

Chapter 1

Situating Gender and Migration in the New West

In the summer of 2004 I moved to Bozeman, Montana, to take a faculty position at Montana State University. My partner and I were drawn to southwest Montana's expansive natural beauty and Bozeman's hip college town amenities. Having grown up on the flat plains of the Midwest and having lived for almost a decade in a large East Coast city, Bozeman's mountains, small-town feel and Western vibe were novel and exciting. It did not take long before I had comfortably immersed myself in my new community, exploring local mountain trails, sampling Bozeman's trendy cafes and restaurants and connecting with other thirty-something transplants to the Mountain West. At the same time, I was unsettled by the area's racial, ethnic and linguistic homogeneity.

Several months after my move to Montana, during my weekly Sunday night trips to the grocery store I began to see Latino men shopping together. They were dressed in construction boots and work pants, and their presence surprised me. I was an immigration scholar and activist and had worked closely with Mexicans and Central Americans in Boston and Minneapolis. I associated immigration with cities and corporate agriculture, neither of which were present in southwest Montana. What is more, I never saw Latinos anywhere else or at any other time when I was out and about in Bozeman. When in public, as my trip to the grocery store made clear, their presence was conspicuous, marked by skin color and language in a place that is hegemonically white and English speaking. So if Latinos lived here, they were generally hidden.

For several Sundays I struggled over whether greeting the men in the grocery store would be interpreted by them as a friendly gesture or an invasion of privacy. Finally I decided to say "hola/hello." As I approached two of the men who were stacking tortillas in a shopping cart I was instantly struck by the obvious fear my gesture provoked. Sensing their unease, I quickly explained that I had just returned from Central

America and was enthused to hear someone speaking Spanish; that I only wanted to say “hi” and to introduce myself. Warm smiles ensued, and the tension between us dissipated. I learned through our short conversation that, like me, Samuel and Carlos were new to Montana. They had come to work in the booming construction industry, and lived far outside of town. They carpoled into Bozeman on Sunday nights to grocery shop. Otherwise they stayed away. In that moment I became bodily aware of the social ruptures that characterized my new Western home.

Big Sky Country

Southwest Montana is majestic. Awe-inspiring. Here the Rocky Mountains frame a landscape of valleys and rolling foothills that butt up against a very big sky. One can drive for miles without seeing evidence of human settlement. Cattle and, in places, bison dot the land. From late May through mid-August the mountains and valleys are a vibrant green. In the late summer and early fall the green fades to clays, grays and browns. Then the snow comes, often arriving in October and staying into May. Throughout much of the year, the peaks of the Rockies are white. It is beautiful country—wide open, remote, rugged—evoking mythologies of freedom and escape long associated with the West (Kollin 2000).

In “Big Sky Country” nature casts a large shadow over the relatively few people who live in its midst. Montana is the third largest state by geographic size in the Continental United States, yet boasts just a million inhabitants. According to 2010 U.S. Census data, there are only six people per square mile in the state, and Billings, Montana’s largest city, has only 105,000 inhabitants, the first and only city in Montana to surpass the hundred thousand mark. Throughout the 2012 presidential campaign, Montana was seldom mentioned in any national political analysis. In many ways Montana is off the political and economic radar screen.

Yet beginning in the 1980s Montana emerged as a powerful presence in literature, film and popular culture. Robert Redford’s 1992 film *A River Runs through It* is commonly credited with launching Montana as a fly-fishing and tourist mecca. There are other examples. This book takes its name from William Kittredge’s acclaimed anthology (1988) of Montana writings called *The Last Best Place*. Ivan Doig’s award-winning novels, especially his 1979 memoir of growing up in Montana, *This House of Sky*, showcases the literary power of the Montana landscape, a landscape that shapes people in its midst and sparks a unique connection to place. Ted Turner’s popular chain of bison-themed restaurants, Ted’s Montana Grill, has bolstered the cachet of Montana in consumer culture.¹

Perhaps because of the beauty, nostalgia and growing consumer appeal of Big Sky Country, there has been a large influx of people into the area. Statistics tell the story. Over the past twenty years, the population of Montana has increased from 800,000 to just over one million, and Gallatin County, where I conducted the bulk of the research for this book, has seen its population explode from 50,000 to 92,000 (U.S. Census, 2013). Paralleling this in-migration has been a major transformation of the region's physical, economic and cultural landscapes (Wycoff 2006). In the process, the geographic context of the rural Mountain West has morphed into the conceptual space of the *New West* (Ghose 2004; Hines 2010; Power 1996).

Indeed, over the past two decades, much of southwest Montana has been transformed from cowboy country into a New West playground for the elite and privileged adventuresome. Better said, it has become a place where ranchers, farmers and laborers share the land with wealthy newcomers, often not happily. Bozeman, the regional "urban" hub, with a population of 38,000, is the gateway to Yellowstone National Park and to the ski areas in and around Big Sky, home to multi-million dollar mansions. Bozeman used to be best known for its feed and ranch stores and for Montana State University, which is still affectionately called "Moo U" by aging locals. But things have changed. Bozeman now has a sophisticated local food scene, art galleries, independent cafes, boutiques, bookstores, and wealthy residents. Ted Turner, one of the state's largest private land owners (Wilkinson 2013), and journalist Tom Brokaw, for example, publicly display their love of Montana, calling it home for at least part of the year. There are many others—some famous, some not, but privileged migrants all the same—who now call Montana home.

