"Living at a slant": Surviving, Achieving, and Failing in the Transborder World of the U.S. Mexico Region.

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Contesting Capitalism at the Margins. Panel B13 at conference RAI2020: Anthropology and Geography: Dialogues Past, Present and Future.

https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/rai2020/p/8317

17 September 2020

Paper title: "Living at a slant": Surviving, achieving, and failing in the transborder world of the U.S. Mexico region.

Paper Short abstract: Transborder living is precarious and an enormous challenge for Mexican origin women. Two case studies are presented that exemplifies the economic and social processes of constantly "slanting" and negotiating daily realities in the midst of a transnational capitalist context.

Paper Long abstract: Two case studies accentuate how Mexican origin women of the U.S Mexico Region carry enormous transborder responsibilities and innovate to great lengths in order to not only survive but excel sometimes tragically. Women guide the unfolding of that quest and are often caught between multiple transborder contexts beyond their control as they seek to ensure that the next generation does not suffer what they suffer now, and as they sacrifice themselves, and even their children, in order for those children to eventually become successful. Often the only way for many women to take hold of self and space in these circumstances is by a "slantwise" manner. That is,they slide into the edges of interstitial spaces and places in between great structures of economy and polity, creating the connectivities and spaces that can be negotiated, manipulated, and traversed.

This is critical of the bipolar model used in many discussions concerning the agency versus domination opposites along an axis. More important is the emphasis on "slantwise" behaviors and strategies having much to do with "going around," underneath, sideways, or slipping by the structures of economy and power in order to access or to acquire needed resources and legitimacy in a context of alienation or marginalization. As the case studies show sometimes success has tragic consequences unforeseen in this quest for survival and achievement in a transborder world.

A few bits of thinking considerations of the phenomena of the border region need some consideration.

The Double Helix of Transborder Living and "Whiteness"

- Persistence of the Border
- Whiteness as normative
- Twistedness
  - Racialism
  - Commoditization

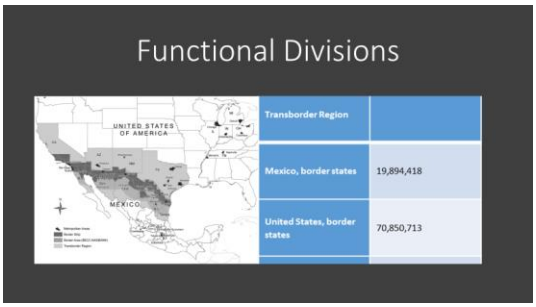
But is important to note that this is a regional phenomenon of common ecologies and integrated unequal political economies of labor, commerce, trade, and natural resources here depicted as Southwest North America in Figure 4.0.

Political Ecology of the Southwest North American Region

- Normally referred to as the U.S. Mexico border region, this more ecologically based notion includes the massive transborder geography of a land mass larger than Germany, Italy, Spain, France, Great Britain, and the Low Countries, and includes the six Mexican states of Baja California, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Nuevo Leon, Sonora, and Tamaulipas, and the four American states of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. But more importantly, this includes the massive interconnecting transborder rivers of the Rio Grande and Colorado, the massive interconnecting Chihuahuan and Sonoran Deserts, the multitude of crosscutting riverine systems, the almost kissing cordilleras of the great Sierra Madre and Rocky Mountains, and numerous subecologies like the Madrelian Archipelagos as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 4.0 About Here

There is a massive regional economic movement from the central and southern parts of Mexico to the northern border areas (fig. 4.1), which has led to an economic and demographic explosion in the U.S. Mexico border states.[5]



<insert Figure 4.1 about here>

Regional Economy

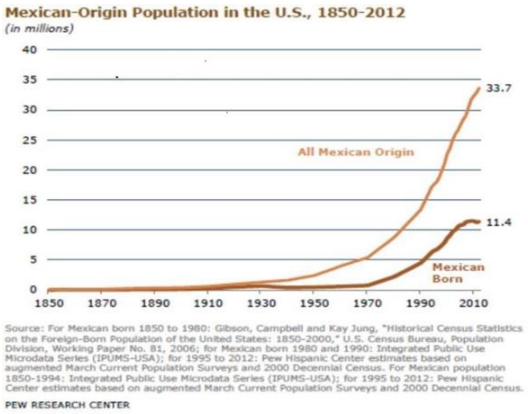
But there is more to it than this and that is the asymmetrical regional economy which looks like this:

Taking into account both imports and exports, the United States trades close to $700 billion in goods and services with Mexico. More than $400 billion in freight crossed the U.S.-Mexico border by truck and nearly $80 billion by rail in 2018 U.S. exports to Mexico support a combined 12 million U.S. jobs in exporting companies and their suppliers. But all of this is accentuated just four years ago by the pedestrian traffic was over 21 million and automobile passengers was over 40 million number and 76 million passenger cars. In terms of people traffic

the annual number of persons crossing is 137 million to work, visit, play, conduct business, or simply cross to get a hamburger. Remittances accounted for 30.6 billion dollars in 2017, and trade to the United States of 358 Billion in 2019. Then the old adage of "follow the money" easily explains how transborder labor markets can be created along with a type of regional centrality, especially for Mexico.[7]

(https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/mexican-immigrants-united-states-2017?gclid=Cj0KCQjwu8r4BRCzARIsAA21i_CRSeiuEWPuFFMVNmCSnRiDVkwW9vKxic54b2o3xvmwRIUae2YMP4IaAuEbEALw_wcB

The Mexicanization of former Anglo towns, and the creation of Mexican rural population settlements in vacant lands in the United States, termed "colonias," are now home to hundreds of thousands of people, 97 percent of whom are of Mexican origin and occupied with major urban growth as well..[6]



Insert Figure 4.2 about here

And what in part accounts for such growth? Now what have been sources of such growth from 1970 to the present. Mexico's agricultural miracle of the "Green Revolution" ceased in 1965 and demographically the population increased from 1970 to 1990 from 50 million to 90 million so that food began to be imported again. As well, peso devaluation struck the costs of many basic goods glued to a peso devaluation and as well increasing public debt. In part these

costs were somewhat offset by the oil boom of the 1970s and then oil depression preceded by spending binges by the 1980's. Devaluation occurred again, capital flight increased, corruption exploded and in by 1987 the inflation rate was 159%. Austerity measures were put into place to pay the debt accrued, wages dropped, and basic commodity prices arose. Then Mr. NAFTA was introduced in 1994, imported American corn itself heavily subsidized was exported and basically drove small Mexican corn producers out of business with its domestic corn production dropping 50%. Consequently, large scale migration from the south to north and with it the rise of drug trade in earnest as a corporate enterprise organized by Mexican Cartels. [i] Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. About Here

From 2010 to the present more Central Americans than Mexican migrated north due to violence, extortion, and gang murders the latter of which were basically generated by deported Salvadoran gang members from Los Angeles, California, USA. We don't have the time to discuss this aspect more fully.

