in other regions around the world. For example people in the community of Chitralis (an ethnic group of northwestern Pakistan) see marriage by elopement as a matter of status and "sectarian identity". The least moral type of marriage is elopement; this is when a couple marries without the permission of either set of parents (Marsden 2007:99). Chitralis see elopement marriages as corrupted acts by the young. Others say elopement marriages are the result of bad parenting. Some people say that uneducated Chitrali parents are unable to fully understand the thoughts of their children and so their children elope because of this (Marsden 2007:100).

In the area of rural Central Thailand, there exist several forms of marriages: marriage with negotiations between the parents, a formal ceremony, elopement, and living together without ceremony. The inhabitants understand and accept that not everyone can follow the romantic ideal. When a traditional ceremony is not possible because the parents disapprove or because the cost is expensive, the young couple elope. When a couple elopes they usually flee to a nearby village and stay there for a few days then return home (Cherlin and Chamrathirong 1988:340).

Once both families come together, the young man asks forgiveness from the girl's

parents. The parents almost always forgive, and then they hold a small ceremony and a greatly reduced bride price is paid. Although the elopement is supposed to take place without the knowledge of the parents, in some cases they may be aware of the situation. Yoddumnern reported that in one village, elopement occurred more often in years during which there was a drought or famine (Cherlin and Chamrathirong 1988:340).

We also see the practice of elopement in East Africa. The Pokot (ethnic group), a farming and herding community, use this as well as kidnapping in order to relieve frustrations from marriage negotiations. These are alternative systems of marriages. Such alternative forms of marriages are sanctionable when the ceremonial cycle known as *sintagh* occurs. The cycle celebrates the summer solstice, and if someone elopes or kidnaps a woman during that time, they may avoid negative sanction. Couples escaping the usual system of marriage negotiations are likely to be exiled from Pokotland. “But within the solstice ceremonial cycle the rules governing elopement, flight and capture or kidnap are widely recognized and make these options as alternative systems of marriage” (Bates, Conant and Kudat 1974:322).

Conclusion

The institution of marriage has dramatically changed since the Aztec period. During the Aztec period, a relationship began with courtship, followed by negotiations between the families, and finally a marriage ritual. The institution of marriage established a bond between families. The daughter who becomes a wife will take all responsibilities of a mother; she also begins to establish a tie with her in-laws. Aztec marriages gave us an understanding of gender roles, family ties, and parent’s engagement in their sons or daughter’s marriage. The extended family is very much a part of the process of marriage. The major difference between the marriages during the

Aztec period and elopements after the Aztec period is that Aztec unions were formal and ideal. Subsequently, marriages in Mesoamerica bypassed the ideal form; and we find marriage by elopement which was considered an alternative form of marriage.

Spanish influences on marriage were brought when Cortes arrived in Mexico in 1519. Catholic courts during the sixteenth century supported couples in matrimony. Later, during the eighteenth century, the Spanish crown's involvement in marital conflicts was strong and it gave authority to parents. Couples needed parental consent in order to marry. The power of the Catholic Church was waning. It was further eroded by King Charles II's policy which promoted bishops who often sided with parents who were not pleased about their daughters' or sons' future spouse. The gap in social status was the main concern for parents who were wealthy. Later, in the late 19th and 20th centuries, couples would be able to take full control over their marital choice.

Marriage by elopement is known to occur in several parts of the world: various parts of Mexico, Guatemala, Cuba, East Africa, Central Thailand, and Pakistan to name a few. We have seen some commonalities and differences in these regions as far as why this occurs and what motivates couples to elope. It may be to defy parents or to relieve frustrations from marriage negotiations. Although it may be seen in various parts of the world, there has been very little scholarship about elopement. My study of marriage by elopement in central Mexico seeks to fill that gap in knowledge and to better understand the factors that lead young men and women to marry in this manner.

CHAPTER IV

SE LA ROBARON

Se la robaron (she, the novia, has been stolen) is a common term that is heard in Santiago Tlacotepec. Once news spreads that the novia has been robada (stolen), close relatives find out who the boy is and what family he comes from. I provide socio-demographic information on each informant and present their description of elopement drawn from interviews. I analyze these narratives, as well as the ones in the following chapter, in Chapter V. Many girls who elope are ignorant and inexperienced with love and life itself. Some of the girls who elope do it in part because they fear their parents or guardian. In some of the interviews, we will see that some of the couples are afraid that the parents of the novia will not accept their marriage, and thus they elope. Others are afraid that it is because the novio is not financially stable. One of the informants feared her grandmother would not accept her in her home if she arrived late from work after having coffee with her novio, so she went to her novio's house and later decided that she was going to stay there permanently.

Women's Narratives on El Robo

Alejandra is a 22 year old catholic, and she is her parents' only daughter. After high school she enrolled in a technical school to become a secretary. She did not complete her training because she eloped. She began the interview by talking about how she met her husband and the discussion they had leading up to their decision to flee. She describes how they met;

“nos conocimos en un baile el 25 de julio. Me cayo gordo, no lo soportaba, mal, mal, mal” (I met him at a dance on July 25, I could not stand him bad, bad, bad). They began their relationship as friends. Years passed, then on May 15 the young man asked her if she wanted to be his girlfriend. She accepted. Initially, she would only see him once a month. Then they began to go out more frequently, and they were happy. On several occasions, her novio had asked her if she wanted to go to his house. She said no because she knew once this occurred, there was no turning back. Alejandra had told her boyfriend that she wanted to be pedida (wanted him to ask for her hand in marriage). He asked, “Why do you want to be pedida?” Alejandra said that as the only female in her family, she wanted to be pedida. She believed it was the right thing to do since she was the only girl. He said, *“no tengo los recursos para pedirte, porque para pedirte es para casarse luego, luego* (I do not have the resources to ask for your hand because for that we would need to get married as soon as possible). A pedida signifies that a person already has a date set whether it is through civil court or religious ceremony. Unfortunately, the novio did not have the funds to get married immediately.

She described his character and continued to discuss why he did not want to ask for her hand. She said, *“es humilde y decía que yo tenia orto nivel economicamente, que yo era de dinero y alomejor, decía mi papa que no* (he is humble and he would say I had a higher standard of living because I was of money and for this reason my father would not give his permission to marry). She mentioned that if she were to have left after her father’s disapproval, then she would be perceived poorly because that would bring about embarrassment and shame to her father; and that was something she was not capable of doing.

After seven months of discussion, she agreed to flee with him and se la robo (he robbed

her). They arrived at his home around midnight and his parents asked the novia, “Are you sure?” She said, “Yes.” The parents said, “Ok, well you have been here before and know how we live. So if you’re ok with it, then you may stay. She replied, “Yes.” The novio’s parents said they were going to notify the novia’s father. The novio’s, parents and uncles went to girl’s father’s house and told him that his daughter had left with her novio. The informant’s father then told the novio’s family when they would receive them for the contenido (the event in which both families come together and accept the engagement).

Elvia was 12 years old when she met her novio who was 18 years old. They lived in the same area of the town. Elvia was child and was unaware of what was about to happen to her. She said, “He would occasionally follow me around, but I never wanted to get together with him. He continued this for the next two months until I finally agreed to be his novia.” They were together for a year before her novio asked her if she wanted to go with him to his house. She was 13 years old at the time. When she left with her novio she said,

Yo no supe, era ignorante, se me hizo facil decir si, era como un juego, un juego, rápido, fácil y ya (I did not know; I was ignorant; it was easy for me to say yes; it was like a game, a game, fast, easy and that was it). When he asked me to go with him, I said yes. But at that time, I thought I was just going to his house and that was all. Y ya rápido vengo corriendo pero pues ya no” (I would come back running, but no). Once Elvia was at his house, his mother told her that she was going to stay there at the mother’s house. She thought to herself, “Well, how can I tell her no.” “I said no, well, yes I’ll stay.” The mother said, “Well, if you’re going to stay here, then it is for the rest

of your life; it is not a game. The informant says, “*Yo me quise hechar a correr y hecharme para atras* (I wanted to run and back-out). “*No, ya no le pude decir nada, me dió pena, pero yo me queria salir*” (No, I could not tell her anything anymore, I was embarrassed but I wanted to leave).

In this case, the young girl was not conscious of what she was doing. Persuaded by her novio, who was 18 years old at the time, the informant was too young to realize what she was getting herself into. This was a situation that she could not get out of. She described that she was embarrassed to say anything to the novio’s mother. Elvia knew that this was going to be her life from now on when her new mother-in-law said, “*te vas a quedar para toda la vida*” (you’re going to stay for the rest of your life).

Felice is 52 years old and did not complete secondary school. She was 15 years old when she met her novio; they were both in high school at this time. They were together for 3 years before her novio asked her to flee with him. One afternoon when they had agreed to see each other at the plaza, he proposed marriage and asked her to go with him. She did not want to go because she wanted him to ask for her hand in marriage. Her novio said, “No, because they are not going to give you to me. If I were to ask for your hand, your parents are not going to accept.” She thought about his comments and could imagine her parents saying no.

She said, “I was 18 years old at the time, but I was still afraid of my parents; and, well, I said yes! I fled with him.” Her novio brought her to his uncle’s house. She arrived there around five in the afternoon. They both entered the uncle’s house and the novio introduced her to his uncle and his aunt. She said, “*Y me dejó encargada ahí en la casa para que el avisara a sus padres para que luego ellos avisaran a mis papas que ya me había traído* (He left me in the

house so he could inform his parents and they would later go notify my parents and tell them that their son had brought me to his house). Then when the boy's family returned to the house, his parents told me that we were going to be leaving to their house. The parents of the novio told the couple that her parents had accepted and told them that they would wait for them the next day for the *contento*.

Lucia is 36 years old and did not complete secondary school. She was 15 years old when she met her husband who was 23 years old at the time. They met at a store close to where her grandmother lived. He invited her out on a date. They began to get to know one another, so he asked her to be his novia. She accepted and their *noviazgo* (relationship) went on for about four months when she decided to go to her novio's house. Lucia emphasized that she was not fleeing with her novio to be later married.

She recounts that she had been working in Toluca and on her way back to the pueblo when she ran into her novio. He invited her for some coffee and they lost track of time. It was 11 o'clock at night, and she was living with her grandmother at that time. She said, "I knew she (grandmother) would not accept me at that time, so we decided that we were going to go to his house and tell his mother what had happened." The novio's mother would then help them decide what they were going to do. The novio said, "If my mother says that we should bring you back tonight, we will."

They arrived at the novio's house, and he told his mother what had happened. He also told his mother that he did not want to take her (his girlfriend) back to her house. By this time, the couple had come to a consensus that the novia was going to stay. The boy's mother agreed, but said the girl was not going to spend the night with him at her house. The mother believed it

would be appropriate for the novia to sleep alone at the novio's sister's house.

Monica is 21 years old and studied to be a secretary. She was 18 years old and he was 20 years old at the time when they met. Her family was not very fond of the young man she was dating. Her parents had never met the novio in person, but had heard that he did not study, did not have a job, and was a drunk. The couple met through one of her cousins at a *fiesta* (party). Her cousin introduced them, but she did not get along with him and thought he was just another macho man. A few days later, her mother sent her to the store on the other side of the church, so she went. When she got there, she ran into him, and he began to talk to her. She did not want to be rude, so she went along. The next time they saw each other, they were both at a fiesta that the pueblo was having. He approached her once again and this time she responded very well towards him. After several *citas* (dates), he asked her to be his novia and she accepted.