As one approaches Bozeman, one can see large homes on the mountainsides. From their high perches, wealthy dwellers can see for miles. There are less luxurious housing developments emerging in the pasturelands surrounding Bozeman. A suburban sprawl of sorts stretches from Bozeman's outer limits to Four Corners and Belgrade several miles away. This sprawl includes large trailer courts, one of which was recently eradicated by developers. Moving beyond the sprawl, dairy farms, cattle ranches, and wheat, hay and potato fields produce for the local, national and global economy.

In Bozeman's quaint downtown, students, ski "bums" and young families share the sidewalks with tourists and wealthy retirees, some wearing furs, many wearing cowboy boots. The restaurants and cafes are full. In the latter, faculty members from Montana State University and young professionals work on their laptops. Word on the street and my conversations with baristas suggest that the cafes are the latter's remote offices as they telecommute to

Palo Alto, Seattle, Los Angeles and other cities. One gets a sense that everyone is on a vacation of some sort. Even though Montana has a relatively large American Indian population, and well-known Indian art galleries are located downtown, American Indians themselves are seldom visible in Bozeman. Here, most faces are white.²

This is the superficial surface of southwest Montana that has captured the imaginations of the tourist and second home market. This is "The Last Best Place," which is projected in marketing materials and painted on city buses in Minneapolis, Chicago and New York City, enticing the resourced elite to escape to Montana. This, though, is not the real Montana.

The innocent splendor of Montana's natural landscape and pop-culture mythology eclipses a more complex social landscape. Since white settlers violently pushed their way into Montana in the mid-1800s, forcing the Crow, Blackfeet, Cree, Cheyenne, Sioux, Assiniboine, Gros Ventre, Salish and Kootenai onto what are now seven reservations, Montana's economy has been based primarily on resource extraction and agriculture, supported by the labor of poor and working-class men (Malone et al. 1991). For much of Montana's development toward and into statehood, European migrants worked in the mines and later homesteaded the farms and ranches that developed around the mining towns. While men labored outside of their homes, women labored inside their homes. Women's tasks were made all the more challenging by Montana's long and violent winters, during which food was often scarce and amenities nonexistent. In addition to tending their homes, women sometimes assisted their husbands as cowhands and hunters, their roles in ensuring family survival more fluid than popular lore would suggest. Single women had few options, working as ranch cooks or in the infamous brothels that serviced male laborers (*ibid.*). On the reservations, excluded from economic development opportunities, Native Montanans struggled to subsist in a context of European oppression. For the past 150 years of Montana's history, intersections of race, class and gender have largely determined who can lay claim to which land, which economic opportunities are available, and where one fits in the evolving social hierarchy of the West.

Today, accompanying an influx of wealth and privilege into Montana is a growing inequality most conspicuously articulated along lines of race and class. This inequality can be seen in southwest Montana's growing homeless population.³ It can be seen as increasing numbers of working and middle-class Montanans line up at food banks.⁴ It is symbolized by the many workers who can no longer afford to live where they work, because while their earnings are among the lowest in the country, housing prices are the

highest in the state and exceed the national norm.⁵ Inequality also finds expression in the region's growing ethnic diversity.

Although the faces in downtown Bozeman are still predominantly white, the official demographics of the region tell a story of change. Montana's new cultural and economic landscapes are intimately linked to an increasing presence of Mexican labor migrants,⁶ who perform a critical role in Montana's evolving economy yet live in the shadows of its wealth. Although not mentioned in history books, a segment of Montana's farms and ranches have depended on Mexican agricultural workers for decades. Similarly, many of southwest Montana's new exclusive homes and resorts were built and are now maintained by Mexican laborers. The vast majority of these laborers are men, supported at home by Mexican women who have yet to find a secure footing in Montana's labor force. This is a book about this "other" migration into contemporary Montana.

This is also a book about the ways in which gender intersects with Montana's rurality to shape migrant life. Though race and class are the most visible fault lines in Montana's new social landscape, it is gender that most intensely penetrates migrant life. Gender influences the pragmatic ways that Mexican migrants negotiate daily life, as well as the ways they construct their identities, expectations and aspirations in a context of gentrified inequality. Like the Native and European women of Montana's early history, Mexican women today often live difficult, isolated lives while charged with ensuring their families' survival and well-being. Since the Great Recession a significant number of Mexican women have entered Montana's low-wage service industry, cleaning private homes and hotel rooms and working in fast food kitchens. Still, most migrant women are invisible on Montana's streets and public spaces. Despite their marginalization, it is Mexican women who are leading the effort to create and protect "home" on this new, and in many ways hostile, immigration frontier.

The struggles of Mexican migrant families, both to survive and thrive in what seems such an unlikely place, has inspired me to write the *Last Best Place*. This is an ethnography exploring the complex ways in which the nostalgia symbolic of southwest Montana intersects with the region's structural realities to influence migrant life. What is it like to be a Mexican migrant *here*, in one of the whitest and most geographically dispersed and rugged areas in the country? How do contextual nuances of place intersect with gender, immigration status and generation to influence Mexican migrants' experiences of power and subordination within their families and communities? How does rurality, as it plays out in Montana's physical, economic and social landscapes, influence the autonomy, well-being and aspirations

of Mexican migrant women, men and their children? Whereas Montana is just one among many new destinations for Mexican migrants in the United States, it diverges from other destinations in significant ways. In this book I argue the importance of recognizing that places are not objective, that the geographic intricacies of migrant destinations must be taken into account in order to understand the full complexity of migrant life.