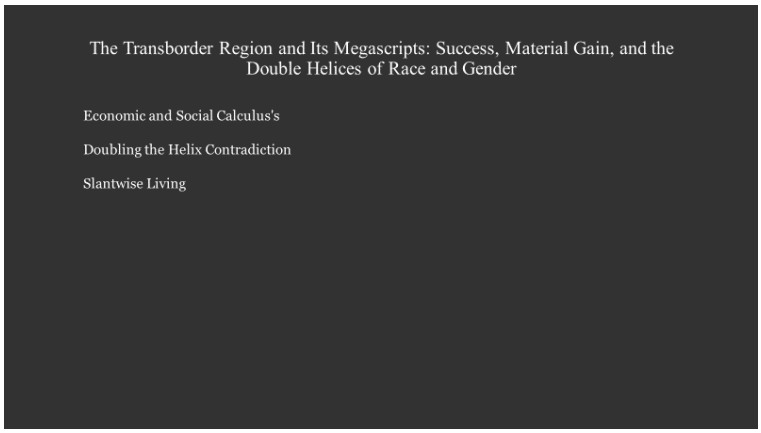
Regarding the Southwest North America Region, I would suggest that we can no longer consider the border to be a place to cross, or merely a "border." Rather, the U.S.-Mexico border region has become the central axis and node for trade, commerce, population crossing and re-crossing, linguistic experimentation, institutional development, academic interest, population settlement, class creations and divisions, and cultural emergence and conflict. In this lie the great contradictions of citizenship, unitary cultural identity, and "one-nation and one-culture" premises. In a peculiar sense, the "border" has become the center from which populations and material travel throughout both nations to peripheral locations in the Southwest North America Region, the East Coast, the Deep South, and the Midwest. This is, however, a subject for another book, but suffice it to say that the regional importance of Southwest North America as a center will continue in spite of 9/11. Economic and cultural practices like ROSCAs are emblematic of the "diaspora" of economy and polity throughout the Southwest North America Region and its creation as an important center of influence and expansion that radiates out.

The border region center is a persistent and dynamic presence that is characterized as a "transnational," transgenerational, and transcultural phenomenon that permeates the region's historical shape and memory. Its creation and continuance is part and parcel of its institutionalism since the U.S.-Mexican War and the Treaty of Mesilla, and it is not just imaginary or a "cultural artifact." Instead, it entails lived, experientially supported, empirical realities. The border center is carried within, whether by a third-generation schoolteacher in Mecca, California, in the middle of the Coachella Valley; a fifth-generation anthropologist; or a recently graduated undocumented computer specialist from Mexico City working as a painter in Phoenix, Arizona. Because of the constant reminders in and around us---all of this center's existence, persistence, and often-masked actuality---it becomes an unthought-of presence.

The following discussion broadly describes some of the major megascripts that guide human behavior in the region, using ROSCAs embedded in people's daily lives as a lens for the study. Yet, as will be seen, these megascripts themselves are like all human inventions: problematic and contradictory for the people who follow them. The region offers an opportunity

to fundamentally understand how gender and race are often primary for the playing out of megascripts, as will be shown in the case studies of dos mujeres sin fin (two women who never quit).

The Transborder Region and Its Megascripts: Success, Material Gain, and the Double Helices of Race and Gender



The transborder region's underlying megascript[8] is the quest for individual and familial success and material gain, with their accompanying social, political, and cultural perks, with rationalizations utilizing the presence of melanin sometimes thrown in as justifications. The notion of megascripts refers to ideologically driven, naturalized rationalizations of power, dominance, and exploitation buttressed by local and regional scripts. These may be constituted and expressed as "values," beliefs, rituals, symbols, and accepted "civil" discourses of many sorts. The "successes" of nations, regions, and global markets---formed and rationalized by centuries of colonial economics, nineteenth-century industrial national and transborder capitalism, and now global and transnational chains of production and labor---are linked through institutions to households and individuals by both material reality and agreed-to megascripts that filter down to local fields and arenas. At local levels, people who want the best for their children

rarely question the script. With that implicit agreement, scripts of various sorts become legitimate rather than coercive. Individuals believe that following these scripts is in their best interests, with observation providing the empirical support for that assertion.

The prevailing educational system, messages and information directly championed by national and international groups and institutions, and expected behaviors associated with those systems and institutions manage and transmit these megascripts. Thus, "consumerism" is a megascript in the United States that drives much of its economic system through elaborated debt structures. Individuals, groups, networks, and corporative bodies must function within these structures, so that "consumer spending" becomes the hallmark of economic success and a measure of the health of the U.S. economy. Yet the efficacy of that spending in times of economic uncertainty goes unquestioned. Being a consumer rather than a producer becomes a legitimate activity and an aspiration shared with others.

Unappreciated but certainly undergirding this script is a U.S. version of "success," so that the allegedly central premise of the consumer-driven economy is a successful one for all participants. The "success" megascript is the driving premise for migration, maquiladoras, use of low-paid labor by businesses, and many of the political scripts that spin off it that are both in opposition to and in support of the larger script. Thus, at one level, transborder cooperation between Mexican and U.S. health authorities seeks a "safer" means of ensuring healthy cross-border traffic and simultaneously labels the Mexican side as a source of undesirable diseases to be "kept out." There are double messages in this last example: The United States wants only the healthiest of labor migrants, which may lead to their own "success" even as they contribute to their employers' "success." At the same time, it maintains a medicalized negative perception of those "others" across the border, as people who are unhealthy might become a public health hazard, and from this perspective, in reality, are a potential liability to continued U.S. economic health.

The Double Helices of Race and Gender\

Given this penetrating and agreed-to megascript, success-driven actions easily convince populations these scripts are "normative" and "natural." Thus, at the level of action, people also agree to the scraping of labor and energy value from things and people, including oneself, to achieve success. Institutions of many sorts support these scripts, and it is the case that judicial authorities of various sorts, including police and judicial agencies, protect the privilege of individual achievement and success. "Illegal" border crossers certainly are chastised for their attempts to follow the megascript of individual success because it is restricted to those of us who are "citizens"---a privileged status often associated with the absence of melanin and/or cultural concerns, especially in relation to language, familial dynamics, body shapes and sizes, and simple things such as dress, proxemics, and sundry other cultural expressions. There may be something to the notion that if one has a greater amount of melanin, is elderly, a woman, Mexican, short, poor, and left-handed then there is less probability of being or becoming successful.

Transborder living gives us an unusually twisted manner in which to consider another dimension of this individualistic megascript. For many in the Southwest North America Region, transborder populations carry double helices from both sides of the border. I am using this of course as a metaphor to indicate tightly coiled but also flexible and racialized historical scripts and strands about gender and melanin that people use to rationalize the previous statement about the most negative of social characteristics. The first strand of the helix---often promulgated by machista ideologies of women as secondary partners or, worse, as only valuable for their bodies---passes through the Spanish colonial and Mexican Republic periods. Too many Mexican households in the present and even women themselves reproduce these patri-centered ideologies. Males especially see themselves as privileged to acquire all the trappings of success in comparison to women, who must be secondary partners deriving their own success from their husbands. This version of sexism then moves north to join with that which Americans and Mexicans before the U.S.-Mexican War and during the Spanish colonial period had already established long ago.

A second, melanin-defined strand harkens back to the racialized Spanish caste system. Mexican familial practices and ideologies of darkness and lightness (with the latter a positive attribute despite great nationalistic and public attention to the great pre-Hispanic indigenous past, especially after the Mexican Revolution) informally reinforce it. Class divisions in Mexico are often articulated along melanin-measured dimensions. Certainly, regardless of the public expressions about the wonder of Mesoamerican civilizations, elites and bleached-blond, upper-class women express a preference for "whiteness," with the males expressing a preference toward dark-skinned consorts and light-skinned wives and children. Mexican class-related whiteness is accentuated in most media of expression. When a new baby comes along, grandmothers often ask first, "¿Cómo es?" ("What color?"), rather than asking if the infant is healthy. There is a tacit agreement that an answer of "light" will privilege the child with an easier lot in life because less melanin is positively valued.[9] However, because upward mobility is hindered by class privilege in Mexico---the domain of the elite and the ever-growing wealthy---the professional class increasingly works two or three jobs or migrates to Europe and, especially, to Canada and the United States. Both countries have benefited enormously, especially in the sciences and mathematics. Nevertheless, the racialized strand also moves north with all classes, as it always has since the Spanish colonial period. Thus, racialization is part of the Mexican cultural repertoire, just as sexism is. Combining the two creates the "other" within the first half of the same, and just as twisted, double helix.