They had been in a relationship for about three years when he asked her to leave with him. She did not want to go because she was the only girl in her family and wanted to be *pedida*. She emphasized that she wanted it to be done the right way so her parents would not be mad at her. They decided on a date for the novio and his family to ask for her hand in marriage.

But plans changed abruptly in September 2010. She had just finished cleaning inside the church where her father was a *fiscal* (worker in charge of the church). The couple had agreed to meet at 9 pm after she had finished her work. She waited at a public phone outside the church but he did not show up. She finally called him and said to him, "*Donde estas?*" *Te estoy esperando*" (Where are you? I'm waiting for you). He said he was at a fiesta and that he would see her in 10 minutes. She waited for him until he finally arrived.

They began to argue. He complained about how she did not show enough commitment

and he doubted her love for him. Her novio said he had enough and that their relationship was “over”. Then he began to walk away. They were only a block away from her house. She reacted and, from one moment to the next, without thinking things through, she went after him and said, “If I say I’ll go with you, what would you say?” His facial expression changed from being upset and angry to excited and happy. At this time, she heard her youngest brother calling her name. She saw him at the corner, so she quickly got out of sight. Then she heard her father whistling for her. She and her novio ran down the street toward the church. Her novio took her to his grandmother’s house. The novio told his family that they had decided they were going to be together. His family was confused because they had said they were going to have a pedimento marriage. The couple explained that their plans had changed.

His mother accepted their decision and told the girl that she is welcome to their family. The mother also emphasized that they were not rich and she knew that her parents were. The novio’s dad had passed away, so two of his older brothers were sent to inform the novia’s parents that she had left with her novio. Once they got back, they told the couple that her parents had said, “They would wait for three days for arrival with the contento.”

The novia’s parents said, “When they knocked on our door and told us our daughter had left with her novio, my husband and I were in complete shock. We heard nothing else of what they were telling us. We could not believe it.” The mother later expressed some feelings she had towards the novio of her daughter. She said

“Dicen que no estudia, no trabaja, que es borracho, no me importa si su familia no tiene dinero. Pero que sea trabajador. Y ahora me están diciendo que la fue a meter en la casa de un hermano. A ver que van hacer cuando tengan niños? Como los van a

mantener? Mira, si mi hija viene y me dice que se arrepiente yo le voy abrir las puertas de mi casa y no me importa lo que diga la gente!” (They say he does not study, does not have a job, that he is a drunk. I don’t care if his family does not have money. But at least be a hard-worker. And now they are telling me that he took her to his brother’s house. And what are they going to do when they have children? How are they going to maintain them? Look, if my daughter comes and tells me that she regrets it, I will open the doors of my house to her and I don’t care what the people say!”)

Norma is 35 years old and only studied until her third year of secondary school. She was 16 years old when she met her novio who was 17 years old. They were together for 2 years before they eloped. She met him through her cousin and they later became novios. One day they met at the plaza just behind the church. She was not given much time to see him. She said, “*me propusó que me fuera a venir con él*, (He proposed that I go live with him) *era una sorpresa, no habíamos planeado nada, era una cosa de la noche a la mañana* (it was a surprise we hadn’t planned anything, it was from one night to the morning). Norma decided to go with her novio. Her novio was very excited and took her to his parent’s house. Once they were there, his parents asked her if she was sure of what she was doing. She said, “Yes.”

Norma did not live with her parents. She had been living with her grandparents since she was a young child. Norma’s father-in-law was a fiscal so he went with one of his sons to notify her grandmother. When her grandparents told her parents, they could not believe the news to be true. Her parents thought that it was too soon for their daughter to marry. Norma’s grandparents did not accept the marriage. They went to the novio’s house along with one of the Norma’s uncles to try to talk to their granddaughter. They wanted to make sure that this was what she

really wanted.

Norma's soon to be mother-in-law came into her house and told the novia that her grandparents wanted to speak to her. She responded and said, "*Ya que tengo que hablar, si ya estoy aquí, no tengo nada que hablar y luego ya no permitimos que hablan con mis abuelos o con mi tío*" (What more is there to say if I'm already here, there is nothing more to say, we did not allow a conversation with my grandparents or uncle).

Norma's father came from El Refugio and said that it was his daughter's decision because she had already left, and they could not do anything anymore. The grandmother insisted and said, "*la voy a sacar de ahí*" (I'm going to take her out of there). The informant's father and brother said, "No, we are not going to take her from there, she can go ahead."

The situation of the informant started out as trying to avoid the problem that she would have with her grandparents because she feared them. Arriving late to her grandmother's house would have created difficulties for them. So in order to avoid problems and to try to find a solution, the couple decided to seek the advice of the mother of the novio. However, while they waited for the mother's arrival, the couple decided that they wanted to be together.

Pilar is 36 years old and completed secondary school. She met her husband in school at the age of 15 when he was 19 years old. He was studying at a technical school. After a year of their noviasgo, he asked her if she wanted to flee with him. She said, "*sin pensar se te hace bien fácil*" (without thinking, it becomes really easy). She accepted, and once she was at his house she thought to herself "What did I just do?" She went on further and explained that she could not go back and undo what had just happened. She said, "Because you're worried about what others are going to think. Men are going to talk about you, that *ya la sacaron*" (they

already took her)[referring to the fact that she has already slept with the man and would be seen as a loose woman if she left].

The novio took her to the house of one of his brothers. Then, they went to his parent's house. His father asked her if his son had taken her *a la fuerza* (by force) because this was no game. The following day, they went to notify the novia's parents. When the novio's family went to talk to her parents, they were reluctant in accepting it or him for that matter.

Rafelita is 42 years old and finished primary school. Within the last two years she recently returned to school and completed secondary school. She was 14 years old when she met her novio, who was 17 years old at that time. Teenagers usually spend their leisure at the plaza. This is where they met during a basketball game. An aunt of hers introduced them and from then on they had a relationship. The couple broke up a short time later. The novio sent one of his friends to go look for the informant. By this time, she was involved with another boy.

The messenger told her to wait for her ex-boyfriend at the park; he was working as a *velador de mercado* (market security). Once he got out of work, they met at the park and talked and agreed to get back together. They then went to a house with a group of friends. They entered a room and the novio did not let the informant get out. She said, "*pues el me preguntó si me quería quedar con él y yo le dije que si, pero yo era ignorante, era chica entonces, era como decision de él*" (well he asked me if I wanted to stay with him but I was ignorant, I was young so it was like his decision). She said, "*pasó lo que tuvo que pasar*" (what needed to happened, happened)."

Afraid of what her parents might say, she thought "How am I going to go to my house; they are not going to receive me." So they agreed that he would take his novia to his aunt's

house. While they were there, a female friend of his went to look for the novio and told the novia that her mother was sick and to return to her home. She said, “We both left and he left me on a corner a couple of blocks from my house. I stayed there crying when my *madrina* (godmother) saw me and asked me what happened?” I said to my godmother, “I had left with my novio but that he had left me there not telling me anything.”

The godmother took her to her parent’s house and she explained what had happened. Her whole family went to the novio’s house. He wasn’t there, but his parents were. My parents told them

How are we going to leave things? His mother said, “I will give you 100 *mil pesos* (\$10,000 dollars) so she [the novia] can leave my son.” My dad and my uncles said, “No, she is not merchandise for you to be buying her with your money. We are going to take our daughter home, but it wasn’t going to stay like this. I’ll take my daughter, but be prepared to face the consequences because my daughter is not merchandise, so this isn’t going to stay like this.” My mother said, “This is not going to stay like this. I’m going to report this to the authorities because she is under age.” The father of the novio said, “Well, we do not need to get into so many problems, she can stay; my son has to respond to her” (the novio had to get married with the Rafealita).

So Rafealita stayed with his family until he returned. She explained that she could not go back home. She said, “*No sé; era niña y no decidí. Nomás era una esquinclá.*” (I don’t know; I was a child and I did not decide, I was just a brat).

Rafelita was young and naïve; this can be seen when she tried to leave. Ultimately, she

believed her fate was the novio's decision. She had been deceived by the novio's friend, who told her that her mother was sick when she was not. Once her parents received the news of what had happened, they demanded that the novio's family make the situation right. The parents believed that if they allowed her to stay it would justify what had happened and he would then marry the novia. This would stop the gossip around town.

Luz is age 55 and studied until her fourth year of primary school. She was 18 years old when she met her novio who was 26 years old. During that time she worked at home; her parents owned a store that sold refreshments, beer, chips, cookies, candy, cheese, and chilies. The novio lived about three houses away. He would occasionally have a few beers with his cousins and friends at my parent's store. They began to get to know one another and eventually established a relationship. She had been with him for three months when she decided to flee with him. She explains

I was at my parent's store and he was outside. I told my sister who was with me at the time that I was going to go to another store that was a few blocks away. Once I was there he went to look for me and we were there for about an hour or more talking. He told me he was going to the United States and asked if I wanted to get married to him. I had spent some time with him and lost track of time; I was scared to go to my house because I had taken so long. I said, yes, I will go with you. He took me to his brother's house but he told me to wait outside until he notified his family that he had brought me. Once I went in his mother greeted me and asked said if I was willing to get married to her son because he wasn't wealthy. The following day his family went to notify the novia's parents. They

told them “Do not look for your daughter, she is already with her novio.” A few hours after his family went to notify her family the novia says: I went in the morning to get my clothes. My mother told me, I was still young and if I was willing to get married, be responsible because when one leaves they cannot return. My father asked me if I knew him well because he drank profusely and was violent. I said, yes. In the evening we got married, and everyone was present: uncles, aunts, sisters, and brothers. There was no contento because it happened so fast.

Besides being in love with her novio, she was also terrified of her father. She was afraid that he would beat her for getting home late. This was one of the reasons that probably pushed the informant into deciding to flee with her novio. Even though she was warned by her parents, the informant insisted on getting married with her novio. She did not take into account the kind of marriage she would later have with her husband. She mentioned in her interview that she lived a life of misery.

Reflecting Back With Regret

Carina age 21 studied to be a secretary. She believes that unlike her some of the younger girls elope because, “ *es la educacion porque unas no tienen educacion y no han madurado porque si vamos a la ciudad no vamos hallar gente de la edad de 14 anos o 16 anos que esten casados* (or sometimes it is the lack of education that some people don’t have and haven’t matured because if we were to go to the city we are not going to find people at the age of 14 or 16 years old that are married).” Carina also mentions that in the pueblo you find young girls at that age with a child and sometimes without a husband because the father did not take the

responsibility.

Lucia age 36, did not complete secondary school. She describes her life after she fled with her novio as a life of regret. She said, “I regret leaving with my husband because I did not know what I was doing and I was not able to *disfrutar la juventud* (enjoy my adolescent years). She mentions that she now talks with her daughters and gives them advice about her mistakes in fleeing with her novio at an early age. She tells them “ *yo le digo casate a una edad apropiada y disfruta tu juventud. Yo me arrepiento porque ya no salgo, es como estar esclavisada* (I tell them get married at an appropriate age and enjoy your adolescent years. I regret it because I don’t go out anymore it’s like being a slave).” “*No me deja ir a la casa de mi mamá* (he doesn’t even allow me to go to my mother’s house).

Elvia age 52, studied only until secondary school. She mentioned that she should have gotten to know her father-in-law before she decided she was going to flee with her novio. She says, “*Porque si yo conociera mi suegro como era, bien agresivo, entonces pues no me hubiera casado! Todo el sufrimiento pues no les podia decir a mis papas porque me dijeron que no les fuera a contar nada, y pues ya estaba aquí* (because if I had known him, how he was, very aggressive, then I wouldn’t have gotten married! All that I suffered, well I could not tell my parents because they told me not to go and tell them anything, and well I was already here).