New Migrant Destinations

Over the past two decades there has been a surge in Latino migration to *new destinations*, destinations that do not have a recent history of non-European migration. New migrant destinations are concentrated in the U.S. South and Midwest, and as such the vast majority of scholarly studies of this phenomenon are focused there (see Anrig and Wang 2006; Gozdziaik and Martin 2005; Marrow 2011; Massey 2008; Naples 2007; Odem and Lacy 2009; Singer 2004; Zuñiga and Hernandez León 2005). Scholars analyze the shift in Latino migration from traditional to new destinations in the contexts of economic restructuring and evolving U.S. border policy (Hirschman and Massey 2008; Leach and Bean 2008; Odem and Lacy 2009; Singer et al. 2008).

When the most commonly traversed U.S. border crossing points were militarized through Operation Hold the Line in El Paso in 1993 and Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego in 1994, migrants began crossing the border in new and more remote places (Massey and Capoferro 2008). In the process they established new migration paths that took them away from traditional destinations (Massey et al. 2002). Networks of family and kin, through a process of *cumulative causation*, maintained migration flows to new destinations, by connecting migrants with jobs, housing and other social supports (Massey and Zenteno 1999).

These new paths followed economic shifts. As processes of deunionization have lowered wages and hampered job security and worker protections, low-wage service jobs have become ever more unattractive to the native born (Parrado and Kandel 2008; Striffler 2007). The majority of new migrant destinations are characterized by growing low-wage service sectors that target foreign workers (Leach and Bean 2008). Ivan Light (2006) suggests that market saturation in traditional destinations has intensified the push of the most recent arrived migrants toward new destinations where labor demand is greater and wages are higher.

New destination migration is concentrated in what Audrey Singer (2008) conceptualizes as *emerging* and *re-emerging* gateways. Emerging gateways are those American cities that have experienced “rapidly growing migrant pop-

ulations over the past twenty-five years alone” (9). Atlanta is a primary example of an emerging gateway. Re-emerging gateways are those that had a strong influx of migrants in the early twentieth century, then “waned as destinations during the middle of the century, but are now re-emerging” (9). Minneapolis-St. Paul and Seattle are examples. Singer also suggests that there has been a growth in *pre-emerging* gateways. These are places that are just beginning to see migrant settlement and are positioned to see their migrant populations grow in the future. New migrant destinations in the Mountain West—Utah, Wyoming, Montana and Idaho—would most appropriately be labeled as *pre-emerging*. Characterizing all types of new destinations are dynamic, growing economies that have spurred population growth of the native-born as well as of migrants.

New metropolitan destinations are home to a diversity of migrants. In new destinations in the Southwest and Southeast (Odem and Lacy 2009), the majority of migrants are Mexican.⁷ In contrast, in new metropolitan destinations in the Midwest and Northeast, which have large refugee settlements, Mexico is not the central sending country (Singer 2008). Another demographic change in immigration patterns can be found in the growing settlement of migrants in suburban areas. Singer (*ibid.*), for example, finds that the growth of suburban tech industries draws high-skilled Asians to the suburbs, while construction and landscaping work draws Mexicans and Central Americans to the same places (see also Mahler 1996, 1995; Odem 2008). Immigration in turn is revitalizing many areas of the United States that have undergone economic and population decline. Odem (2008) finds that in suburban Atlanta, for example, Latino migrants are reviving struggling areas by opening up stores and restaurants and filling up the housing stock.

Although immigration remains a predominantly urban and suburban phenomenon, new destination migration has also expanded into rural America. As family farms are replaced by corporate farms (Brown and Swanson 2003) and high-wage factory jobs in food processing and meatpacking are deunionized and relocated to rural areas where wages are lower (Hirschman and Massey 2008), the demographics of rural America are changing. Labor migrants are recruited to work in the new rural sectors. Most notably in the South and Midwest, economic restructuring has drawn Latinos, Mexicans in particular, to small towns that do not have a history of Latino migration (Deeb-Sossa and Bickham Mendez 2008; Hernandez León and Zuñiga 2000, 2003, 2005; Marrow 2011).

Yet Mexican migrants are not new to rural America. The Bracero program brought around 4 million Mexicans to rural American outposts to perform agricultural labor from 1942 to 1964. This labor flow was predom-

inantly male, and it was cyclical. Workers migrated in and out of agricultural areas following the agricultural season. When the Bracero program ended, the flow of both authorized and unauthorized migration from Mexico into the United States increased dramatically. As the demand for Mexican agricultural labor persisted, workers kept coming, though as newly labeled unauthorized laborers (Massey et al. 2002). Whereas an itinerant agricultural labor flow still exists, especially between U.S. agricultural states as workers follow the harvest, fewer workers now migrate back and forth between Mexico and the United States. Because the border has become more dangerous and expensive to cross, more Mexican agricultural workers have put down roots in rural America.

The demographics of contemporary labor migration into new rural destinations are different from those to new urban and suburban destinations. According to Jensen (2006), migrants to rural destinations are more likely than those to urban areas to be from rural Mexico, to have low levels of formal education, and to have migrated as families (see also Donato et al. 2008). Ethnographic accounts of migrants in the rural South (Hernandez León and Zuñiga 2000; Marrow 2011; Silver 2012) and Midwest (Diggs 2011; Millard and Chapa 2004; Naples 2007) have put the experience of migrants in rural places on the scholarly map. This book is the first to explore ethnographically the lives of migrants in the rural Mountain West, the newest and least studied of migrant destinations in the United States.