However, there is another strand of the second half of the double helix for Mexicans who have had the border cross them and those who cross the border. That is, the third strand consists of Mexicans being regarded as only "cheap labor," creating a strand of an identity as a basic "commodity." "Mexican" and cheap labor become one and the same, and achievement is not included as part of the formula. There is a long history to how this occurred, but without too much embellishment, Mexican-origin populations in border regions try like mad to rid themselves of the degrading term "Mexican." In that effort, many attempt to take on respectability by labeling themselves with more-accepted terms such as Hispanic or Latino or

other versions. In a previous work (Vélez-Ibáñez 2004a), I traced the human rights dimensions of a commodity-based identity that, coupled with melanin preferences in the United States that privilege "whiteness," racializes Mexican-origin populations' low status. Even when contradicted by individual achievements and historical reality, such racialized strands of the double helix remain in place, and they are accentuated institutionally, as the case study in this chapter illustrates. Thus, Mexican-origin populations carry the burden of contradicting the homebred Mexican racialism generated from entirely different histories and the American commodity-based racialism encountered since the nineteenth century from the outstretched imaginings of Manifest Destiny and the need for "cheap labor."

The fourth strand is a complicated twist of commoditization, sexism, and racialized identity. For many foreign-born and first-generation Mexican women, especially, their commodity identity is gendered and associated with housework, caretaking of Anglo children and Anglo elderly, and service employment. The shadow cast on Mexican women and often replayed in the public sector by movies, television, and newspapers is too obvious to repeat here, but suffice it to say that such repeated associations with gender and commodity concretize a strand that is glued as the completing link to the double, twisted helix of racialized and commoditized identity for men and a gendered one, as well, for women.

Thus, in this transborder region, people must address these double helices on a daily basis, and as individuals, they have to deal with running smack into the prevailing megascripts that call for success, achievement, and individual mobility. This can make people a bit stressed.

Transborder Living and Gender

Coupled to this reality is the fact that transborder living also involves a way of emotionally, cognitively, socially, economically, and, most importantly, culturally deciphering and living out

the multitude of cultural scripts that transect daily existence because of border influences. Transborder living and remembrances touch all in the region and beyond it. Whether expressed in the latest anti-immigration T-shirt, intemperate ethnocentric remarks uttered by the ignorant in a clothing store, the daily life of people crossing our paths wearing Brooks Brothers suits with brown faces and Aztec noses, workers waiting patiently on the corner in 110 degree weather for a hopeful ride to a low-paying, backbreaking job, or the domestic worker making our bourgeois beds and caring and loving our children, the presence of the border and the necessity of transborder existences touch everyone within eyesight or earshot through the media, on the street, in our work places and schools, and in the multitudes of daily settings.[10] In a most contradictory manner, many transborder Mexicans have to live their lives constantly changing and shifting identities, outlooks, positions, and selves to cope with the double helix and the quest for achievement in a transborder reality.

Many women, especially, carry transborder adjustments, adaptations, and innovations to great lengths. The reason is fairly simple: they carry most of the weight of raising children, keeping hearth and home, and ensuring that relationships are maintained and that social capital is guarded and spent. They have to be sure that their families remain healthy, physically and emotionally, and above all, that the delicate "economic calculus" that transborder people manage and create is balanced and functional. They have to be sure that their "social calculus" operates to keep them just out of the reach of eviction from the apartment, or that it contributes to their being able to fix the aging means of transportation, or that it allows for a balance between eating well, eating poorly, or eating very little at all. These are terrible responsibilities, and because of the border, they become greatly problematic for many women in many different ways. These struggles are kept in the hidden folds of what seem to be daily "normal" experiences---things not spoken about nor much heeded. They seem to be normal, standard, stereotypically acceptable, and beyond analysis. But they are also double helical in that whatever sacrifices these women make for their children, it will be most likely in the name of a "better life," added opportunity, more education, and, finally, making sure that children get what the adult never had or could

have. Thus, the quest for achievement and success permeates many households. And the women guiding the unfolding of that quest are often caught between multiple transborder pressures to stay whole, in a nonindividualistic manner and crazy-making way, as they seek to ensure that the next generation does not suffer what they suffer now, and as they sacrifice themselves, and even their children, in order for those children to eventually become successful.

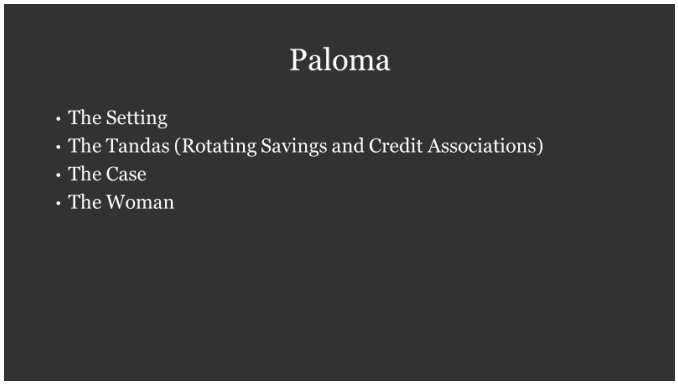
Slanting. Often the only way for many women to take hold of self and space in these circumstances is by creating, developing, adjusting, inventing, and simply innovating "best practices" for excellence and survival that coincide with broader megascripts. They, in fact, act in a "slantwise" manner.[11] That is, they slide into the edges of interstitial spaces and places that Wolf (1956) long ago suggested were anthropologists' province of study, because here, in between great structures of economy and polity, exist the connectivities and spaces that can be negotiated, manipulated, and traversed. At the same time, those having direct access to domains of influence and power often do not recognize these spaces.[12]

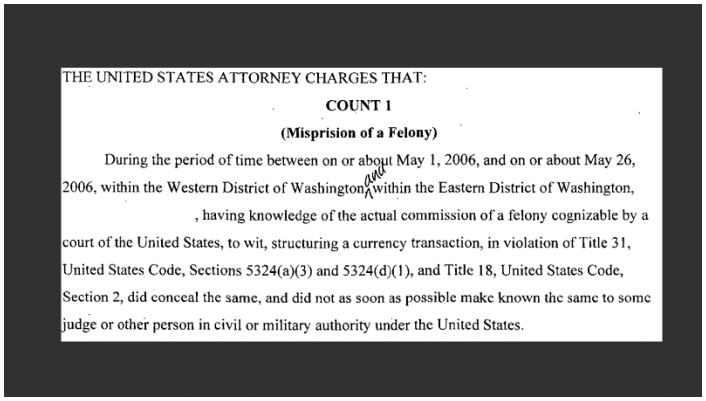
Howard Campbell and Josiah Heyman (2007), who coined the term "slantwise," concentrate less on its economic than on its political meaning and usage. They are critical of the bipolar model used in many discussions concerning the agency versus domination opposites along an axis. They emphasize acts that frustrate "the normal play of a given power relation by acting in ways that make sense in their own frameworks but are disconnected or oblivious to that power relationship's construction or assumptions" (2). However, I add to this idea with the notion that slantwise behaviors and strategies have much to do with borderlands populations "going around," underneath, sideways, or slipping by the structures of economy and power in order to access or to acquire needed resources and legitimacy in a context of alienation or marginalization. Just as importantly, they maneuver in between the spirals the double helices of transborder racialism and gendered existence.

In my estimation, transborder people are situated on the most advantageous and, simultaneously, on the most precarious social perches within those undefined interstitial spaces. They conduct and induce slantwise behaviors in order to excel, survive, support, and manage

their own and others' lives and in order to deal with the inherent contradictions that arise from following the megascript of success while simultaneously maneuvering between the vortices of the racialism, classicism, and gendered relations.

Paloma




THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY CHARGES THAT:

COUNT 1

(Misprision of a Felony)

During the period of time between on or about May 1, 2006, and on or about May 26, 2006, within the Western District of Washington and within the Eastern District of Washington, , having knowledge of the actual commission of a felony cognizable by a court of the United States, to wit, structuring a currency transaction, in violation of Title 31, United States Code, Sections 5324(a)(3) and 5324(d)(1), and Title 18, United States Code, Section 2, did conceal the same, and did not as soon as possible make known the same to some judge or other person in civil or military authority under the United States.