Norma age 35, completed her third year in secondary school. She expressed what she was feeling and thinking at the time when she decided that she was going to flee with her novio.

She says

Well, in the moment you think that it is going to be the same as when you were in a relationship; that everything is going to be great in the color rose. It is only

when you get along with your husband that life gets less complicated, but then come your children. You think a certain way when you're young from now when you're much older because I ask myself now... I did not receive an education, why did I not prepare myself so I would have offered a better life to my kids. But like I said you think differently when you are young. I try to emphasize this on my oldest daughter to prepare herself and get an education.

Pilar age 36, and completed secondary school. She describes how her parents “gave their backs” to her when she was in need of them. Her decision to elope with her novio caused a conflict with her parents. She says, “*Y ya no me hablaron mis padres era como mas de cinco años, y luego yo fui a su casa de mis padres y pense que me iban a decir, pues que se las arregle, nosotros le dijimos. Pero yo iba a su casa con temor pensaba que me iban a decir algo; ya vete que vienes a hacer aqui. Ya despues, ya no me hablaron. Tú guardas un rencor cuando mas los necesitas te dan la espalda. Es una decision que haces, y ya la tomaste y pues ahora ya adelante y a ver que pasa hay que apoyarte mas que nada en uno que estes chica. Me dieron la espalda y el rencor, como que ya no sientes el mismo cariño* (My parents did not speak to me for more than five years and then I went to their house and I thought they were going to tell me, figure it out we told you. But I would go to their house with terror. I thought they were going to tell me something, like, leave, what do you come here for? Then later they did not speak to me. You hold a grudge, when you need them the most they give you their back. It is a decision that you make and is made and go ahead now and see what happens. You have to support yourself more than anything even if you're young. They gave me their backs and the grudge; it's like you don't feel the same affection).

She goes on and says

Yo me decía que hice? Todavía era muy chica, hubiera estudiado una carrera (I would tell myself what did I do, I was so young, I should have studied a career). El también todavía no maduraba, no se sentía responsable, se salía con sus amigos a tomar, no disfruto sus adolescencia (He was not mature; he did not feel responsible he would leave with his friends to drink. He did not enjoy his adolescent years). Y luego lo esperas y piensas; donde estara y como te puedes quejar a tus papas, porque ellos te lo advirtieron y tu que si,si,si quisiste estar con el (and then you wait and think where could he be and how can you complain to your parents because they warned you and you insisted that yes, yes, yes you wanted to be with him). Y no iba ir a quejarme porque ellos que me iban a decir, ahora vete, tu quisiste eso ahora te aguantas (And I wasn't going to go complain to my parents because they would tell me well now, leave; you wanted this, now you have to handle it)."

Pilar discusses a few other reasons why others might elope. She says

Well, I think it could be a lack of communication. I would sit down with my daughter and tell her don't get married too young; don't go through what I did. Enjoy your adolescent years. I'm not saying you're not going to get married. But at least think about getting an education at a technical school don't go through what I did because then you are going to regret it. Sometimes when you do have communication I think that maybe it is your luck or destiny of each and everyone because if your mother tells you not to do it and yet you still do it, it isn't because

lack of advice. Or sometimes one does it just to see what will happen with time and you begin to feel regret.

Luz discusses why she eloped. She says

I think that it was because we could never go out and enjoy our youth. We could not go to a dance; we didn't have liberty. I had a good father, but he did not give us any sort of liberty. On one occasion there was a dance in the pueblo and my dad took us to the fiesta and we saw our cousins there. They wanted us to go see the dance so we went with them to see how it got. My father did not know we were going to the dance. We didn't even dance, then we left and we saw my dad, he was coming towards us. He just gave us a look and we knew we were in trouble. We left and once we got home he whipped us with his belt. He said, never to do that to him. I thought to myself if we would have told him, he would have said no regardless.

Luz discusses the regret she felt after she eloped. She says

Later after I lived the life that I had lived I thought maybe I should have left home when I had the chance. I should have left when I was waiting outside my novio's brother's house, but I didn't because my father would have beat me once I got home. I thought maybe it would have been different, lived differently. I wanted to go out a bit more but it did not happen; I pictured my life a different way. I thought it was going to be different, but it was worse. I didn't think things thoroughly, not even that day. *Al momento dije que si y las consecuencias? Me arrepento por una parte de como me ha tradado si, pero por otra no porque tengo*

mis hijos y eso es mi gran orgullo que tengo unos hijos buenos (At the moment I said yes and the consequences? Asking herself.. I regret this in a way because of how he has treated me yes, but in another no because I have my kids and they are my pride and joy because I have good kids.)

Conclusion

This chapter described the courtship of the couples. Many of the girls fear their parents or guardian. A few of them were terrified of arriving late to their house after being with their novio for a few hours. This, in turn, triggered them to flee with their novio. Others are too young and ignorant of what they are doing. The majority of the girls have not matured mentally and are under the supervision of their parents. The parents are usually the ones who make decisions for their children. Hence, when it comes to making a decision, it is made by impulse. The young women have yet to foresee the consequence of the decision that was taken lightly. Other couples feared the rejection of the novia's parents because the novio might not have the characteristics the parents want for their daughter. Hence, the couples decide that the only way they can marry is by elopement. After having a serious conversation with the novia, they both decide that they should flee, which forces the novia's parents to accept. Even if the young woman would want to retreat from their engagement, it would be almost impossible. Besides facing fear from their parents, they will have to face the shame from the community.

Women also discussed how they viewed their marriages. Some of the informants regret fleeing with their novio. These informants talked about where their life could have gone if they had continued their education. They also would have waited in order to be mentally prepared.

They regret that they did not have a youth because of a decision that was made on impulse. They believed it would be different from how they lived at their parents' home; however, that was not the case.

CHAPTER V

EL CONTENTO: THE COMING TOGETHER OF TWO FAMILIES

In this chapter I will describe what happens during a contenido. The contenido is the event that occurs after the novio and the novia have fled. Once the novia's family has been notified, her family will tell the novio's family to return in approximately three days to receive them and their daughter for the contenido. The families of both the novia and the novio come together, usually during the late afternoon, to have the contenido, which in most cases is the acceptance of the engagement. There have been rare occasions when the parents reject the couple's engagement. Another aspect of the contenido is el perdón, which is when the novio's family in the name of their son asks forgiveness from the novia's family for the decision that the couple made. The families discuss matters of the nuptial. The contenido usually involves about one to two hours of conversation. It establishes a relationship between the two families. This is important for lessening potential conflict and bringing together the families who are now bound by the marriage.

The descriptions from my informants give a better understanding of the setting of the contenido and the type of discussions that the two families have. In regard to the families of the novio and the novia, one can see the unity of a family that comes together and their influence

over their children.

Women's Narratives on the Contento

Monica is a female, age 21, who studied a short-term career as a secretary. With her permission, I was able to witness a contento. Her invitation to observe allowed me to have a better understanding of the initial steps a couple takes after the elopement.

It was 8:30 pm on a cold night in Santiago Tlacotepec. Monica and her fiancé wait outside of her parent's home while the rest of his family arrives. Once everyone is there, they knock and enter the house. Both sides of the families are there including uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, godparents, brothers, sisters and, most importantly, both sets of parents. As soon as the couple enters with the novio's side of the family, Monica walks across the room towards her parents and *los saluda* (greet them) with a kiss on the cheek and goes around and greets her family. Both families greet each other with a *buenas noches* (good night), then the novio's parents are the first to speak. The mother says, "*Pues ahora como se acostumbra un perdón, su papá de mi hijo falleció y ahora les presenta mi hijo el mayor* (well now how we are accustomed to ask forgiveness, his father passed away a while back so my oldest son is here to speak).

The oldest son then says

Ok, well I want to apologize a thousand times, we didn't know this was going to happen because we were told that our family was going to come ask for her hand in marriage. But now we can see that that isn't the case and that they decided for it to be like this. We came here with all the humbleness of the world and to ask forgiveness for the situation and want to end this difficulty and begin something new. Something new is going to be starting and we appreciate the attention that

you all have given us up until this point with opening the doors, so thank you.

I have been representing my brother ever since our father passed away: I have given my brother support and hope that the doors of your house are open to him.

We have also treated his novia like a new member of our family with a great deal of respect and open the doors to our home to her.

Then her father speaks and says, in a gushing tone of voice, “This will always be your house and the doors of this house will always be open, *hija*, (daughter), and thank you for bringing her so we can support her during this time. Also you all are always going to be well received in this house. I also ask that you all treat my daughter well”.

Her mother speaks, “I want the best for my daughter. I want him to give her respect and to value her because she is our treasure. Also, to support her and I do not want him to mistreat her. My daughter also realizes the compromise that we have here in the chapel and has to obtain that compromise” (She is referring to obligation that the family has at a chapel. The father is a fiscal who takes care of the events that the chapel has).

His older brother says “We want the best for our children, and I ask my brother to do things to the best of his ability and I think it would be best to give them good advice and I understand your *pena*. *Dios dijo te presto un hijo, por cuanto tiempo? No lo se? Su hija ya se la prestaron ahora ella tambien tiene que buscar su camino*” (God told us I’ll lend you a son, for how long? I don’t know).

He continues on and explains

Please don’t be sad, on the contrary, be happy for them and ask God to guide them in their life together. Also, you mentioned bad treatment.

Our family is not that type of people, so as far as my brother, he is a good guy. He we will be aware of the issues that they face. But like I mentioned before, the marriage is between both of them and well hopefully, they can resolve their issues/problems. So please don't feel sadden by this. You all have gained a son; (he is referring to some of her family members who are crying during this time among them are the parents of the novia and the grandmother).

The novia's father speaks, "Well, hopefully this continues because I mean it is like when you receive a new toy of course, you treat it with happiness and *gusto* (joy), so we want the best for her con gusto (with joy) and of course there is going to be problems and we are going to be there for our daughter to *respaldar nuestra hija* (support our daughter). I will never close the doors to this house to her."

Next, the older brother introduces his side of the family: grandma, *madrina de confirmacion* (godmother of confirmation), *tia*, *tios*, brothers, and cousins. The father of the novia speaks and says, "Well, it is important that the principal family is here because I do not think it is necessary for other people to be here to be truthful." Then, he starts introducing his side of the family: "my grandma who is like my mother practically because she is the one that raised me and then my mother, my sons, in-laws, nieces." This is done so the families can introduce each other, so they will not be estranged.

His mother and older brother then asked permission so they can light a *cera* (candle) (Figure 5) this represents a new beginning and marriage. They light the *cera* in front of a religious image, in this case, in front of the Virgin de Guadalupe. They do this because they want the sacred image to protect and guide them. Then the couple kneels in front of the Virgin and the

candle (Figure 5.1). The practice of kneeling is symbolic because they are asking *perdon* (forgiveness) from both sides of the families because they took initiative and eloped as opposed to asking for the novia's hand in marriage and acting the proper way.



Figure 5 Cera (candle)



Figure 5.1 Candle lit and Virgin De Guadalupe (Virgin Mary image)

Then everyone, beginning with her parents, walk towards the couple and gave them advice for their marriage. For example, the mother speaks to her daughter directly as both are kneeling side by side. She says, “I have nothing to forgive you for because this is *la ley de la vida* (this is the law of life [emphasizing that this would inevitably happen]). The daughter is weeping during this time; and the mother gives her the *bendición* (blessing), a hug and a kiss. The mother speaks to the boy “You take care of her and treat her right because you have taken our treasure from us.” Her father speaks, “These doors will always be open for you (in a sad tone



Figure 5.2 Couple kneeling asking forgiveness

of voice) and gives her the bendición and kisses her on the cheek. The father then tells her novio, “*Ahi te la encargo por favor y si algun día te ofende ella me dices y yo hablo con ella*” (Please look after her, and if there comes a day that she offends you tell me and I will talk with her). He then gives him the blessing and a hug.