Labor Migration to Montana: The Transformation of the American West

Whereas food processing, commercial agriculture and manufacturing have been the principal draw of migrants to rural destinations in the South and Midwest, medium-scale agriculture and rural gentrification are at the base of Latino migration to the Mountain West. Mexican agricultural workers have been migrating to Montana for decades. Their migration story began in the 1920s as sugar beet workers in the fields of eastern Montana (Kevane 2008). This migration continued for forty years, formalized during World War II as part of the Bracero program. Although the Bracero program officially ended in the 1960s, many Mexican workers continued to cycle between Mexico and Montana, eventually putting down roots in and around Billings, home to Montana's oldest Mexican community (ibid.). In the late 1980s, labor migration in Montana shifted west, as Mexican men began migrating on H2A guest visas to work on cattle and sheep ranches. More recently Mexicans have migrated seasonally from Texas to work on potato farms near Bozeman,

and from Washington to work in the cherry orchards near Glacier National Park, while unauthorized Mexicans from Idaho, Washington and California keep southwest Montana's dairy industry afloat.

Agricultural migrants most often live in remote areas near or on the ranches and dairy farms where they work. They tend to be from the poorest and most rural parts of central Mexico, and they now live in the most rural areas of southwest Montana. Agricultural workers and their families are also the least educated of migrants, and the most marginalized, geographically and socially. Although ranch workers on H2A visas migrate to Montana directly from Mexico, living eight months of the year away from their families, most Mexican agricultural workers move to Montana from other U.S. Western states with their wives and children. Mexican agricultural workers in Montana trace their roots to the traditional migrant sending areas of central Mexico, most commonly Jalisco and San Luis Potosí.

Although agriculture remains Montana's largest industry and is the base of the longest-standing migrant stream into Montana, tourism and the second-home market are spurring a new, much larger migrant influx. In southwest Montana, Mexican construction workers and their families, the majority from Aguas Calientes and Zacatecas, come to Montana by way of Colorado, California, Kansas, Minnesota and other states to work primarily as masons, dry-wallers and roofers in the building of exclusive homes and resorts. Like Montana's agricultural workers, most construction workers and their families are from rural areas. Yet unlike agricultural workers, they tend to be from small to medium-size towns. Construction based families have replicated, whether intentionally or not, the semirurality of their childhood years in Mexico, by living on the periphery of southwest Montana's towns.

The migration of Mexican construction families has been generated by the rapidly changing economy of the rural Mountain West. Indeed, the pastoral countryside of southwest Montana is being transformed into a globalized countryside whose economy is shifting away from agricultural production and resource extraction toward consumption (Hines 2010; Keller et al. 2012; McCarthy 2008; Woods 2007). Wealthy urbanites, adventure-seeking service workers and high-tech professionals come to Montana to consume both the natural and urban-transplanted amenities of Montana's countryside—fly-fishing, world-class skiing, the wonders of Yellowstone National Park and quaint preserved historic downtowns with great shopping, cafes and restaurants—without needing to depend on the land's productivity for survival.

There are several factors driving this *lifestyle migration* into the New West (Krannich et al. 2011; Nelson et al. 2010; Nelson and Nelson 2011). For one,

technology now allows people to visit or live in remote rural areas while telecommuting to jobs in urban hubs (Rasker and Glick 1994). Individuals who have capitalized on financial markets are increasingly investing in second homes in rural areas, where they can enjoy the remoteness of the countryside while still having access to urban pleasures (Cloke 2006; Ghose 2004). Wealthy baby-boomer retirees are a significant segment of this population (Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Nelson and Cromartie 2009). So too are what Nelson et al. (2010) call *footloose service workers*: those who want to enjoy outdoor amenities while supporting themselves via low-end and high-end service work. In terms of the latter, southwest Montana has recently become home to high-tech companies that are strategizing ways to couple business with lifestyle.⁸

Geographers suggest that lifestyle migrants are also attracted to the countryside by a *rural idyll*, which is rooted in nostalgia for a simpler, innocent and more authentic time (Little and Austin 1996; Nelson et al. 2010). Historically, this idyll has drawn those seeking to escape the violence, moral corruption and insecurity of the industrial city for the refuge and simplicity of the countryside (Bunce 1994; 2003). The rural idyll is a social construction of rurality centered on tranquillity and “traditional” values. Family and community lie at its heart, which means that it is implicitly gendered. Women, specifically in their roles as mothers, are charged with reproducing the idyll’s values in daily life (Little and Austin 1996).

The surge of wealthy migrants into rural areas has spurred a parallel influx of labor migrants, the vast majority Mexican, to service their lifestyles: a form of *linked migration* (Nelson et al. 2010; Nelson and Hiemstra 2008). Saskia Sassen (1998) theorizes that labor migrants have been pulled into postindustrial global cities to perform the services that support the urban lifestyles of the financial elite. In a similar vein, as members of the financial elite relocate away from the cities to the countryside, labor migrants follow to build and clean their houses and do their landscaping (Nelson et al. 2010). The linked migration of urban capital and Mexican labor distinguishes migrant destinations in the Mountain West from many of those in the South and Midwest.⁹

Gentrification and linked migration have not been without tension. An influx of urban wealth into rural areas has meant a surge in home and property prices and consequent class ruptures within rural communities (Hammer and Winkler 2006). In southwest Montana, it is increasingly only well-resourced residents who can afford to live in town, while former residents have been pushed into the rural outskirts as well as into new suburban-like developments that have sprouted up on former agricultural lands.¹⁰ Tensions ensue between long-time residents and newcomers who tend not to share

the same values, politics or cultural preferences (Nelson and Hiemstra 2008; Ghose 2004; Smith and Krannich 2000). Ethnic tensions have developed too, as Latinos move into areas that for the past two centuries have been predominantly white and English-speaking.