I met Paloma for the first time in a federal prison. I entered the colorless visiting room one cold, wet morning. Her attorney, Shelly Newman, and I had been ushered through security checkpoints by very efficient federal officers as we showed our "get in and out of jail" cards, which Shelly had previously obtained. Passing through two locked, inner rooms, we were led by an attending officer into a space that looked like a cheap "ballroom." Arrayed around it were a few glass-enclosed inner offices. Each served as the interview space for clients, lawyers, and their consultants.

I served as the latter. Shelly had asked me to serve as a consultant for Paloma's defense. She was charged with a number of federal criminal activities, not the least of which was money laundering, and given her less-than-privileged position as a socially defined "non-white" person, it was unbelievable that she was not engaged in illegal money deals given the level of wealth she had accumulated. Shelly had mentioned that Paloma had repeatedly told her that the money she earned was partially from organizing and participating in "tandas." So, Shelly decided to look into them, which led her to my 1983 book, Bonds of Mutual Trust. She contacted me and asked for my help in understanding how tandas, or ROSCAs, could have contributed to the wealth Paloma had created and earned.

As I explained to Shelly in our initial conversation, in urban and rural Mexico and the United States, tandas (as ROSCAs are known in central and southern Mexico) and cundinas (as they are called in northern Mexico) are of central utility for many people. ROSCAs cross class lines so that low-, modest-, and middle-income people participate in them in multiple sites. I added that they basically work on the principle of mutual trust (confianza) because a number of individuals contribute a set amount, weekly or monthly, to a pool. Each receives the amount in the pool once, based on a lottery or random-number selection. Essentially, the ROSCAS are still "slantwise" practices, in that they are not part of most institutional frameworks (except for some now-notable exceptions, as this work illustrates in other chapters).

The government based its case on the assumption that Paloma's modest income from working in a packing plant and as a fry cook and waitress, as well as working in the fields on weekends, was insufficient to generate the amount of monies necessary to buy properties. There had to be an extra-legal source for that money. Her properties included three houses and a duplex bought over a period of ten years. She also participated in the purchase of two cherry orchards in Oregon, where she and her family migrated to from California during the picking seasons. At different times, she had owned a secondhand 2000 Mercedes-Benz sedan, a Cadillac Escalade, and a 2000 Lincoln Navigator. At the time of her arrest, she was wearing a 24k gold necklace and chain matched by two heavy gold bracelets, and almost $5,000 was in her purse. All of it

was confiscated. A federal grand jury indicted her as a co-defendant with four others on a variety of drug charges. After a series of motions made by the defense attorney, she was separated from the others and charged solely with conspiracy to launder money, allegedly through land transactions with one of the four defendants, Mario García. Essentially, this indictment emerged from her agreeing to partner with García in the purchase of Oregon cherry orchards, allegedly using drug money, and according to the charge, for the purpose of growing marijuana.

These were the allegations in the case at the time I entered the "ballroom." It had numerous folding chairs, arranged in many different ways, and was filled with federal prisoners of all ilks, including young men and women in light green smocks, making the best of the time spent with their loved ones during visiting hours. A tattooed mother, tall and blond, held her squirming, pink-dressed child. Tears streamed down Mom's cheeks, while her own mother sitting nearby wept in tandem. Some fathers walked their two- and three-year-olds around the room. They seemed to be expressing glorious feelings for their kids simultaneous to their quick furtive looks of anxiety towards the two unsmiling guards, sitting on an upraised governmental gray desk along one wall, but prominently situated. The guards had microphones sitting nearby, by which they checked and then called the prisoner who was next to be visited.

What impressed me most strongly was that most of the prison population in that "ballroom" was Latino, African American, or Asian. Of the forty-eight or so individuals, only about eight were seemingly "Anglo." My estimate was that at least twenty were Latinas/os, ten were African Americans, and ten or so were "Asians" of various origins, including Filipino, Chinese, and Vietnamese. I did not observe any East Indians. We will return to this later.

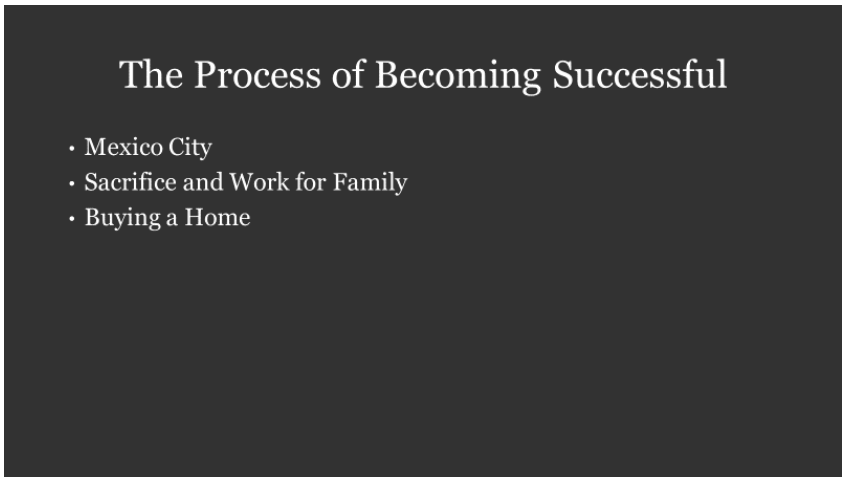
As we waited in the inner office, a dull, restrained, but powerful command was heard for Paloma to enter from a barred enclosure. A burly guard escorted her to an open bench next to our room. Shelly then was able to call her in, and it was there that I would come to know Paloma over the next few months.

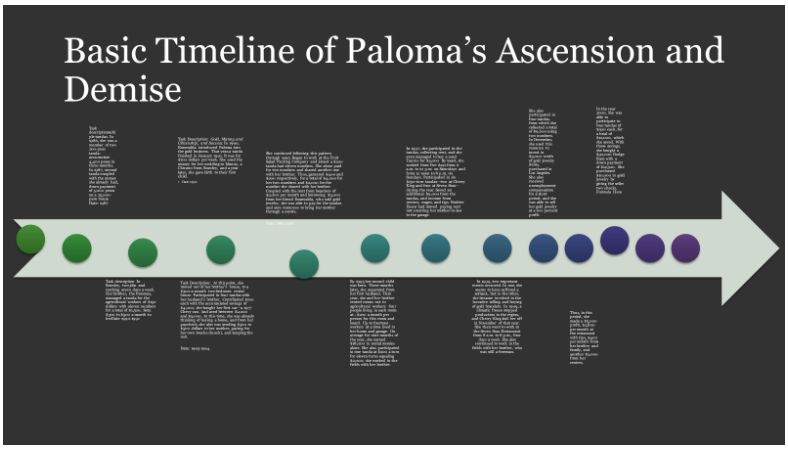
Shelly introduced me to a fragile, thin, and slightly hunched-over thirty-something Mexican woman, with large doe eyes, an angular face with no makeup, and hair combed into a

tight bun. She was dressed in the same kind of smocks all the other prisoners wore, except this one hung like a badly fitting, oversized prison sheet. She looked almost emaciated, with the clavicles of her shoulders pushing up to form two cloth pyramids, while the rest of the smock hung loosely, hiding any sense of her physical form. She sat down, and Shelly and I explained my role in the case. We told her that I would be trying to understand how she came to accumulate her wealth, especially that earned through the ROSCAs. Months of intensive interviews followed during winter 2005. The story, however, was more complex than just "calculating" how she got to this point in time. Instead, it was necessary to contextualize her abilities to establish hearth, home, and wealth---all in a matter of ten years---as part of her role in the local version of the megascript for whiteness.