The grandmother from the mother’s side is hesitant about giving them the blessing and a *consejo* (advice). She did not want to accept the couple’s union and does not want to walk towards the couple and give them the bendición even after the novia’s father asked his mother-in-law to do so. Finally, she stands up and walks over to them and gives them the bendición without giving them any advice. The novia’s grandmother says to her, “*Esto no es nadamas de un dia hija, ni para dos, hasta diosito nos quite la vida, y tu tambien me la tratas bien y que sean felices*” (this is not for one day, nor for two until God takes our lives and you too [referring to the novio treating her good and to be happy]).

The novia's uncle says, "*Y eso de el perdón pues todos cometemos errores y que sean felices*" (And that of forgiveness, well, all of us commit errors and hope that you all are happy). The older of her brothers gushes out in tears and tells her fiancé to take care of her. The younger of the brothers goes and gives them a hug. After the entire family from her side finishes participating, then his family also does the same.

Toward the end of the *contento*, the novio's brother says, "*Antetodo gracias por aceptar mi hermano. Dios dice te presto un hijo, amalo, quierelo, hasta el ultimo dia de tu vida, creeme que dios los va acompañar para siempre, y gracias a todos los que les dan el apoyo a los jovenes*" (Before anything, thank you for accepting my brother. God says I'll lend you a son, love him, like him, until the last day of your life. Believe me that God will company them forever and thank you all for giving the couple support).

The family of the novio then offers the chiquihuite. Figures 5.3 and 5.4, a large basket filled with a variety of fruits, to the family of the novia. This is a gift in order to repair or compensate for the damage the novio has caused. Once the parents of the novia have accepted the gift and the union of the couple has been accepted, the families settle on a date for the couple's civil and religious ceremonies.

Alejandra is a female, age 22; and she explained that on the day of the *contento*, the novio's family brought a *cera*. She mentioned that the *cera* represents, "*la pureza que haya en tu matrimonio, también compran un chiquihuite, traian bebida, y les avisan a los familiares mas sercanos: tus tías, tíos, padrinos de bautismo*" (the purity that the marriage has. They also buy a chiquihuite, bring alcoholic beverages and they notify close relatives: aunts, uncles, godparents of baptism). Once the novia, novio and his family arrived at her parent's house, they knocked



Figure 5.3 Chiquihuite (large basket)
Contains a variety of fruit



Figure 5.4 Chiquihuite and refreshment for
Contento

and entered the house. Her side of the family started crying, she said that they were saying, “*La novia ya se la llevaron*” (They have taken the girlfriend). She also said that, “*Lloran de dolor* (they cry because it is painful). The informant is referring to the idea of seeing a child be taken, because for her family it is like she has been stripped away from them. It was unexpected and causes pain.

Alejandra mentioned that some people kneel, but in her case they sat the couple down on chairs because one of the novio’s uncles said “*Ya sabian que es lo que estaban haciendo y que porque los van a encar*” (They knew what they were doing, so why should they kneel. We sat in the middle of everyone). Alejandra described what her father-in-law expressed to her side of the family. He said “*Disculpen a mi hijo que porque ya se la habian llevado a su hija* (Forgive my son because he had taken their daughter) and the novio’s parents asked the novia if she had agreed. “*Y que humildement les trajeron el perdon y contento*” (And with humbleness they brought their forgiveness and contento). Her father then asked her if she was sure and she said yes.

During the entire *contento* the *novia* never really spoke nor was she involved in a deep conversation with either family. On the other hand, the *novio* did ask her father for *perdón*, and he expressed that he was going to try his best to make her happy and give her what was necessary. Later, as the *contento* continued, both families gave the couple advice; the informant expressed some advice that was given to her, “*Que no es un juego que es para toda la vida, que te portes bien, que lo atendias con su comida, su ropa, que le llames a tus suegros*” (This is not a game, this is for life, to behave, attend him, feed him, his clothes, and to get along with your in-laws).

Her father said he was going to receive the *novio* like a son and not like a son-in-law and that he did not lose a daughter, but on the contrary had gained a son. Then both families gave them a hug, and they began discussing matters of marriage toward the end of the *contento*. The *novio*'s side of the family decided when the couple would get married through civil law and then the religious ceremony. His parents agreed upon the date to marry the couple through the civil court and said that they would give her family an answer later as to when they would get married through church.

Carina, age 21, discussed the steps leading up to the *contento*. She mentioned that on some occasions the “*Fiscales los encargados van a avisar a tus papás. En nuestra ocasion sus padres de él fueron a avisar a mis papás y ya ellos hablan de cuando van a ir a recibirlos*” (the *fiscales* are the men who are in charge of the church. In our case his parents went to report to my parents and in turn my parents told his family when they would receive us). In their situation, both informants would be expected at the house of the *novia* within the next two days. Carina explained the meaning of the *chiquihuite*. She went on to say that the size of the *chiquihuite*

represents the male. For example, if it is a small chiquihuite, then it is insinuated that the novio is “*medio-flojo, y para mostrar que el joven es honesto, trabajador entonces compran buenas bebidas, hay buenas frutas y el chiquihuite es mas grande*” (the novio is characterized as being lazy if the chiquihuite is small; however, in order to demonstrate that he is an honest, hard worker the novio’s family needed to buy good liquor, fruit and the chiquihuite would be larger).

Both the novia and novio then knelt in front of both families during the contenido and remained there until their family gave them their blessing. Carina mentioned the prolonged period the event lasted, which was two and a half hours. Carina also mentioned the type of discussion that occurred during this time. She said, “*Hablamos de los tramites de cuando se van a casar y para que se conozcan las familias*” (They discussed the steps of when they were going to get married and so the families could become acquainted).

She said, “*Y pues la familia del novio pide perdon a los ofendidos en este caso la familia de la novia, se disculpan por que no tomaron el camino correcto e ir a pedir la mano de la novia*” (The family of the novio asks for forgiveness to her family because their son did not take the correct route and ask for her hand in marriage). She mentioned that if the offended one becomes the novio and resides in the house of his in-law, then that is poorly seen. People begin to say that, “*Lo llevan de nuera y los papels cambian porque eso es muy mal visto aquí*” (They have him like a daughter-in-law and the circumstances change which is frowned upon).

Elvia is a female, age 25. In her case, she described that the novio’s parents went to notify Elvia’s parents the day after the elopement. They told her parents not to look for her anymore, saying that she had eloped and that their son had taken her. The novio’s family also expressed that she was well taken care of at their house. The novia’s parents then said that the

contento was going to take place that very same day in the afternoon. Once the couple arrived at her parent's house, his family took a chiquihuite and they began talking and giving the couple a bendición. Elvia mentioned that during the ceremony, they knelt down, surrounded by both families. The novia also mentioned the reason for kneeling during the contento, "*La razon de incarnos en frente de nuestras families es para pedir perdon, nos ponen una Virgencita y una cera*" (The reason we kneel in front of our family is to ask forgiveness, they place the Virgin Mary and a white candle in front of us).

Elvia discusses the significance of the white candle. She explained

Por que segun cuando eres señorita tienes que tener tu cera blanca (supposedly when you're a lady, you have to have a white candle). During the contento the novia's parents asked her, "Why did you leave? Were you not in good hands? The novia responded, "I saw it as a game." Her parents then said, "Well, you should of thought about that before because this is not a game; this is forever, but now there is nothing you can do. She went on and explained that you cannot back out because people here see it as *una ofensa, la gente piensa muchas cosas por decir ya te robarron, ya te fuiste y te regresas, que no nomas se fue a acostar, es una mujer de la calle, si te vas y te vienes. Por eso no se pueden hechar para a tras* (It is viewed as an offense, the people think a lot of things, if they were to rob you and you left and later returned. That you only went to go sleep with him and you are now a woman of the streets if you go and come).

Felice a female, age 52 discussed her contento after se la robaron. She explained that the next day was the contento and both families were going to present themselves. The father-in-law

of the Felice said he wanted the novia's parents and family to meet his son and wanted to get to know more about her family. The establishment of this inter-relationship would help both families in agreeing when would be an appropriate date for the couple's civil marriage. She explained that the contenido, "*Era un presentación de novios incluyendo los abuelos, los invitaron por que a la major conoce el novio o haber si es soltero de verdad o si fue casado, como desconfiaban yo asi lo note*" (It was a presentation of the couple including the grandparents. They invited the grandparents to see if perhaps the novio was single or if he was married; it seemed to me that they did not have any trust. Felice also mentioned that her grandparents were present as a support system. The parents would feel at ease if they were at the contenido).

Felice's father said "I will believe what you all tell me, my daughter will be married and I don't want you to leave her later and leave her in disappointment. "*Y que mi hija salga desfraudada, si no dejenmela y yo me la llevo*" (I do not want my daughter to be disillusioned, if so, then leave her and I will take her). The couple then proclaimed their love for one another and both parents accepted. As the contenido proceeded, the couple had to ask for perdón to both families. Once the parents accept the family members, they advised the couple how they can have a good marriage.

The novia's mother began to sob because she was the eldest in the family and her mother felt heartbroken by the decision she had taken. Her mother could not speak during the conversation; however, the grandmother of the novia was involved in the discussion that the families were having. The novia's grandmother said to her "Well, if you have decided already, then by all means go ahead, but I do ask from you *hija que no dejes mal a tu papá, tu tienes que llamar a tu suegra que va ser, que se tome un café aun te acomidete como un sirvienta*" (child,

do not to make your father look bad, you have to call your in-laws, to have a cup of coffee, accustom yourself as a servant).

The novia went into further detail about what her grandmother meant by not embarrassing her father. She said, "*Que yo fuera resongona, huevona, cochina eso es lo que estaba hablando que vengan tus suegros y que digan que soy floja que no te acomides a nada* (That I back talked, lazy, filthy that is what she meant and she did not want my, in-laws to say that I was lazy and irresponsible). "*Como que no tuve buen hábito, que yo deje mal a mis padres con la familia de mi esposo eso es lo que mi abuelita me decia, no tienes que ser asi, porque nosotros no te obligamos tu lo decidiste y como lo decidiste ahora te aguantas, a tu papá no le vayas a contar cosas porque quien lo decidió fuiste tu*" (It was as if I did not have good habits and made my parents look bad with my novio's family. My grandmother said, you shouldn't be like that because we did not teach you, you decided and now you have to support it. I do not want you to speak to your father about anything regarding your marriage because you decided this).

Elvia said, *Y pues como está uno enamorado pues a todo dice que si* (and when one is in love well they will say yes to everything). The grandmother of the informant gave advice to her granddaughter and said "*Que dios te acompañe y ahora cuando quieras venir tienes que pedir permiso si te dan permiso vienes, si no te tienes que aguantar ni modo. Y como yo fui la primera que case pues mi mamá nadamas estuvo llorando de tristeza*" (And so one is in love and says yes to everything. My grandmother also said God be with you and now when you want to visit your family you have to ask for permission. If he does then you come, if not then oh, well, too bad).