Park and Pellow (2011) document another type of social tension connected to linked migration. In Aspen, Colorado, another gentrified area in the Mountain West, lifestyle migrants who identify as progressive environmentalists have built a political power base. In addition to organizing for environmental preservation, they are organizing against the presence of Mexican migrants in Aspen, who they claim are putting undue pressure on the land's resources. Park's and Pellow's research uncovers the racism and classism at the base of some environmental rhetoric, highlighting the hypocrisy of the new rural elite's partial progressivism, in which they simultaneously depend on and reject Mexican labor migration.

It was not until I had lived in Montana for many months that I recognized the parallel flow of Mexican labor migrants to which my lifestyle was connected. I am now critically conscious of the link between the lifestyle migration of which I am in some ways a part and the labor migration that services the many amenities that bring my semirural life urban comfort (see also Nelson et al. 2010).¹¹ And I am uncomfortably attuned to the coded racial tones of my adopted state's slogan, "The Last Best Place." I often reflect on the likelihood that for some, "The Last Best Place" is "best" because it is predominantly white and European. My reflections about the relationship between race and rural gentrification took even deeper root when, in the midst of the 2006 national immigration debates, a stream of editorials in the local newspaper written by lifestyle migrants from California warned Montanans not to let immigration ruin Montana the way it had ruined California. At the same time, white supremacists targeted migrants. Interestingly and important to this story, I speculate that the most immediate aggravating factor of the white supremacist activity was not Mexican migration specifically, but the migration of wealth into Montana. I have learned from my Montana-born students just how insecure lifestyle migration has made many working-class Montanans. This is an insecurity that some have taken out on the most vulnerable and conspicuous, Mexicans.

A migrant to Montana myself, I now write from an uneasy yet unique vantage point. For nine years, during six of which I was engaged in formal fieldwork, I have been immersed in two very different migrant realities. The first migrant reality is my own. I am a white university professor, a wife and mother, who shops at the local food co-op, drives a Subaru, and frequents

Bozeman's trendy bars and cafes. The other migrant reality is that of my Mexican friends and research participants who are marginalized from the amenities I take for granted, and are rendered invisible to most Montanans. Yet through my research I have learned that despite race, class and cultural differences, people living both realities share a deep appreciation of what Montana represents.

When I first began my field research I thought my future manuscript would tell the story of Mexican migrants' daily life struggles and the multiple barriers to incorporation that are unique to a new rural destination. And clearly, much of my data *does* tell this story. As I detail in future chapters, lack of services amenable to a migrant population, rough mountainous terrain and inhospitable winter weather, high housing costs near town centers and the persistent fear of deportation that results from the impossibility of anonymity in one of the whitest states in the country combine to make migrant life in Montana extraordinarily challenging.

However, my research also highlights a contrasting, seemingly paradoxical theme. Interspersed with migrants' narratives of struggle, isolation and anxiety are narratives espousing their adoration for and connection to Montana, a connection they told me they had not felt in the other places they have lived in the United States. All the migrants I met, whether man or woman, authorized or unauthorized, agricultural or construction worker, told me that if they are to live in the United States, they do not want to live anywhere else. In Montana they feel a sense of security and hope they have not felt elsewhere, and they feel they can be better husbands, wives, fathers and mothers. Men can provide for and protect their families. Women can offer their children a safe, beautiful place in which to grow up. And in Montana, both men and women feel a transnational connection to "home." Through my research I have learned that the rural idyll, despite its superficiality and whitewashing, has meaning, even for those it deems invisible. This book explores that meaning.

Gender and the New West

I did not enter this project with the intent of writing about gender and family. I originally thought this would be a study of race and incorporation in a new migrant destination, one that does not have the white-black binary of the New South (Marrow 2011) or the refugee-migrant mix of the Midwest (Singer 2008). Yet I quickly learned that while race and class delineate inequality *between* migrants and other populations in southwest Montana, gender delineates inequalities *within* Mexican families as well as highlights

the most poignant distinctions between the daily life experiences of migrants in different receiving areas. Gender led me into the most intimate spaces of migration and showed me how these spaces are altered by geographic context,¹² a story that has not yet been told.

One of my earliest field observations was that Mexican men are more publicly visible than Mexican women. Men spend their days on construction sites or working the land. They carpooled to their work sites and appeared a part of strong male networks. In contrast, I rarely saw women in public, save for at the food bank and community health clinic, which they visited infrequently, or at Spanish Mass once a month. Most often, if Mexican women were in public, they were with their husbands. In the fall of 2006 when I began my formal fieldwork, there were few jobs available for migrant women. Thus Mexican women spent most of their time at home, working to hold their families together and maintain their own sanity. Women's networks appeared weak and dispersed.

I also learned that while men were at much greater risk of deportation (see Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013), and indeed over the course of my fieldwork many men but no women were deported, it was women who had to hold family together following a deportation, a task made uniquely difficult by the vast physical terrain and the economic and social context of Montana. Yet, although isolated and uniquely burdened by their care duties, the migrant women I met asserted agency, choosing to stay in Montana for the well-being of their children, even if this meant fewer opportunities and more stress for themselves personally. I realized early on in my fieldwork that a few of my key observations were missing from, or counter to, research findings from traditional destinations, highlighting the ways the intricacies of place impact migrant life.