The Process of Becoming Successful.

From a materialist point of view, Paloma always sought to be successful, whether in Mexico or in the United States. But things are not what they might seem.





Paloma was born in 1967, in what she referred to as a "wretched" rural town in Michoacán. She was one of fifteen siblings. Her father---a brutish, poor farmer who abused Paloma's mother throughout most of their marriage---moved the entire family to the State of Mexico, following in the footsteps of one of his older children. There, they lived in one of the commuter cities that surround Mexico City itself. The State of Mexico serves as a long-standing migratory space from rural areas, especially from the states of Michoacán and Oaxaca and from other communities in the State of Mexico itself. In fact, the commuter city where she lived is almost indistinguishable from the rest of the urbanizing areas that surround Mexico City, even when they are located in different state entities, not unlike the cities and towns in Virginia or Maryland in relation to Washington, D.C.

Although she attended middle school, she did not complete it, and she got a job in the same bakery where her violent and abusive father worked as a guard. What is salient about Paloma's economic and social behavior is that during her time in the bakery she held down two shifts: from 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m.

She also participated in multiple tandas. In 1986, she was a member of two 200-peso tandas. Both ran for three months, with eleven numbers. She held one number in each tanda, and when she was low on cash, her brother would lend her the weekly contributions. Thus, while paying 200 pesos each turn, she was able to accumulate 4,400 pesos in three months. In 1987, she again participated in a tanda, and coupled with the money she already had, she was able to

put a down payment of 5,000 pesos on a 25,000-peso house that she would share with her mother and siblings. Finally, her mother was able to escape the violence of her husband.

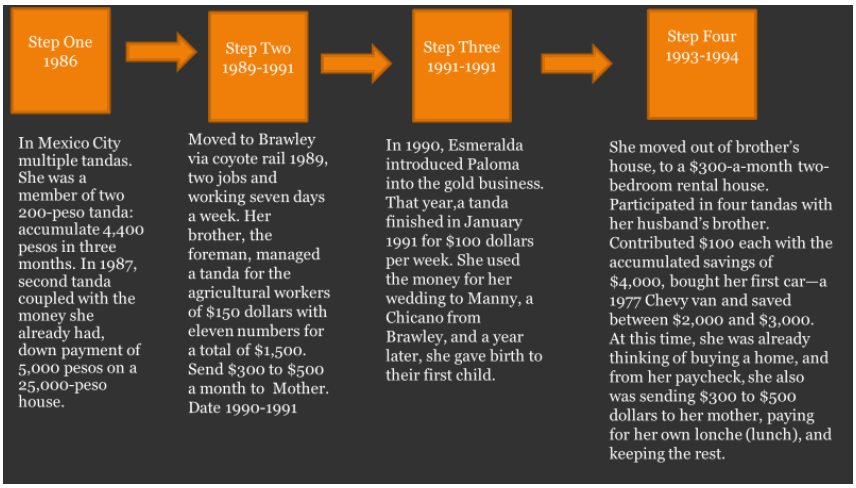
Thus, Paloma's early version of whiteness had much to do with altruism, not individual achievement. Moving her five siblings into this home set a pattern for home purchases---the sharing of her hearth with her brothers, sisters, and mother---as well as her participation in tandas, which was to become an important source of savings, investment, and purchase later in the United States.

Here it is important to signal how Mexican families of modest income initiate "slantwise" strategies to slice against their circumstances. They do so by pooling their resources in order to purchase major items like a home, car, land, or appliances. They also frequently purchase these goods from people they know, thereby getting reduced prices. In this case, Paloma bought the home from the sister of her brother-in-law (her sister's husband) for the price mentioned, even though it had a higher value.

This transaction also illustrates how Mexicans utilize kinship relations to conduct economic activities. People leverage their dense social relations. The glue for those relations is confianza or mutual trust, which is the highest value held among Mexicans and Mexican-origin populations in the United States, persisting with the latter at least through the third generation, until they become totally "white." In all of her transactions, Paloma relied on confianza to participate in the tandas. When she was not in a relationship of confianza with the organizer, then one of the participants would "lend" her the needed mutual trust. In other words, a trusted person may vouch for someone who is not known personally to the organizer (for example, an organizer of another ROSCA or a person involved in a transaction of another sort such as exchanging labor).

During 1987, while still working two shifts in the bakery, Paloma continued to participate in tandas. These now had thirty people each, with eleven numbers over three months. She participated in four altogether, generating 8,000 pesos, which she used to make her house payments, purchase furniture, and help support the eleven people now living in the house. In

1988 and 1989, she repeated the same pattern. By 1989, she had finished paying for the house, while continuing to help her mother as well. In 1989, she gave the house to her mother, and shortly thereafter, in 1990, she managed to go to the United States. She and two of her brothers moved in with another brother, who had established residence in Brawley, California, in 1982.

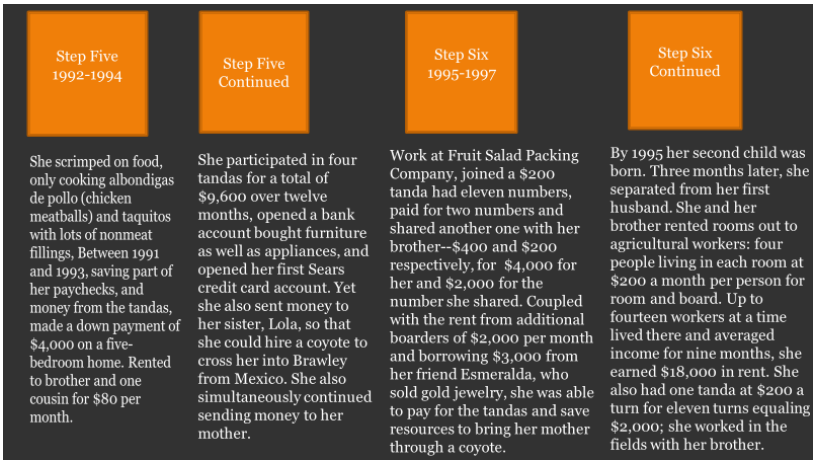


Her brother was a foreman in the agricultural fields, so in 1990, Paloma began working at $4.25 per hour for ten hours per day, from 6 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. She picked nectarines, peaches, and other fruits, [author query: meaning of end of the sentence; I'm not sure what "working by contracted amounts of table grapes" means She is contracted to pick a minimum of boxes of grapes] as well as working by contracted amounts of table grapes. During that first year, a fellow worker, who saw her struggling with baskets of fruit while she ascended a ladder, suggested that she work in something more suited to her size and strength and referred her to Acosta Foods which was a processing plant, [author query: do you want to identify this as a supermarket or packing plant or whatever it is?] where she began to work as well.

In Brawley, she continued her former pattern of holding down two jobs and working seven days a week. She also continued her pattern of participating in tandas. Her brother, the foreman, managed a tanda for the agricultural workers of $150 dollars with eleven numbers for a total of $1,500. With these funds, she was able to send $300 to $500 a month to her mother, and she also helped her brothers defray household expenses. As she explains, "I loved to work with

my friends and my brothers in Acosta and in the fields because it was more like a party, of people working together so you forgot the inconveniences of the heat, the bugs, and dirt of the fields, and the long hours in Acosta Foods."

Gold, Citizenship, and Success. In 1990, Esmeralda, one of her friends at Acosta Foods, began to sell gold bracelets. This piqued Paloma's interest, and slowly her friend introduced Paloma into the business. That year, she joined a tanda that finished in January 1991. It was for $100 dollars per week with eleven participants. She used the money for her wedding to Manny, a Chicano from Brawley, and a year later, she gave birth to their first child. Manny was an avenue toward her legal residency, and her U.S.-born child reinforced Paloma's claim to residency as well. However, she pointed out that Manny "was lazy and didn't have the balls to be successful even though he was a kind and responsible man." She said, "I had to do and think about everything. He just worked, came home, played with our child, was kind to me and his mother, but he didn't do anything."