Pilar is a female, age 36; and she describes her *contento* as a complex event between two families. The *novia's* family had accepted the union of the couple. The *novio's* family went to advise her family to no longer look for their daughter because she was already with her *novio*. The day of the *contento*, the couple presented themselves at the *novia's* house with all his family. They entered the house and her father immediately put her in a room and locked the door; they did not let her out. Her parents forced everyone out of their house and told the *novio's* family that she did not want to get married. Later Pilar had overheard her parents discuss what they were going to do with her. Her parents were planning to send her to another town. But eight days after the *contento*, the Pilar fled once again with her *novio*.

She described that she had gone to school after convincing her father to allow her to attend. Her father did not trust her, so he would walk her to school. Once school was out he would wait for her, but one day she had taken a different route so she could escape to her *novio's* house. Her mother then went to take her daughter out of his house with a *licenciada* (attorney) because they made the argument that she was under age, being 16 years old at the time, and he was over the age of 18 . Then her parents told her to say that she was taken a *la fuerza* and she responded, yes. The attorney wanted to talk to the informant; he asked her if her *novio* had taken her a *la fuerza* and she replied, no. She further went on to say, "I want to be with him." After speaking with the attorney, the informant said she was able to go with her *novio*. My parents then told me "*Ni sabes lo que haces tienes 15 años y no sabes lo que quieres*" (You don't know what you are doing, you're 15 years old and you don't know what you want).

Thalia is a female, age 25. She mentioned the event of the *contento* was during the late afternoon. They walked into her parent's house. She expressed that they invited the whole

family, “From our grandparents to uncles, aunts, cousins, and even the dog. *Ellos traen una cera blanca que representa luz a la nueva pareja*” (They bring a white candle that represents the light of the new couple). The father of the novio begins to talk and says, “*Disculpe la falta que mi hijo ha cometido*” (Forgive the fault that my son has committed). The novia’s father then begins to speak about accepting this marriage and receiving him and his family to theirs. The white candle is then lit. Thalia’s uncle then tells the couple to kneel. However, Thalia’s father told her to get up, and that she did not have to kneel because he had nothing to forgive her for. The parents then gave them their blessing and a few words of advice toward what will be of their marriage. The chiquihuite is given towards the end of the contenido. Thalia described that it is a symbol of the union. The chiquihuite consists of: fruit, bread, bottles of wine, and refreshments. “*Esto es un simbolo para que se contenten*” (This is a symbol, so they can be content [referring to her family]).

They also discuss the date for the wedding. “Usually it is the novio’s parents that decide the date of the wedding depending on their economic status,” she explained. In Thalia’s case, her father wanted her to marry as soon as possible, so they also agreed to help. “You have many padrinos to help out with the wedding expenses; for example, arrangement of the church, cake, and rings.

Conclusion

The interviews from the informants describe what the contenido is like. It is clear that it is crucial for the two families to establish a relationship. The parents of the novia emphasize to the parents of the novio that she should be treated with respect. The chiquihuite serves as a gift that is offered to the novia’s family. Acceptance of the chiquihuite by the novia’s family signifies that

they are on good terms and have accepted the union of the couple. The white candle and the sacred image represent a variety of things. Some suggest the candle signifies a new beginning and the sacred image represents God blessing the couple. The significance of having the couples kneel in the center surrounded by both families is to ask forgiveness to the novia's family. The couple decided to take a different approach than taking the ideal marriage system of pedimento, and they wish to have a marriage that both families will accept.

Some of my informants were scared of how their fathers were going to react to the situation, knowing that their daughter left with her novio. So the fiscales are seen as the mediators of the couple. The fiscales make an attempt in settling the mood of the situation; they get called on because the novia has warned the novio's family that her father is a man of little or no tolerance. The parents of both the novio and the novia are the central key to the dialogue that takes place during the contenido. Having the support of the family is essential to the process of the contenido.

CHAPTER VI

MARRIAGE AFTER THE ELOPEMENT

In this chapter, I will discuss machismo, which was a part of some of the women's lives during their marriage. "Machismo refers to a cult of virility characterized by exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male relationships, arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationship. Excessive drinking, violent behavior, and other types of risk taking are also intrinsic qualities of the machista" (Stevens cited in Browner and Lewin 1982:90). The woman on the other hand, has spiritual strength that is infinite and her sacrifice is immense. "No self-denial is too great for the Latin American woman; no limit can be divined to her vast store of patience with the man of her world" (Stevens cited in Browner and Lewin 1982:94). A good woman lives not for herself but for her children and husband (Browner 1982:620).

Honor, virginity, and public awareness were issues that affected the women of Santiago Tlacotepec. Female honor is tied to virginity in the case of a girl and to chasteness in the case of a wife. When a man spoiled a woman's honor by deflowering her, the act damaged the honor of her father and her entire family, especially if it became public knowledge (Sloan 2008:34). In the next section these topics will be brought to light through information about the women's husbands and the chatter of the community.

Women's Narratives on Machismo

Norma age 35, completed her third year in secondary school. She describes the attributes of machismo she sees in her husband. She said, "*Aqui en el pueblo se dice, la casa eres tu, y el hombre tiene mas libertades*" (In this town you're the house and the man has more liberty).

She continues explaining:

The way I see it, the men don't care about their marriage, they care about the outside. You on the other hand, well, you stay at home, take care of your children and you figure it out! If you leave him, who is going to give him his food or you also have to ask him for permission if you are going somewhere. The man is always first and then the woman. I feel marriage is of two and don't think it is right! For example, men have their whole family with them, parents and grandparents; however, women have left their family to be with the man. The man feels protected by his parents. After we got married, we went to his parents' house and we were living in their living room until we built two rooms for our family on his parents' property.

Rafealita age 42 recently completed secondary school. She expresses that throughout her whole life, she suffered with her husband. She says, "I stayed with him, but every night he would go out. He was with one girl and if it was not her, it was with another; I would see him out on the street. Rafealita describes her husband's character as a chauvinist. She gives further details about her situation:

He was a machista; he would not allow me to go out of the house. He would physically abuse me out on the street in front of my aunt's house. When my

uncles found out, they told him to be careful because I was not alone. He would hit me sometimes because I would return home late after I had visited my family or because he would come home drinking *y se alocaba* (would get crazy), but now it has changed. I had told him he had to change or I was going to leave and when my daughter got sick he changed drastically.

Pilar age 36, has a secondary education. She describes the machismo in her marriage and the physical abuse she had to endure because she was afraid of what others would say if she left her husband. My informant tells me what she went through in her marriage:

He never let me work because he was a very jealous man, and he used to drink a lot. It got to an extreme case where it became physical and I did not want to leave because I was worried about what they (people) would say; I had to endure it. His parents would intrude and protect me during the beginning years of our marriage. I would say, "I'm going to go buy food," he would say, "well, I'll, go with you."

Pilar said that her husband would often go out and she would be left alone at home with her children, she further mentions:

Pues creo que es el machismo, el es el hombre y la mujer debe estar en la casa (Well, I think it is the chauvinism, he is the man and the woman has to stay at home). He would work and waste all the money; he would not give us any including my children. Then, my children would get sick and I did not have any money to buy them medication. He would come drunk and I would argue with him because he would try to hit my kids. It took me a lot to change him. He would tell me that his father never did anything around the house, and that he was a

man!

Pilar believes that many of the men from this town feel that it is okay for them to go out at night, while leaving their wife and children at home. Many of these men got married at a young age and still feel the need to go out and enjoy themselves because they are still in their adolescent to early adulthood years.

Irene age 48 completed secondary school and describes the chauvinism that her husband possessed during her marriage. She shares detailed information:

In the beginning of our marriage he would not allow me to work because he was a machista, and he wanted to be the provider. He was a jealous husband and would not let me attend school. I can remember that I had left for school one day and he went to go get me out of class in front of everyone; I was so embarrassed. He said to me, “*Y orale*” (hurry up). I never returned to school after that. My husband also did not allow me to talk to any male friends I had in school.

Luz age 55, who completed her fourth year in primary school discusses the difficulties that she had to endure during her marriage. She also mentions that her husband was a machista:

The first years were difficult for me because he drank and would fight and physically abuse me. He was very machista and to this day still is. His father was also a machista. I got along with his mother because she also went through the same thing. Then, she passed away and I was alone again. His sister did not get along with me in the beginning, and later we became close. She would defend me from her own brother.

Luz describes the differences between her husband’s family and hers:

My dad was very different from his family. My dad never hit me and we never saw him raise his hand at me or my mother, *pero con mi esposo si lo recibí* (But with my husband, I did receive it). He would easily get upset, he is very unsure of himself. When we went to go visit his family he hit me. *Me pego aya y me estaba diciendo muchas maldiciones y se me hizo fácil irme a mi casa con mis padres. Cuando llegue le dije a mis padres pero luego mi padre me dijo que no, que me tenia que regresar con el. Porque cuando me pregunto si ya sabia como era, y yo dije que si. Él me dijo, yo te había dicho como era ese hombre y ahora te vas a fregar y te vas a regresar con el, yo aqui no te quiero. Eso lo miran mal, antes, si dejaba uno el esposo la gente y los padres lo miraban mal porque era para toda la vida* (When we visited his parents he had hit me and was cursing at me so then it was easy for me to go to my parents house. When I arrived, I told my parents but my father told me no, that I had to return with my husband. Because when he (father) asked me if I knew how he was I said, yes. My father had told me the way my husband was and that I was screwed. My father told me, I do not want you here. This would be perceived negatively if a woman were to leave her husband).

Luz continues and says:

My mother wanted me to stay, she exclaimed to my father that, “How could he let me go with him”. Then my mother-in-law came for me and I had to leave. I could not go anywhere else; it was very difficult because we never made decisions for ourselves. It made everything difficult, we never left our house, and I was scared.

Women Facing Dishonor and the Community

In this section I will discuss dishonor and virginity which were two topics that women mentioned were a concern for them after their elopement. The decision to elope is a serious matter and cannot be taken lightly. In order for dishonor to occur, the girl had to flee with her novio and then return with her family after fleeing with her novio. Virginity is also of importance to the matter of dishonor because if the girl is deflowered that night she flees with her novio and later returns home because things did not work out, then her virginity is questioned by others. If this is known by some members of the community then the girl and her family will face criticism.

Roberta age 20, who is currently studying public health suggested that a girl is a virgin before she flees with her novio. On that night that she is with him, she is deflowered. She also mentioned that if a girl leaves after being with him sexually, it is frowned upon by the community. Roberta further discusses the issue:

On the night you're with him you will lose your virginity. On occasions, if the girl has a disagreement with her novio after she has fled with him, she returns home. It is perceived in a negative way, people will say, "Oh, well she already left, what is she doing talking with another man". It is like you're seen as having committed adultery. You are seen as a loose woman. People have that ideology of the church of when you should be a virgin before elopement or marriage.

Roberta gives her personal opinion on the issue of virginity before marriage. She says:

"I don't think it matters if you lose your virginity before you marry as long as

you do it responsibly. The older women of this community view this negatively, some of them say, “Oh, she has dishonored her family.” For example, I have a friend who eloped with her novio and got pregnant but later separated from him. Some people say, “*Es una cualquiera*” (she is a promiscuous woman). She is living in *pecado* (sin). I believe she does have value because she needed the will in order to confront her family and the community. Some parents may turn their backs on their daughter because she has dishonored their family. Afraid of the rejection and the gossip of the community some girls stay in the relationship that they are in, even if that means enduring the machismo of their husband.”