Today half of all international migrants are women, and increasingly women are migrating to work instead of for family reunification (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Growth in the care industry, including demand for nursing assistants, nannies and home health aides, partnered with a spike in domestic and commercial cleaning jobs, draws female migrants to the United States. In many cases women migrate without their children, leaving them behind to be cared for by close family and kin (Carling, Menjivar and Schmalzbauer 2012). This gender transformation in international migration has received increasing attention by scholars interested in transnational families (Abrego 2014; Dreby 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Parreñas 2001; Schmalzbauer 2005; Thai 2008) and the survival strategies migrant women adopt to care for their families in contexts of social and economic marginalization. Scholars place special emphasis on the importance of networks to

the well-being of migrant women and their families (Hagan 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kibria 1993; Menjívar 2000). Most recently research has introduced discussions of gender and illegality (Abrego 2014; Abrego and Menjívar 2011; Golash-Boza 2012, 2014; Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013), investigating the ways men and women are differentially affected by current immigration policy and legal regimes.

The vast majority of the research on gender and migration has focused in traditional migrant cities. There has been scant research on the gender-specific aspects of migration to new settlements,¹³ and no ethnographic research to date analyzing gender and migration in a new rural settlement. Although focused on Montana, this book provides theoretical insights into the gender dynamics of migration into rural areas throughout the United States, filling a conspicuous gap in the immigration literature.

This book also contributes a translocal and transnational analysis of how intersections of place and gender shape immigration.¹⁴ Instead of being solely determined by culture, gender expectations and prescriptions are embedded in transnational social structures. Hirsch (2003) advises scholars against overlooking the ways in which the fluidity of gender in migrants' home communities impacts gender formation in their host societies. Heeding Hirsch's advice, I explore gender's iterations in all the critical places, both in Mexico and the United States, where my research participants have lived.

As Mexico's economy has become more globalized and as technological advances have generated changes in domestic labor, gender relations in Mexico have changed. Gutmann's now classic ethnography (1996) on masculinity in Mexico City, for example, shows how "meanings of macho" have evolved with changing economic conditions. Gutmann finds men's roles as husbands and fathers were transformed as more women went to work outside of the home and joined community organizing efforts. Hirsch (2003) expands on Gutmann's analysis, suggesting that as more families in Mexico gain access to electricity, running water, dual incomes and globalized media, women's and men's attitudes about gender are evolving, though not necessarily uniformly. Gender expectations and experiences vary; some men and women are more flexible and open than others, but there is nothing to suggest that gender is ever static. Thus Mexicans do not migrate from "tradition" to "modernity" as they cross from Mexico into the United States. Instead their gendered selves are malleable throughout the process of migration and settlement, and may present themselves differently depending on the specific time and context of their lives.

Still, the regional context of women's and men's lives matters in terms of how they experience and perform gender (Gonzalez-López 2005). In urban

areas in Mexico, for example, women tend to have more access to employment, which gives them greater autonomy and power and therefore more options from which to choose how or if they want to create family. On the contrary, in rural Mexico, fewer economic opportunities for women mean they are more likely to find themselves dependent on men and marriage. This is not to say that rural Mexican men and women are intrinsically more conservative than their urban peers, but rather that the context of their lives shapes, in often pragmatic ways, their gender attitudes and practices (*ibid.*). Social position too can expand or limit the way individuals think about gender. For example, in both Mexican rural and urban contexts, women and men who have greater access to literacy and education, a privilege that tends to be rooted in class position, are more likely to be exposed to and adopt flexible gender norms (*ibid.*; Hirsch 2003).

In the United States too, urbanity and rurality are critical to the ways migrants experience gender. Hirsch (2003) finds that the anonymity of Atlanta, where she performed her field research, allows for more gender “transgressions” among migrant women than were feasible in their rural, home communities, where gossip serves as an important tool of social control. In Atlanta, women do not have to worry about being seen in public with men who are not their husbands because they can easily find places where no one knows or recognizes them. And because the women in Hirsch’s study are more likely to engage in wage work and to have access to transportation in Atlanta than in their home communities, they are more autonomous. Thus the urbanity of Atlanta prompts Hirsch’s participants to assert “modern” identities.

In Montana rurality and the economic opportunity structures connected to it are the source of rigidly scripted gender roles and expectations. As I detail in Chapter 2, migrant families were pulled to Montana for work in construction and agriculture, both of which are male-dominated. In Montana, female employment niches, such as those of care and cleaning, continue to be dominated by white, native-born women. As such, the economy of Montana is best suited for male labor migrants. Whereas a few women I met worked in Mexico and several worked in other states where they had lived, in Montana, most migrant women find their opportunities are limited. Montana’s economy pushes many into “traditional” domestic roles, which some embrace but others resent.

As another example, most Mexican migrants in Montana grew up in rural areas where women rarely learned how to drive. In other U.S. states they had access to public transportation. Yet the rurality of Montana means that migrants are car dependent. As such, migrant women, without easy access to

transportation and without jobs outside of the home, tend to be unduly isolated, which shapes their experience of daily life in powerful ways. Because migrants in Montana have to cope with economic and rurality-induced gender divides, social constructions of femininity and motherhood that emphasize sacrifice and care and constructions of masculinity and fatherhood that center on provision have gained currency in their lives (Dreby 2010).