At this point, she moved out of her brother's house, to a $300-a-month two-bedroom rental house. During the year, she again participated in four tandas with her husband's brother. They both contributed $100 each to an eleven-member tanda, and each received $1,000. With the accumulated savings of $4,000, she bought her first car---a 1977 Chevy van. In addition, Paloma

saved between $2,000 and $3,000. She stated that she had not thought about putting it in the bank because she "simply was not aware of it" (that is, the institution of banking), which basically meant that it was not part of her experience. At this time, she was already thinking of buying a home, and from her paycheck, she also was sending [sendingauthor query: saving? Or sending to her mom?] $300 to $500 dollars, paying for her own lonche (lunch), and keeping the rest.

At this time, she scrimped on food, only cooking albondigas de pollo (chicken meatballs) and taquitos with lots of nonmeat fillings, as well as buying very little meat or chicken for the meals she served her husband. Between 1991 and 1993, by scrimping on food, saving part of her paychecks, and acquiring money from the tandas, she was able to accumulate enough to make a down payment of $4,000 on a five-bedroom home on Calle Hanson in Brawley. One brother and one cousin moved in as well. Each paid her $80 per month, while she paid the balance of her $583-a-month mortgage from her wages, her husband's wages, and from tanda earnings when she was short. In 1993, she participated in four tandas for a total of $9,600 over twelve months, and for the first time, she opened a bank account (at a Bank of America branch), bought furniture for the bedrooms and living room as well as appliances, and opened her first Sears credit card account. She was well on her way to "whiteness." Yet she also sent money to her sister, Lola, so that she could hire a coyote to cross her into Brawley from Mexico. She also simultaneously continued sending money to her mother.

Thus, by 1993, three years after arriving in the United States, Paloma had combined monies from tandas, her salary, and the modest rents paid to her by the relatives. This served as the basis for her integration into the U.S. economy and her induction into the use of credit. However, none of these efforts probably would have come to fruition if it were not for the presence, use, and articulation of the dense social relations surrounding her. These are essential parts of slantwise living, for they facilitate, support, and make possible "sideways" penetration of capital and labor. These are not "white" practices, but rather the basis of local exchange and of

values, but not values of individual achievement and success nor of vertical mobility. I will return to the chronology of events shortly.

Density, Reciprocity, Exchange, and Confianza: Mediums of Slantwise Living

Mexicans and Mexican-origin populations in the United States, especially immigrant and first-generation individuals, participate in multiple dense relations with many people. Put differently, not only is a person a sister, friend, confidant, and blood kin, but in many cases, ritual and participation in many joint activities multiply these relations. Thus, Paloma's brother, Saul, is Paloma's compadre because she was the godmother at the baptism of one of Saul's children. In turn, Paloma is comadre to her brother and to his wife and also madrina (godmother) to the child. Saul and his wife are compadre and comadre, respectively, to Paloma's husband and to her.

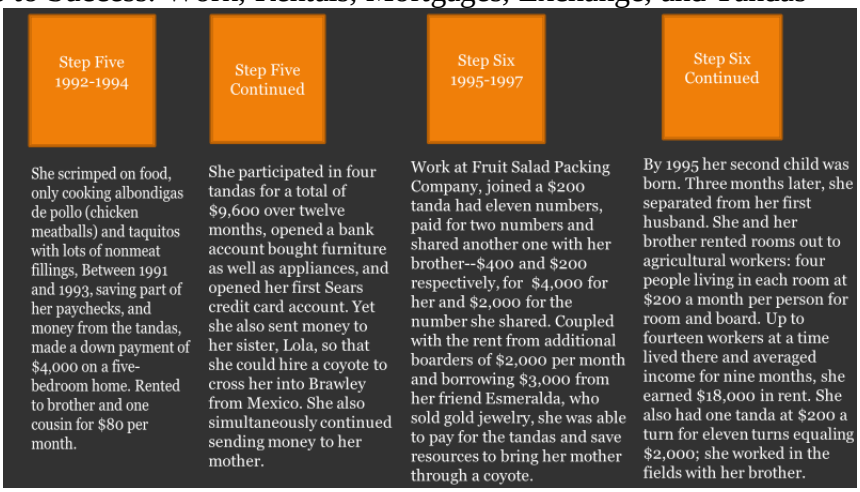
Other factors compound this density of relations. First, Saul paid for Paloma's trip to the United States. Second, he was Paloma's foreman in the fields. Third, she lived in his home for her first three years in Brawley. Fourth, and finally, she participated in tandas that he organized. When friendship, affection, and love are added to the mix, as well as daily verbal, emotive, and material exchanges of multiple sorts, then this density translates into the necessity to follow basic rules of reciprocity of both a general and a specific sort. These can be used as "slantwise" relations to access needed resources.

Reciprocity of a general sort rests on the idea that no specific value is placed on that which is exchanged. For example, there is no specific value attached when Paloma takes care of Saul's child or cooks him a meal or when Saul selects Paloma to be a worker in the fields he oversees. Only in a general sense will these exchanges be paid back sometime in the indeterminate future. Reciprocity of a specific kind does have a value, such as the amounts of money exchanged in the tandas following specific timetables and rules about payments. The latter, in this case of the tandas, however, cannot occur without the general reciprocal obligations already established through various contexts and relationships.

Thus, the underlying value for all of these general and specific reciprocal relations and the "thickness" of the dense relations are all based on a culturally valued, glue-like concept:

confianza, or mutual trust. Learned early in childhood and reinforced throughout the life cycle by ritual, material, and nonmaterial exchanges, and the proximity of those involved, confianza is the key value that lets us understand Paloma's success. It also lets us understand, in part, her failure in her final financial transaction, when she extended her confianza to a stranger, Mario García, simply because he was an intimate friend of her brothers. The key is that this repertoire of cultural practices and values are truly "slantwise" mediums for access to institutions and economic domains and fields.

More Pathways to Success: Work, Rentals, Mortgages, Exchange, and Tandas



By 1994, Paloma had stopped working at Acosta Foods due to a wholesale immigration raid in which many of its employees were deported. Her own status as a legal immigrant had not yet been confirmed, but her second child was born in August, which helped solidify her prospects for remaining in the country legally. Three months later, she separated from her first husband. That year, she and her brother, with whom she shared title to the home on Calle Hanson, decided to rent rooms out to the ever-present agricultural workers. This was not unusual throughout farming areas in the southwestern United States and in California's agricultural valleys. Brawley is centrally located in one, the Imperial Valley. Throughout the town, people rent out modestly priced rooms, garages, and even trailers standing in their backyards. Paloma was able to rent out rooms to agricultural workers from her hometown. She had four people living in each room. She

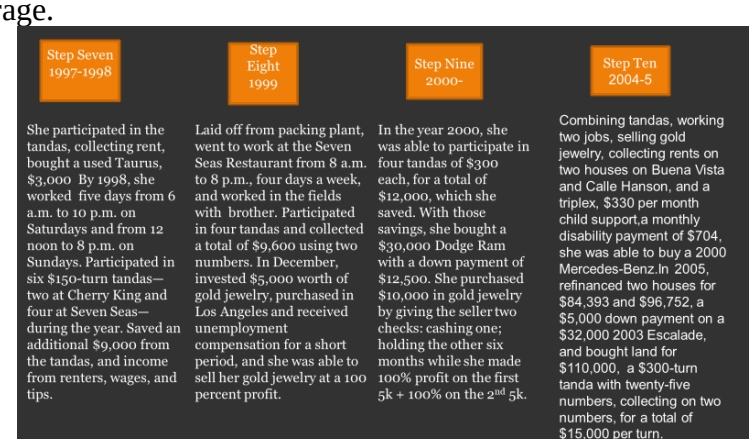
also made lonche (lunch and dinner) for all of them, and she charged $200 a month per person for this room and board. Up to fourteen workers at a time lived in her home and garage. On average, however, between March and November, a nine-month period that coincides with the area's agricultural cycle, Paloma rented to ten workers. Thus, for nine months of the year, she earned $18,000 in rental monies alone. She also participated in one tanda at $200 a turn for eleven turns equaling $2,000. Additionally, she worked in the fields with her brother. She arose at 3 a.m. to make taquitos for the workers. Then she went to work in the fields and the packing sheds, returning in the afternoon to make dinner for all of her renters.