Thalia age 25 who is currently studying public health discussed the topic of virginity tells a story of how a novio had to pay to compensate for the loss of honor of a girl. She elaborates on this topic:

About 30 years ago, parents of a novia did not accept the novio for their daughter. We do not know if she had lost her virginity the night she fled with her novio. The parents of the novio had to pay *una dote* (payment or compensation), the novio's parents had to paid money or compensate for the loss of the girls virginity. A mutual agreement by both parents was met in order to repair the damage. This on occasion is still seen.

Thalia recounts a story of her uncle that this occurred to:

This happened to my uncle; he took his novia and wanted to get married with her, but her parents did not want her to get married with him. So her parents went for their daughter at his house and told them they would receive the novio and his

family a few days later for the contenido. When they took the contenido, her parents told him that they were not going to allow him to get married with her. The novio and his family returned to their house and the novia stayed with her parents. Her parents then demanded una dote. The novio's father had to pay because her parents said she had lost her virginity and she had dishonored their family, so the novio's parents needed to pay.

Thalia expressed that you're seen as filthy if you return home:

You are seen as filthy and if you are pregnant, it is like you committed adultery.

The men don't take interest in you, I had heard my uncle say to us that a girl became pregnant but was no longer with the man. My uncle then said, *ya esta hechada a perder*" (She has no value), saying she has no value, no one will want her. The community notices that she has a child and if she does find someone, she is still seen as *loca* (crazy).

Luz tells a story that occurred to her older sister, who became pregnant and underwent insults from her father and uncle. The issue of dishonoring the family was brought to light once more because of this incident. Luz begins to describe that her older sister was 14 years old when she met her novio who was 18 years old. She tells me briefly about her sister:

My sister complained that she was sick from her stomach. So my father told my mother to take her to the doctor. The doctor examined her and told my mother that she was pregnant. *Mi mama le pregunto que como habia hecho eso? Mi hermana le dijo que habia hecho eso pero que no sabia que haciendo eso, se embarazaba uno* (My mother asked my sister how could this happen and my sister told her, she

had done that but did not know that by having sex one would become pregnant).

Luz explained how this was possible:

You see, my mother never talked to us about sex. The people here are very cautious about private issues. *La gente es cuidadosa, muy cerrada, como tampoco nos hablaron de la regla, nunca nos hablo de eso. Como que las niñas no deben de saber eso o mirar eso*” (The people are careful, very closed, they would not discuss things like your menstrual cycle, they never did. Young girls are not supposed to know about this or see it). Once they returned from the doctor’s office, her sister had to confront her father.

Luz continues with her story:

Mi papa estaba bien enojado él le pego cuando llegamos. Le dijo que se tenía que ir de su casa que era una cualquiera, mis tíos supieron que estaba embarazada y dejaron de hablar con ella. Mis tíos pensaron que ya, ya deshonoró la familia es una verguenza, es terrible que una hija salga embarazada sin casarse. Mi mama consiguió un abogado para que fueran a ver el muchacho. Él dijo no ni siquiera la reconozco, adivinar de quien es ese hijo. Dijo mi papa esta bien si no lo reconoce, esta bien, a la fuerza no” (My father was very upset and hit her, when we arrived. He told her that she needed to leave his house because she was a loose woman. My uncles found out that she was pregnant and stopped talking to her. They believed that she already dishonored the family and was an embarrassment. It was terrible to have a daughter pregnant without being married. My mother hired an attorney, so he could go see the boy. He said no; he

does not even know her and who knows whose child that is. My father then said okay if he does not acknowledge the child, okay we are not going to force him).

Luz's father would lash out at the her sister because of her pregnancy. Luz said:

Mi papa tomaba y la corría de la casa. No se iba, se dormía de bajo de la cama para que no la mirara ahí y así duro un tiempo. Ella ya tenia tres meses de embarazo, y tenían 8 mese de novios cuando esto paso. Mi papa le decía a mi mama, "Tu hija si no la miraba que era una quien sabe que" (My dad would drink and would throw her out of the house. My sister would not leave, she would sleep under our bed so my father wouldn't see her and she sleep there for some time. She was already three months pregnant when we found out and had been with her novio for eight months. My father would say to my mother, "She is your daughter, would you not look after her, she is a who knows what.....).

El la culpaba. Le tenia mucho coraje. Cuando regresaba del trabajo le decía mi papa.... "Vete! Tu No Eres mi Hija... Vete no te quiero aquí!" Lloraba el, por la gente no lo trataban con respecto...no se.. (He would blame her. He had a lot of hate towards her. When he would return from work he would tell her, "Leave you are not my daughter, leave I don't want you here!" He would cry because the people would not treat him with respect. I don't know).

Later, the church was having confessions. My uncle told my father to go confess himself and tell the priest what had happened with his daughter and to tell the priest that he wanted his daughter out of his house. Before he left to see the priest he told his daughter, "*Agarras tus cosas porque si el padre me dice que te corra, te me vas de la casa*" (Get your stuff because if the

priest tells me to throw you out, you will have to get out of my house). He told the priest that she had already sinned and was pregnant and that she was only child herself. The priest said,

“Que la apoyara porque era una niña y que si no la apoyara que le iba a tiene la culpa de lo que le pasaba a ella. Que porque se iba ir y sabrá dios que iba ser de ella, y él iba ser responsable por haberla corrido de la casa y que no era la primera o la ultima mujer que hacia eso. Y luego reacciono y le empezo hablar a ella (To support her because she was just a child and if he did not support her, that he was going to be the one to blame if anything were to happen to her. Since she was going to leave, only God would know what was going to be of her and he was going to be responsible for her having thrown her out; she was neither the first nor the last woman to have done this. Then, he reacted and began to talk to her). But afterwards her father raised her child, gave him education, and taught him how to work.

Conclusion

In this chapter I mentioned the issues that women were concerned about after their elopement. Some women I interviewed discussed that during their marriage they observed the machismo in their husbands; the women described the hardship they underwent and the constant battle they struggled. Women also faced dishonor and the community. Some women discussed ways someone could dishonor herself and her family. In critical situation this problem can hurt ties with family. Leaving a husband might be difficult to do because of the gossip that circles around the community. This can also become a restraint for women who want to leave their husbands but cannot because they do not want to face the criticism.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION

Santiago Tlacotepec is a community that holds on to its traditions and customs. El robo, elopement, is only one aspect of its history. El robo has been an accepted form of marriage for many generations in Santiago Tlacotepec. In this chapter, I will be presenting my analysis of the marriage institution of el robo. Based on my interview data, I identified three main themes in women's narratives about why el robo occurs in this community: 1) youth and inexperience of the young girls; 2) fear of parental rejection of the union; and 3) a lack of freedom and parental control over daughters. I go on to discuss factors that keep women from retreating from their novio's house. I will also mention women's reflections on their marriage with their novio.

I will discuss Robichaux's research on the contenido in Tlaxcala and make a comparison to Santiago Tlacotepec. I will discuss the future of el robo. What are women's concerns for their daughters and their future? What needs to occur so girls can elope at an older age? I will also make suggestions for future research on el robo. For example, men should be interviewed to understand their perspectives on el robo, and the dynamics of the family should be studied to understand gendered roles in this community. Addressing these suggestions will create a better qualitative study over el robo.

Major Themes and Analysis

To begin my analysis, I will present the stories of Monica and Roberta, two young women whom I interviewed for this study. Their stories show the significance that el robo has in this community. Monica and Roberta, two women ages 22 and 20, explained the reasons they believe girls elope. Both Monica and Roberta received more education than the other interviewees. Monica was in a relationship when I first interviewed her and Roberta was single.

After eleven months from the initial interview, I discovered that both Monica and Roberta had eloped. Monica eloped two months after our interview. During our interview, Monica mentioned that some of the reasons girls eloped were due to problems at home, lack of freedom, and a lack of understanding the moment the novio asks his novia to go away with him. However, when Monica decided to elope she said that the moment for marriage had arrived and she wanted to begin a life together with her novio. After living in common law marriage for nine months, she said, “el me cerro, yo pensaba que ya no iba encontrar otra persona y con el iba ser feliz y me cerre yo misma” (mentally he closed me off from seeing the larger picture, I thought that I wasn’t going to find anyone else and thought I would be happy with him and I closed myself from believing that I could find someone else other than him).

Roberta believed that some of the reasons why girls eloped was because they lack communication at home or perhaps lacked an education. She also suggested that their age plays a role in eloping. She emphasized that many girls are too young to understand what they are doing. After interviewing her for the second time, she explained her reasons for eloping. Roberta said at the moment she feared her father would not accept her novio. She also added that she was afraid that her novio would leave her because he had already asked her several times before. So

Roberta decided to flee with him before he changed his mind. So even though Monica and Roberta received a high school education both of them still ended up marrying by el robo. This suggests that even being more educated does not appear to discourage el robo.

Youth and Inexperience

The most frequently reported reason for eloping is youth and inexperience. Of the 17 women interviewees who eloped, eight stated they eloped because they were young and “didn’t know any better.” In many cases, their husbands were their first intimate experience with a male companion. Many of the girls were flattered by the flamboyant gestures they received from the boys; they were bedazzled by the romantic conquest. Women reported that their youth and inexperience allowed them to be “awed” by their boyfriend. Because young girls have many responsibilities that they have to take care of on a daily basis, this male attention and flattery becomes an outlet for happiness and a refuge. If they can get a brief moment to run off and meet with their novio “a escondidas” (secretly), they will.

Many of the girls believe that their relationship will remain the same when they begin a life together with their novio. As one informant stated, “tu crees que todo va a quedarse igual, que todo va estar padre, de color rosa” (you believe that everything is going to remain the same, that everything will be great and rosy). Women reported, however, that their relationship changed once they became man and wife. They felt that their husband had more authority over them. For example, one informant said that she had to ask for her husband’s permission to visit her parents. She said, “si me da permiso voy, si no entonces pues no puedo ir” (if he gives me permission I will go, if he doesn’t then I can’t go).

Much to their dismay, the women said they could not foresee the consequences of their impulsive decisions to marry or the difficulties they would face during their marriages. Women said that a girl's world closes in that instant when a novio asks his novia to go away with him. One informant mentioned, "se te cierra tu mundo y no piensas de nada pero en ti misma" (your world closes and you don't think of anything but yourself). In this statement what the woman means is that at the precise moment when a novio asks her to go away with him, her world closes in that she does not think about what will happen tomorrow or how her parents may react. He is her world and all she thinks about is herself and the bliss she has found with him.

Women stated that their youth was something that was valuable, something that they themselves were not able to enjoy. However, their youth ended the moment they decided to elope with their novio. Some women regretted that their youth was stripped from them by the decision that they mistakenly made. However, a few women mentioned that their husbands had a kind heart and were good fathers for their children.

Fear of Parental Rejection

The second reason why girls elope with their novios is because they fear that their parents will not accept their boyfriends. Some of the reasons why parents would reject a boy would be because he might be known as a drunk, lazy, or be unemployed. Parents also consider the boy's family and their reputations. They will try to stop their daughter from seeing her novio if they believe it to be unsuitable. This causes their daughter to resort to the only alternative she believes will allow her to remain with her novio, el robo.

Seven of the 17 interviewees used el robo as a way to force their parents to accept their relationship. Some parents did not believe the novio to be a decent boy. Consequently, the

daughters were left with the only alternative they believed they had, which was to elope with their novio. Some of my informants mentioned that they believed that their fathers would reject the novio if he were to ask for permission to marry. One of my informants, Felice, said this was an issue for her, “I told him (novio) I wanted him to ask for my hand in marriage, but he said no, that they (parents) are not going to give you to me. I thought to myself and imagined my parents saying no. I was only 18 years old at the time, but I was still afraid of my parents and, well, I said yes”.