Social position, as well as geographic context, shape rural women's gender expectations and practices. Over the past nine years I have observed how the rural idyll, for example, is gendered in its expectations and prescriptions. Julie Keller et al. (2012) present a narrative analysis of representations of rural femininity in two popular magazines, one aimed specifically at agricultural families, *Successful Farmer*, and one aimed at those aspiring to a country lifestyle, *Country Living*. They found that in the latter, themes of "escape" and "fantasy" aim to lure urbanites away from the stress of the city to the tranquillity of the countryside. Images prevail of women leaving their cell phones behind to make jam and bread and decorate their homes with rustic furniture salvaged from old farms. They label this phenomenon *transformative country chic*, suggesting that at the cultural level it symbolizes both the "rural in the feminine" and the "feminine in the rural." While rugged landscapes symbolize masculinity, the care and domestic work that permits families to live in these landscapes are constructed as feminine. Increasingly the latter is taking on a privileged, consumption-oriented significance.

When I first moved to Montana from Boston I was inspired by these trendy yet genuine efforts to "downshift" (see Schor 1992). In 2010 my husband, who has a graduate degree from an elite school, sold his "green" building business to stay home with our young children, remodel our house, tend our chickens, make yogurt, bake bread and plant a large organic garden. While typical gender norms are flipped in our family's case, class privilege lies at the base of our lifestyle choices and the flexibility with which my husband experiences his masculinity. It was not until I was years deep into my fieldwork with local Mexican families that I began to see the gender and class complexities involved in privileged homesteading. I began to understand in a deeper way why my own mom, who grew up on a small farm in Minnesota that did not have running water until she was nine, finds no romance in using an outhouse, while my husband, who lived in a cabin in the woods for a few years while working for a wilderness adventure organization, embraces the experience for bringing him closer to nature.

I now view the country chic phenomenon with a more critical and skeptical eye. I am aware of the striking irony that for Mexican migrant women, as for women in poor American agricultural families, sewing, outhouses and

domestic agricultural skills are part of survival. They do not represent choice, nor are they chic. For the Mexican women I know, as was true for my own mother, leaving an agrarian lifestyle marked a move toward modernity. And yet, while many Mexican migrant women left behind agricultural duties, they continue to carry the burden of the other domestic responsibilities necessary to maintaining a household. My mom, on the other hand, a white, English-speaking, U.S. citizen, moved on to university and a career as a social worker and then as an entrepreneur. She moved to the city, became a feminist, and never looked back.

In Montana, *country chic* coexists with what I call *survival femininities*, in which Mexican migrant women's social positions as they intersect with the specificities of Montana's economy and physical geography, urge them toward an often isolated role of domestic labor and *intensive mothering* (Hays 1996). Jessica Vasquez (2011) in her study of Mexican migrant families in urban California finds that working-class mothers often enter a *survival mode of parenting* in which they must spend the majority of their time working away from their children, leaving their children in many ways to fend for themselves. Survival femininities are different from a survival mode of parenting, in that although in both cases survival is the families' first priority, in the former survival work is focused mostly if not entirely in the home, because there are few opportunities for employment outside the home. As this comparison suggests, context shapes the ways poor and working-class migrant women perform motherhood.

In Montana, as divergent as are the lived experiences of women aspiring toward country chic and those living a survival femininity, their migrations to Montana both have roots in a globalizing countryside. And while country chic femininity is based on consuming the idyll of the countryside and survival femininity is based first and foremost on family sustainability, both are centered on the expectation that child-focused motherhood is central to womanhood, and the belief that it is easier to meet this expectation in Montana than elsewhere.

Researching and Writing through the Lens of Motherhood

This book is based on six years of ethnographic fieldwork in southwest Montana, where I immersed myself in the Mexican community. My formal fieldwork began in the fall of 2006 when I answered an email recruiting volunteer translators for our local food bank, which had seen an influx of Spanish-speaking clients. This volunteer stint led me deep into the Mexican migrant community. Through my participant observation I got to know

many migrant families well. In addition to participant observation, I did eighty-two formal in-depth interviews and three focus groups with migrant mothers, fathers and members of the second generation, both authorized and unauthorized.¹⁵ I followed six families closely over the six-year period, doing repeat interviews as well as spending extensive informal time with them. The majority of quotations in this book are drawn from my formal interviews, but several are drawn from informal conversations I had while in the field. Finally, I did fifteen in-depth interviews with key respondents in the community who interface with Mexican migrants on a regular basis. I use pseudonyms for all the migrants I interviewed. I use the real names of all key respondents who are public personas, except for three who requested a pseudonym.

As I detail in this book, there are unique challenges to being a labor migrant in Montana. Here it is impossible to be anonymous, which intensifies migrants' fears of being targeted. As such there were few reasons that migrants should have given me their trust when I began this research. I am white, middle class, and my native tongue is English. Yet I do speak Spanish, not perfectly, but well, which is unusual in Montana. I also know Mexico and Central America well, which allowed me to spark a cultural connection with Latinos I met. But in the context of earning the trust of my participants, neither my Spanish ability nor experiences abroad were as significant as my identity as a mother, a pregnant mother for a while, with a baby, toddler or small child at my side for much of my fieldwork.¹⁶

In the summer of 2007 I was invited to attend a Spanish Mass in Bozeman, the first of its kind in southwest Montana. I had become friendly with a few Mexican women who frequented the food bank, and they had invited me. I was both enthused and anxious about the invitation, as I still felt on the periphery of their community. I had intended to leave my son Micah, who was at the time only an infant, with my husband while I went to church. When he was invited to go hiking with friends, I agreed to take Micah with me. Although I was unsure about bringing a small baby, prone to crying, to a formal Mass, I was dedicated to honoring the women's invitation. With butterflies in my stomach, I strapped on my child carrier and headed to Mass.