She continued following this pattern through 1995. Additionally, she began to work at the Fruit Salad Packing Company and participated in a tanda organized by a woman named Marta. This $200 tanda had eleven numbers. She alone paid for two numbers and shared another one with her brother. Thus, in this tanda alone, she was able to garner $400 and $200 respectively, for a total of $4,000 for her two numbers and $2,000 for the number she shared with her brother. Coupled with the rent from boarders of $2,000 per month and borrowing $3,000 from her friend Esmeralda, who sold gold jewelry, she was able to pay for the tandas and save resources. She did this so successfully that, coupled with some borrowed money, she was able to pay a coyote to bring her mother, her sisters Lupe, Linda, Julia, Ronda, and her brother Eneos from Mexico.

By 1996, her sister Lupe had moved out and taken their mother with her, while Marga (another sister), Ronda, Julia, Eneos, and Orlando (another brother) all stayed at the house on Calle Hanson. Meanwhile, Paloma continued to work at the Fruit Salad Packing Company full time. On the weekends, she worked at the Seven Seas Restaurant, for $4.75 an hour for twelve hours each day, earning $60 daily plus $100 to $200 in tips, and, occasionally, as much as $400, especially during the holidays. She continued to rent the garage and two of the bedrooms to between five and six people, and in 1996, she participated in six $100-turn tandas with two turns in each. The tandas operated in both the Fruit Salad Packing Company and the Seven Seas Restaurant. She took two turns each in six tandas at $200 each for eleven turns.

In sum, during 1996, she earned an average of $4,600 from renters, $12,000 from tandas, $5,760 in wages from the restaurant, and an average of $7,200 in tips. Thus, not counting her income from the Fruit Salad Packing Company, she was able to generate $29,560. The tanda money, of course, she had to pay back at each turn that was not hers. Yet, from all of these sources, she was able to accumulate this level of resources. Again, this is not unusual in many Mexican communities, and especially for women who are very entrepreneurial.

Yet for Paloma, things were not easy. She had to use the money that she earned from her full-time job to cover her household expenses, to pay for medical care for her mother who had been hospitalized at least twice, and to pay back her friend Esmeralda for the $3,000 loan she had borrowed to bring her mother and siblings to the United States. During this period, Paloma remodeled the house at a cost of approximately $5,000, and her mother-in-law also moved into her refurbished garage.



In 1997, she continued participating in the tandas, collecting rent, and she even managed to buy a used Taurus for $3,000. She re-tiled her kitchen, living room, and bathroom at a cost of $2,000. The labor was provided as part of exchange relations between her brothers, her cousin, and friends.

By 1998, she began to work in Cherry King (a packing house) and continued working at the Seven Seas Restaurant during the weekend, from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Saturdays and from 12 noon to 8 p.m. on Sundays. She again participated in six $150-turn tandas---two at Cherry King and four at Seven Seas during the year. Thus, she saved an additional $9,000 from the tandas, as

well as earning income from renters, wages, and tips. By this time, her brother Eneos had moved in with his wife and two children, so a total of eleven persons lived in her home, not counting her mother-in-law in the garage. She received money from Eneos for household expenses and rent.

In 1999, two important events occurred. In one, she seems to have suffered a setback, but in the other, she became involved in the lucrative selling and buying of gold bracelets. In 1999, a climatic freeze stopped production in the region, and Cherry King laid her off in November of that year. She then went to work at the Seven Seas Restaurant from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., four days a week. She also continued to work in the fields with her brother, who was still a foreman.

She also participated in four tandas, from which she collected a total of $9,600 using two numbers. In December, she used this resource to invest in $5,000 worth of gold jewelry items, purchased in Los Angeles. She also received unemployment compensation for a short period, and she was able to sell her gold jewelry at a 100 percent profit.

Thus, in this period, she made a $5,000 profit, $2,800 per month at the restaurant with tips, $400 per month from her brother and family, and another $2,000 from her renters.

With this continuing source of income in the year 2000, she was able to participate in four tandas of $300 each, for a total of $12,000, which she saved. With that, she bought a $30,000 Dodge Ram with a down payment of $12,500. In this year, she was able to purchase $10,000 in gold jewelry by giving the seller two checks. The first was covered by savings from all the various sources already described; the second was a postdated check that the seller was not to cash for three months. Within those three months, Paloma sold a quarter of the jewelry at a 100 percent profit, thus making $5,000, which covered the postdated check. For the rest of the year, monies earned from this source were free and clear, although she saved $5,000 in order to buy the first installment of jewelry.

During this period, she sold the house in Mexico, which she had bought for 25,000 pesos thirteen years before, to her sister for 199,000 pesos, giving Paloma an 800 percent profit.

In 2001, she continued selling gold jewelry, earning between $5,000 and $7,000, and she participated in four tandas, each with $300 turns, from which she was able to recoup a total

$12,000. She also continued to work two jobs and collect rent. She was able to purchase a foreclosed triplex on West Downing for $99,000, with a down payment of $4,950. She immediately rented out each of the apartments, which covered the mortgage payment.

Thus, to sum up, by combining money from selling gold jewelry, renting rooms in her house, renting the triplex, working two jobs, and participating in tandas, she was able to purchase a second home on Buena Vista Drive and an apartment house for a total outlay of $166,000. By September 2005, these two properties were valued at $475,000.

By 2002, Paloma was in fact participating in two $300-turn tandas, one of eighteen turns and the other of twenty-five. She shared three numbers with her sister for a total of $900 per turn, or $450 each. Thus, in 2002, she collected a total of $16,200, and of that, she saved between $10,000 and $11,000. In 2003, she used these savings as part of the down payment for a fourth [author query:fifth is this the fifth? House on Calle Hanson, triplex, house on Buena Vista, and apartment house] real estate investment: another house. Simultaneously, she was still selling the gold jewelry, working two jobs, collecting rent from the triplex, which covered that mortgage, and paying for her first home from money collected from her tenants---brother, cousin, sisters, and temporary renters.

In March 2003, as was mentioned, she purchased her third house, on West Upton, with a down payment of $13,447 from the saved tanda monies. She then rented the house on Calle Hanson to her brother and his family for $850 in rent, while her mortgage payment on that house was only $580 per month. She moved into the West Upton house with her new common-law husband, having divorced Manny a year before, who now gave her child support of $330 a month. Seven months after the purchase of this third habitat, she was able to purchase yet a fourth home on Dorothea in Brawley.

She got the $22,500 down payment for the Dorothea home from three income-tax checks from her former husband, which she cashed for a total of $10,000, and from borrowing the balance: $5,000 from don Anastasio and $5,000 from don Benito. The remaining $2,250 came

from savings from two tandas in 2003 in which she saved a total of $9,000. She used the rest of that money for upgrades to this home so that she could eventually rent it out.

By 2004, still combining tandas, working two jobs, selling gold jewelry, collecting rents on her houses on Buena Vista and Calle Hanson, and the triplex, she was able to save $16,200 and pay don Benito the $5,000 owed. She also collected child support from Manny of $330 per month and had a monthly disability payment of $704. She was able to buy a 2000 Mercedes-Benz that only cost $9,600 because it had been crashed and rebuilt.