With fear, the couple finds support, consoles each other, and finds the courage to flee together. If a boy were to ask for the girl’s hand in marriage and the parents reject him, that would devastate the couple and the girl would have to see her novio *a escondidas* (secretly). In rare cases the girl may runaway with her novio after her parents have rejected the boy’s proposal for matrimony. This leaves the girl’s parents *deshonrados* (dishonored) because the daughter disobeyed their wishes for a second time. I will discuss this further in the next section.

El robo for some women helped them receive the consent of their parents even when the parents did not want to accept their consensual marriage. When el robo happens, parents are inclined to give their blessing to the couple. There is more pressure on the parents to accept the novio. When a girl is pedida, parents have the choice to decline the boy’s proposal. To avoid this el robo is a method that girls from this community use in order to gain two things. The first is to begin a marriage with her boyfriend. The second is to gain her parents’ blessing, whether it be forced upon them or accepted. Regardless, the couple will be able to begin a life together by using el robo to circumvent parental rejection.

Lack of Freedom and Parental Control Over Daughters

The third reason women identified for consenting to el robo is parental control over their daughters. The girls wanted some autonomy in their lives and wanted to get out from under the authority of their parents. Cultural norms in this community apply pressure when it comes to girls socializing with boys. The head of the household is usually the father; and, in most cases, he will not allow his daughter to go out in public with a boy. The widespread practice of el robo in Santiago Tlacotepec places parents in a position where they believe they have to restrict their daughters to the home, school, and church. Fathers are not fond of the idea of their little girl having a relationship with a boy who, in some cases, is older than the novia. Nevertheless, on some occasions, young girls and boys have the opportunity to socialize at fiestas. This is a loophole for both girls and boys to take initiative and make advances towards one another for a romantic prospect. The childish, innocent acts by both male and females reflect their youth. The couples' limited ability to socialize causes them to hide in dark alleys where they can be together, but out of sight.

Such secret romances exist because of the close supervision that the parents have over their children. Five of the women interviewed hid their relationship from their parents. Those women stated that "*era de escondidas*" (it was a secret). Keeping relationships secret was how the women would avoid problems with their parents. Some of the girls would often be afraid of their parents, mostly their fathers. In order to maintain a relationship the young girls kept it a secret. The only opportunity they would have to see their novio was in school, at fiestas, or when they had the chance to sneak off to the store.

El robo was a way to escape of the problems they believed they had at home. As one

informant suggested “mi padre era muy estricto con nosotras y no nos dejaba salir a dar la vuelta. Tambien tenía mucha reponsibilidad para una niña, que cuidar la casa, hacer la comida, que ir a la papeleria” (my father was very strict with us and he would not allow us to go out for a walk. Also we had a lot of responsibilities for a girl, taking care of the house, preparing meals, and going to a stationery store). Other women shared this same sentiment, which they said led them to elope.

Women suggested they did not have enough freedom in their lives because their fathers would restrict them from going out with friends. One woman mentioned that after a long day at work, she met with her novio and arrived late to her home. Parents expected their daughter to be home at a particular hour of the night and the girl feared that her parents would not allow her to enter her home after late hours of the night. With fear seeping in, the girl found it more convenient to go with their novo to his house. As one woman said, “sin pensar se te hace bien facil, estás enamorada” (without thinking it becomes very easy, you’re in love). Hence, some couples used el robo to bypass this issue of not being able to have the girl home at a certain hour and the women are glad to be with their novios.

The involvement of the parents is fundamental to this form of marriage. Parents are very much a part of this ritualized process. Family support and involvement during the sequence of events are apparent. Although the couple flees together and begins living together before getting parental approval, sanctions are requested shortly thereafter. As noted in interviews of the informants, it is clear that elopement is a family affair. In all the robos described by my interviewees, the family of the novia is instantly notified about her whereabouts.

Once the couple arrives at the family home of the novio, his family sees to it

that the girl's family is made aware that he has taken their daughter. The parents then confer briefly and agree upon when they will be received by the girl's parents. This meeting is known as the *contento*, and it usually occurs two to seven days after the girl has eloped. During the *contento* the parents play a leading role by giving a formal speech. Not a word is heard from the couple during the entire *contento*. At the ending of the *contento* both families agree upon the terms of marriage and toast to one another.

Inevitably, both families and their extended family will have some sort of involvement leading up to the actual marriage ceremony. Preparations for a civil or religious ceremony include parents and family from both sides, each taking on a role that will assist the couple's marriage. Some couples get married through a civil marriage ceremony as soon as three days to six months after eloping. Other couples live in a common law marriage, and some couples undergo a religious ceremony within a year after they eloped.

Factors that Keep Women from Returning to their Home

Family honor is an important issue for most of the women who were interviewed. One reason why that parents give their consent to their eloped daughters to marry is because it will allow them to preserve the family's honor and the daughter's honor. Once a girl has run off with her *novio*, it is almost impossible for her to return single to her home. If a girl leaves her home with her boyfriend and later wants to return, then she and her family would lose their honor. *El robo* is not something that is to be taken lightly. Once the couple arrives at the boyfriend's house, the *novio's* parents converse with the girl and ask her if she is absolutely sure about what she is doing, helping her realize that this is a serious matter.

Honor can also be lost for a man if he changes his mind and decides not to marry the girl

after he has already taken her to his family's house. There have been situations where the girl's family became furious at his decision not to follow through on the elopement, and they went out to seek revenge. For men, it is important that they keep their word. If they do not then, they will bring shame to their family.

Public opinion and sexual values related to virginity are elements that may also pressure a woman to stay with her novio even after she has second thoughts about her decision. These two key elements act as two strikes against the girl. Once a girl has left her home with her boyfriend, she is no longer considered to be a virgin and thus faces public scorn if she decides to go back to her family. Social pressure keeps the girl at the home of her novio and makes it impossible for her to return to her home. For these reasons, girls should be absolutely sure of their decision, which is difficult given their youth and inexperience, because there is no going back. In Santiago Tlacotepec an impetuous decision by an adolescent has life long consequences.

Public opinion was a great influence especially over some of the women who are now older. Several of my informants questioned whether fleeing with their novio was the correct thing to do. However, the social stigma attached to being a non-virgin was a fundamental factor that made them stay with their novio. Several women feared that if they returned to their home, they would be perceived as a "used" woman. Anyone who knew about the failed elopement could gossip about what they believe to be "improper behavior" by the girl. One woman gave an example of what someone would probably say, "esa ya se fue no mas acuestar" (that one just went to sleep with him). The word "esa" gives a negative connotation towards the girl; it is a term that degrades her. Other people might perceive her as "perdida" (a lost cause) because they might have assumed that she already had sexual relations with her novio when in fact they were

kept in different quarters of the novio's house. In some rare instances the girl's extended family, for example an uncle, would not speak to the girl if she were to return home after fleeing with her novio. But after some time, she will regain the relationship with her uncle.

Comparison of Tlaxcala and Santiago Tlacotepec

In this section I will compare my findings about the contenido ritual to Robichaux analysis in Tlaxcala. In 1996 Robichaux was given permission by his informant, Doña Eustaquia, and was able to witness a contenido in the community. The woman's son, Salómon had stolen his girlfriend, Maria, and brought her to his mother's home. Later she sent one of her sons to notify the girlfriend's parents that she was at their house.

The next step is the contenido in which "the groom's family is trying to appease the bride's family for having stolen their daughter" (Robichaux 2005:10). Robichaux mentions how the boyfriend's family members took a basket filled with a "bottle of brandy, a thick candle and flowers to the home of Maria's parents." The informant then asked permission to light the candle. The mother of Salómon began a speech to Maria's family asking forgiveness because her son had stolen their daughter. She also said that the couple wanted to marry and that there was not anything either family could do to prevent this from occurring. The mother then offered them the basket and they accepted. They later "exchanged hugs" (Robichaux 2005:11).

Maria's parents asked the novio's family to sit at the table, and they began to eat some rice with mole. Later, Dona Eustaquia was given permission to speak and she thanked Maria's family for the mole. She further explained that she wanted the couple married in a week and went on further, explaining that this was crucial so Maria's family can see that Dona Eustaquia and her family were not irresponsible. At the end of the contenido, the novio's family agreed to

have the couple marry through a religious ceremony in four months. Both families then toasted one another to finalize the beginning of something new (Robichaux 2005:11).

There are similarities between Tlaxcala and Santiago Tlacotepec. In Santiago Tlacotepec, the couples begin el robo by fleeing with their loved one. The novio takes his novia to a family member's house, usually his parent's home. Once his family has had a discussion with the girl about how serious her actions are, her future in-laws notify her family that she is with their son. This leaves her parents a bit unsettled and in a state of shock.

The next step is the contento ritual that unites the two families and establishes a relationship. Once the son's family rings the bell, the daughter's family can choose to allow them to enter or not. If they refuse then the marriage proposal has been declined. However, if the proposal is accepted, the novio's family and the novia will enter her house. They bring with them a chiquihuite (basket) filled with a variety of fruits such as grapes, mamey, and pears. They also bring with them refreshments and a bottle of liquor. Once inside, the families greet each other. The father of the novio is the first to speak, and he introduces his side of the family. The father *se desculpa* (asks forgiveness on behalf of his son and his family) for his son's actions.

Then the father of the daughter speaks and tells the novio's family that he wants his daughter to be treated well and respected. He explains that the doors of his home will remain open to her and her in-laws. The father or mother of the novio asks permission to light a candle which usually is lit before a sacred image. Next, the couple kneels in the center surrounded by both families. In this way they ask their families for forgiveness. Then each person present walks up towards the couple and gives them a blessing and words of advice for their marriage. Toward the end of the contento, the chiquihuite is given to the novia's family. This may signify an

offering to the novia's family or a nice gesture in order to repair the damage. At the end the families toast to one another and talk about when the couple will marry legally or in a religious ceremony.

There are several similarities between the practice of el robo in these two communities. This is shown by the notification that is given to the girl's parents, the contenido which consist of a basket (chiquihuite) filled with fruit or bread, and the bottle of alcohol used to toast to the occasion. The formal speech is also an important component of the ritual that occurs in both Santiago Tlacotepec and Tlaxacala. Other elements of the contenido we saw in both places include the candle being lit, asking forgiveness to the girl's family, the toast once both families have accepted the union, and the marriage plans.

The Future of El Robo

Based on my research, I believe el robo will continue to be practiced in Santiago Tlacotepec. Mothers who eloped are concerned that their daughters will flee as well. Eight women stated that they wished that their own daughters would pursue an education rather than get married at a young age. This of course is for the benefit of their daughters. The women mentioned that they ran off with their novio and by no means do they wish this upon their daughters.

Pilar, an interviewee, expressed these feelings with me and elaborated on this issue further.

I would sit down with my daughter and tell her don't get married too young, don't go through what I did, enjoy your adolescent years. I'm not saying you're not going to get married. But at least think about getting an

education, don't go through what I did because then you will regret it. Pilar then related that, after her daughter had eloped with her novio, her daughter told her that she was sorry for not listening to her.

Some women regret eloping with a particular man because he caused them pain and suffering. One woman said, "Mi esposo llegaba tomaba diario y peleaba conmigo. Me hizo mi vida pesada hasta el ultimo dia que murio" (My husband would drink daily and would come fight with me. He made my life difficult until the day he passed away). Another woman expressed what men think about women, "la mujer es como la casa" (the woman is like the house) her place is at home. This becomes a vicious circle in which the boy takes on the role of the wife's father and asserts his authority over his wife and family. The girl takes on the role of her mother and takes care of the domestic household once she is married.