As I entered the church my nerves quickly settled. Edith, one of the first women I met in my research, saw me and walked toward me smiling. I realized right away that she was smiling not at me but at Micah, who was wide-eyed and cooing. Within minutes I was surrounded by women who wanted to meet Micah.

The church was almost full and I sat down next to Edith and her family. As I looked around the church, I was struck by how many families were in

attendance. This was markedly different from church services I had attended in Boston, where I had lived and previously done fieldwork. There many migrants were men and women whose immediate families were in Honduras and El Salvador. Then my eyes caught on a group of single men in the back of the church. In the context of families, they stood out. I later learned that they were H2B workers, in Montana for eight months to work in the booming construction industry in Big Sky. After the Mass, as I was leaving the church, two of the men came over to me and reached their hands out to Micah. We chatted as one of the men took Micah in his arms and bounced him playfully. They told me that they had young children in Mexico.¹⁷ They had not seen them since early spring and were counting down the days, hours, minutes until their reunion in November.

During my fieldwork in Boston, many of my research participants were struck by my single, childless reality. Friendly joking and flirtations accentuated my identity as a straight, single, childless woman. The difference between my own identity and those of my participants was highlighted by my research focus on motherhood and transnational families. In Montana, the migrants I met embraced me initially *not* as a researcher or as a community activist, but as a mother. Micah, and soon after my pregnant belly, and then my daughter Zola, formed a bridge between me and my participants.

My young children ensured me a warm welcome wherever I went. And most important they privileged me with the confidence of the migrants I met. My participants hold family, and especially motherhood, in high esteem. Although I am not Mexican or a labor migrant, I am a mother, which gave me status among them. Gaining trust of the community was surprisingly easy. I just had to be who I was, a mother who cared deeply about the experiences of migrant families. As I have reflected elsewhere (see Schmalzbauer 2013), I am aware of the ways in which I unintentionally capitalized on my identity as a mother. And yet, to give this point too much pause would be to discredit my participants, who choose whom they want and do not want to trust, and whom they want to let into their lives.

Throughout my field research, my family and I were invited to baptisms, dances, children's birthday parties and other gatherings. I was also brought into family crises, in most cases when my language skills or ability to negotiate bureaucracy was helpful. Because of my entree into these intimate spaces, I observed things and heard things to which I likely would not have been privy if I had not had a child in my arms. As such, my position as a mother influenced the themes I highlight in this book. As I wrote earlier, I did not enter this research intending to write about gender, yet soon found gender central to my work. Upon reflection I realize the likelihood that at

least part of the reason I found gender to be central in my research is that it was central to my own life at the time. My identity as a new mom impacted the directions that my interviews often took, the private spaces within migrant families in which I found myself, the informal conversations I had in the field and the lens through which I analyzed my findings. Motherhood also influenced my own relationship to Montana and the rural idyll. Security, tranquillity and the natural beauty of the area took on new meaning in my life once I became a mother, while the city lost the strong appeal it had previously had. Here too I bonded with my participants, especially the migrant women I got to know as we were both settling into Montana and motherhood.

Because I lived in my field site before, during and after my fieldwork, my position in this ethnography extends beyond that of researcher to include mother, friend, professor, lifestyle migrant, general community member, activist and informal social worker. I have written myself into this ethnography in all of these capacities. I have done this *not* as an attempt to stand in for others who share these identities, but to make my own interpretive lens clear.

Outline of the book

This book unfolds in six substantive chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 2 describes the gender landscape of Mexican migration to southwest Montana. In this chapter I detail the economic structure that contextualizes migrant family life, the gender division of labor within migrant households and how transnational gender expectations interact with this context. In Chapter 3, I explore the ways in which Mexican migrants to Montana experience illegality, paying special attention to the gender aspects of illegality. I show the importance of rurality in shaping migrants' sense of security and insecurity, and I explore the ways in which illegality penetrates the emotional well-being of migrants, specifically as they try to manage their gendered roles within their families and their gendered positions within rural space. Chapter 4 interrogates the meaning of the rural idyll in the lives of Mexican migrants to Montana. In this chapter I use a transnational lens to investigate why Mexican migrants espouse a special connection to Montana that they have not felt elsewhere. In this chapter I suggest that natural landscapes and cultures of rurality cultivate feelings of belonging for migrants who are otherwise marginalized. I also highlight the ways in which the rural idyll is both gendered and raced, and I investigate the paradoxical relationship between belonging and exclusion. In Chapter 5, I discuss the impact of the Great Recession on migrant families in Montana, paying special attention to

the ways in which it altered gender divisions of family labor and challenged gender relations. Chapter 6 centers on the perspectives of the 1.5 and second generation. This chapter exemplifies the ways that childhood both transcends and is bound by geographic context, and how gender shapes the early part of the life course. Chapter 7 touts the importance of safe spaces and individuals, who bridge race and class divides, to migrant well-being. This chapter portrays the hope and opportunity that exist for migrant incorporation and community building in the New West. In Chapter 8, I conclude by returning to the book's title, paying special attention to the question mark at its end. Is Montana the last best place for Mexican migrants? I answer this question by theoretically interrogating my key findings and suggesting how the findings from Montana can inform immigration research more broadly. Overall, the goal of this book is to give readers an intimate look into the gendered lives of Mexican migrants to a new rural destination in the Mountain West, and in the process to show the importance of place in experiences of migration and incorporation.