Given that el robo is so deeply embedded in the local culture, what needs to occur so girls can elope at an older age is greater experience, opportunity for an education and exploration of their larger environment. Experience with life would help them grow and develop the maturity to make more sound decisions. Experience outside their home will hopefully teach them about alternative realities and help them to be wise and make critical decisions when it comes to large life-altering choices. It would also help young girls not to fall in love with just any boy who comes her way or with someone who gives her the attention she might lack. I think it is necessary for the girls of Santiago Tlacotepec to date so they can gain an understanding of the different attitudes men can have toward their wives.

A majority of the women interviewed in this study did not complete a high school education, and only thirteen women received any formal education. Parents of these women

strive to keep food on the table and provide any medical attention their children might need. Education is limited to some families in Santiago Tlacotepec because of these struggles in life. Consequently, their childhoods are cut short. The next stage of life, their teen years and early adulthood, will almost certainly involve marriage, especially if they do not have a university-level education.

Exposure to their larger environment, I believe, can help develop women's independence, not only from their parents, but also in order for them to gain self-confidence and knowledge to make critical decisions that come their way. Monica, one of the two women who recently eloped, said "me da miedo a ir como a la Ciudad de Mexico, porque que tal y me pierdo" (I get scared to go to like Mexico City because what if I were to get lost). She later mentioned that she would feel more comfortable if her father went with her; she would not like to go alone. Monica was one of my interviewees who received a technical education. She is twenty-one years old, but lacks self-confidence in herself and still fears getting lost. Many of these girls need to gain some independence in their lives so they can feel more comfortable about exploring their larger environment.

Future Research

Future research should be conducted on el robo in order to gain a broader perspective on the issue. We have seen the women's reasons for eloping in the community of Santiago Tlacotepec.; however, we have yet to study men's impressions and perspectives. Men can not only give us their perspective on el robo, they can also provide insight into what their motivations are and if they gain anything from eloping rather than *pediendo la novia* (asking for the girlfriend's hand in marriage). Interviews with men will help us explore and answer

questions about machismo, which was briefly mentioned. In addition, future research should investigate more fully the role of the fiscales (men who take care of the church and help the church run smoothly), which was mentioned very briefly, so that we can get a better understanding of the involvement of the church in el robo. An extensive study should also be made on current young teenagers, their feelings about el robo and their ideas about marriage in general. I would also recommend that a more elaborate study be conducted on family dynamics of the household, specifically the father/daughter relationship. By examining their interactions with each another we can further assess gender roles in this community.

Definitely, a larger sample of informants-both men and women-would enable a more reliable qualitative analysis. This would help us find larger patterns, not only for women but also for men. Research should be conducted over a five-year time span in order to see if there are other critical factors, such as economics of the family. Observations of family economics would allow us to see if this variable is a contributing factor in the continuous cycle of el robo.

Conclusion

This research focused on el robo in Santiago Tlacotepec. El robo is an alternative form of a marriage that is a norm in this community. El robo is a ritualized event that involves family members from both the bride's and the groom's sides. Throughout this study we heard women's narratives about el robo. I also briefly mentioned pedimento and bride theft, two other forms of marriage that have occurred in this town. The three main reasons for eloping in this community are the girl's youth and inexperience, fear of parental rejection of the boyfriend, and, the lack of freedom and parental control over their daughters.

Women raise concerns about honor, public opinion, and sexual virtue within the

community because these are issues that may arise because of el robo. Women expressed that it is hard to avoid these concerns. Another factor of importance in this community is the respect that is shown by children toward their family and the respect that is shown between families during the contenido. "Rapto, elopement, seduction, and bride stealing all are practices that in many minds signify male domination and female victimization. At the very least, these concepts conjure up images of an archaic past, a tenacious relic of disappearing traditions that managed to survive into the ostensibly modern era" (Sloan 2008:33). As this study has shown, el robo is not a relic of the past but is alive and well.

REFERENCES

- Bates, Daniel G., Francis Conant and Ayse Kudat
1974 Introduction: Kidnapping and Elopement as Alternative Systems of Marriage. *Anthropological Quarterly* 47(3):233-237.
- Browner, Carole and Ellen Lewin
1982 Female Altruism Reconsidered: The Virgin Mary as Economic Woman. *American Ethnologist* 9(1):61-73.
- Cherlin, Andrew and Aphichat Chamrathirong
1988 Variations in Marriage Patterns in Central Thailand. *Demography* 25(3):337-353.
- D' Aubeterre Buznego, María Eugenia
2000 *El Pago de la Novia Matrimonio, Vida Conyugal y Prácticas Transnacionales En San Miguel Acuexcomac, Puebla*. El Colegio de Michoacán, Mexico.
- Ferraro, Gary and Susan Andreatta
2012 *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective*. Wadsworth, Belmont, CA.
- Foro-Mexico
2011 Información de Santiago Tlacotepec (Toluca). Electronic document. www.foro-mexico.com, accessed: March 20, 2012.
- Franco, Edgar
2011 Tres Días en la Elección Mexiquenes. Electronic document. <http://redaccion-nexos.com.mx>, accessed: February 5, 2012.
- Garcia-Martinez, Bernardo
2008 *Las Regiones de Mexico Breviario Geográfico e Histórico*. El Colegio de Mexico, Mexico D.F.
- Gil-Dolores, Ignacio
1991 *Delegación Municipal de Santiago Tlacotepec*. H. Ayuntamiento Constitucional, Toluca, Mexico.
- Gobierno Mexico
2010 Estado de Mexico-Toluca de Lerdo. Electronic document. <http://e-local.gob.mx>, accessed: March 15, 2012.

Goloubinoff, Marina

- 2003 ¿Por Qué se Roba La Novia? Las Razones De Una Costumbre Negada Pero Viva In *El Matrimonio En Mesoamérica: Ayer y Hoy Unas Miradas Antropológicas*. David Robichaux, ed. Pp.237-248. Ciudad de México: Universidad Iberoamericana.

Hernández-Morales, Erik S.

- 2011 Personal interview. June.

Hernández-Rodriguez, Rosaura

- 2009 *El valle de Toluca Época Prehispánica y Siglo XVI*. El Colegio Mexiquense, A.C, Zinacantepec, Mexico.

Instituto Linguistico de Verano en Mexico

- 2010 Lenguas y culturas del Mexico Moderno (Troncos y Familias). Electronic document. <http://www.sil.org>, accessed: February 22, 2012.

Instituto Nacional De Estadistica y Geografia

- 2010 Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010. Electronic document. <http://www.inegi.org.mx>, accessed: June 16, 2012.

Lavrin, Asunción

- 1989 *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*. University of Nebraska Press, United States.

Ledezma-Rueda, Alejandra

- 2007 *Diagnostico De Salud Santiago Tlacotepec, Toluca Estado De Mexico*. Universidad Tecnologica Del Valle De Toluca, Lerma Estado de Mexico.

Marsden, Magnus

- 2007 Love and Elopement in Northern Pakistan. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13:91-108.

Martinez-Alier, Verena

- 1972 Elopement and Seduction in Nineteenth-Century Cuba. *Past and Present Society* (55):91-129.

Martinez-Garcia, Raymundo

- 2010 Tierra Nuestra. *Revista Trimestral*, June 2010:7-10.

Murstein, Bernard I.

- 1974 *Love, Sex, and Marriage through the Ages*. Springer Publication, New York.

- Nanda, Serena and Richard L. Warms
2007 *Cultural Anthropology*. Thomson Learning Inc., California.
- Noguez, Xavier
2010 Tierra Nuestra. *Revista Trimestral*, March 2010:7-8.
- Paul, Lois and Benjamin D. Paul
1963 Changing Marriage Patterns in a Highland Guatemalan Community. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 19(2):131-148.
- Penner and Associates-Mexico Law Firm and Business Consulting for Mexico
2011 Marriage in Mexico. Electronic document. <http://www.mexicolaw.com>, accessed: February 25, 2012.
- Pennock, Caronline D.
2008 *Bonds of Blood: Gender, Lifecycle and Sacrifice in Aztec Culture*. Palgrave MacMillan, New York.
- Pérez-Silva, Gerardo
2010 *El Apóstol Santiago: Patrono y Protector de Nuestro Pueblo*. Anaya Imprentas, Toluca, Mexico.

2011 Personal Interview. June.
- Robichaux, David L.
2005 Couple formation and common-law marriage in Mexico: A cultural tradition. Manuscript. Electronic document. www.ciesas.edu.mx, accessed: February 22, 2012.
- Seed, Patricia
1988 *To Love, Honor and Obey in Colonial Mexico*. Stanford University Press, California.
- Sloan, Kathryn A.
2008 *Runaway Daughters: Seduction, Elopement, and Honor in Nineteenth-Century Mexico*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.
- Stockard, Janice E.
2002 *Marriage in Culture: Practice and Meaning across Diverse Societies*. Thomson Wadsworth, California.

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY

A la fuerza- taken by force

Barranca- deep break or hole caused by heavy rain

Bendicion- blessing supermarket

Bodega-store/supermarket

Capulin- species of cherries

Cera- Candle

Cerro- hill

Chalcas- tepalcates

Chiquihuite- Large basket that contained a variety of fruits and bread in some cases

Citas-date

Contento- the event in which both families unite and discuss matters of marriage.

Deshonrar/deshonrado- dishonor

Érmita- hermitage

Escondidas- secretly

Fiesta- party

Fiscales- workers and helpers of the Catholic Church

Guerreros- warriors

Gusto- Joy

Hija- daughter

Licenciada-attorney

Loca-crazy

Machismo/machista- chavinism

Madrina-godmother

Magyeria- agave plantation

Matlat- net

Mexiñcas- Aztecs

Novia- girlfriend

Noviazgo- relationship

Novio- boyfriend

Padrinos-godparents

Pecado- sin

Pedimento/Pedida- ask for the girls hand in marriage

Pena- shame, sadness

Perdon- forgiveness

Pueblo- town

Pulque- source of liquor

Rapto- bridtheft

Respeto-respect

Robo- steal

Saluda- greet

Sintagh- ceremonial cycle

Sustraer- steal

Tanguis- open-air-market

Tasojkamachani- donations of firewood, meat, bread and salt.

*Tecihuatlanque-*matchmakers

Temátlat- sling or armed with a sling

Tia- aunt

Tio- uncle

Union libre- free union

Virgin de Guadalupe- Virgin Mary

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Susana Pelaez was born July 8, 1986 in San Benito, Texas with a mid-wife to Florentino Armando Pelaez Valdez and Maria Guadalupe Pelaez Hernandez. She grew up in Harlingen, Texas and is the ninth child out of thirteen children. Coming from a large family she faced many economic hardships and learned the value of an education. For her education was very precious and valuable.

After graduating Harlingen High School in 2004, she pursued a college education and enrolled at the University of Texas-Pan American. She was able to gain vital experience as an undergraduate student. She was one of the four students who were able experience field work in Casma, Peru. She is a member of Lambda Alpha, the Anthropology Honor Society. Susana graduated with her B.A in August 2008, with a double major in History and Anthropology.

Not being afraid of a challenge, Susana continued her education as a graduate student and will earn her Master's Degree in Interdisciplinary Arts, with a concentration in Anthropology in May of 2012. After earning her Master's Degree, she would like to pursue a career in social sciences. Permanent Address: 520 West Monroe Harlingen, Texas, 78550