In January 2005, she refinanced two houses, one for $84,393 and the other for $96,752. With that, she paid the $5,000 owed to don Anastasio, put a $5,000 down payment on a $32,000 2003 Escalade, and, with the remainder, bought land in Brawley for $110,000. She simultaneously participated in a $300-turn tanda with twenty-five numbers, collecting on two numbers, for a total of $15,000 per turn.

In 2006, she borrowed on a line of credit for $99,999. With that and what was left from refinancing the two houses, she was able to purchase a trailer in Oregon for $85,000, paying $72,000 down, and she also made a down payment on a cherry orchard. When taking all the sources of income together---including rentals, selling gold jewelry, working two or more jobs, and participating in tandas from two to four times a year---it is very clear that between 1990 and 2006, Paloma had been able to parlay very limited resources into a position of real returns on her investments. She achieved this utilizing her hard work, ingenuity, and available capital resources from all sources. Clearly, she had established this pattern in Mexico years before. Up to this point, she was well on her way to whiteness.

In that year, a federal attorney indicted her for money laundering along with four other defendants.

Mario Garcia and the Cherry Orchard: Investment and the Misprison of a Felony

Jail, Pleas, and Misprision

Jail, Pleas, and Misprision

- The Arrest
  - The charges
  - The confiscations
- Conviction and Damage Control
  - Advice: Guilty Plea
  - Fortifeitures
  - No more investments
  - Admission of guilt

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY CHARGES THAT:

COUNT 1

(Misprision of a Felony)

During the period of time between on or about May 1, 2006, and on or about May 26, 2006, within the Western District of Washington and within the Eastern District of Washington, , having knowledge of the actual commission of a felony cognizable by a court of the United States, to wit, structuring a currency transaction, in violation of Title 31, United States Code, Sections 5324(a)(3) and 5324(d)(1), and Title 18, United States Code, Section 2, did conceal the same, and did not as soon as possible make known the same to some judge or other person in civil or military authority under the United States.

At almost every interview, one constant theme emerged: Paloma believed that all her economic activities were for the welfare of her two children. She stated incessantly that all the sacrifices she had made were so that her children did not want for an education, home, clothes, food, amenities, and certainly so that they could enjoy all the comforts of middle-class "white" living. [author query Streaming?] Rolling tears, sobbing spasms, and head shaking from side to side only served to support what she reiterated over and over again: she had worked so hard just to make sure that her family was safe and did not have to worry about the future.

Yet in this place of incarceration where the majority of persons looked almost like her, it was probable that many, if not most, had landed in this white institution with some of the same motivations, but with alternate methods of employment. In fact, Paloma had not laundered money but had entered a deal to buy cherry orchards with Mario García when her brother convinced her that his good friend Mario needed a partner who could be trusted and that he was a man of confianza. Indeed, that is what she did by in fact leveraging her purchased houses, land, and triplex and her Mercedes-Benz, Cadillac, and Navigator to partner with García to buy Oregon land for $150,000. She could not obtain her half by the closing date for the deal, so he paid for it all. Paloma also signed the purchase papers as co-purchaser with Mr. García. Soon after, but before her arrest, she repaid Mr. García for her half.

The indictment of the four defendants including Paloma alleged that she was part of a large-scale drug importation ring headed by Mr. García, who also had a number of businesses in Brawley. The monies resulting from drug sales explained not only his wealth but also Paloma's accumulated wealth. Thus, all of her homes, automobiles, jewelry, and cash, as well as any accounts with money, were confiscated, and her children were forced to live with relatives. Her common-law husband, who was an undocumented Mexican citizen, was arrested at the same time as she was, and he was quickly deported.

For six months, Shelly introduced evidence and was able to show that, in fact, Paloma's wealth was earned in the manner I have described. (The attorney, however, did not introduce the information on the tandas, as will be explained below.) Additionally, a forensic economist

supported the findings of how she had leveraged her holdings to accumulate the monies to buy the cherry orchard. This and other evidence presented to the judge before trial allowed Paloma to be separated from the others.

The federal attorney initiated a plea bargain, and in the process of developing it, Shelly consulted with a prominent judge from another district, who advised that given the backlash against immigration and all of the negative attention being given to the border that it was going to be impossible for Paloma to get a fair trial in the Southern California region. So, Shelley and Paloma made the decision to enter a guilty plea. The plea bargain required that Paloma would plead guilty to one count of misprision of a felony. This involved her admitting her guilt by acknowledging that she knew money laundering was taking place but did not report it. It also included the forfeiture of her part of the cherry orchard, two of her homes in Brawley, her land purchase in the same community, and all of her automobiles. The government magnanimously agreed that she could farm and harvest the cherry crop in the year of her release and keep the income. However, she was forbidden to seek any loans for the purposes of purchasing land or homes during her probation.

What finally became of her purse and its $5,000 and the 24k gold bracelets and necklaces? The purse was found, but evidently the valuables had been distributed among a number of local, state, and federal arresting agencies. Finders keepers.

She received a sentence that was equivalent to her time already served and probation for a number of years. Her residency in the United States was not compromised. Her admission of guilt reads as follows, written in printed letters and in Spanish; it is translated here and slightly amended to mask the identity of the judge.

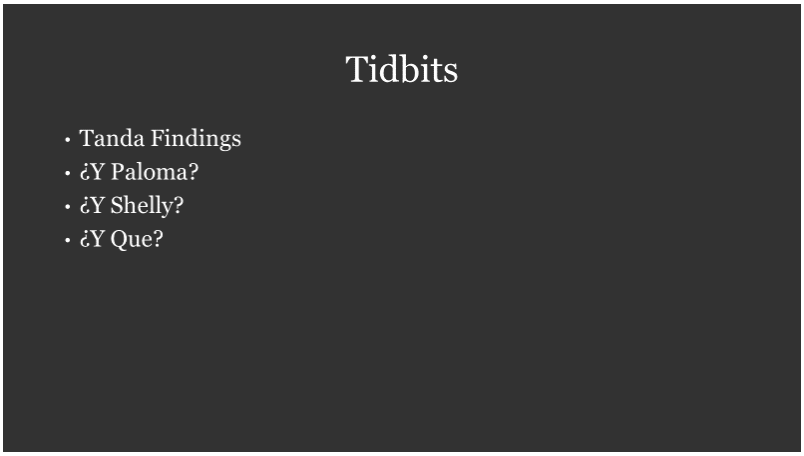
Mr. Judge:

My name is Paloma Rivera and I only want to ask your forgiveness for what I did. Because I only wanted to invest [sic]. Because I am a hard-working woman and I only thought of the best way of giving a better future to my children.

Sincerely,

Paloma<\>

She had become partially successful for a price that she could not have ever imagined.



But there is one last anthropological tidbit to chew on. None of my tanda findings were presented before the judge, either when the decision was handed down to separate Paloma from the other defendants or during the plea bargaining. From Shelly's point of view, the concepts of tandas and rotating savings and credit associations would not be accepted because of their cultural foreignness and lack of an American reference and, in my words, their culturally organized relations based on confianza rather than a highly stereotypic individualized value of personal achievement. This is the great contradiction, in that Paloma's individual success is due to her communal participation in tandas, but this practice cannot be presented as a defense because it is culturally too foreign for either prosecutor or judge to understand.

As for Paloma, she said she learned a hard lesson, in that sacrifice and work for her children had not helped them. She vowed to spend much more time caring for them and keeping them happy inside of their extended families. In the final analysis, these nonsuccess domains, together with their possible slanty features and density of relations, are the only, mostly, predictive arenas for emotional success and human contact.

As for Shelly, she wrote to me: “So thank you again, my friend, for your assistance in this case. I don’t know if we got absolute ‘justice’ (as if such a thing can be got in our current system), but we did significant damage control. I think she will be fine. I know she’ll have no problem on probation.”

Last Commentaries y Que?

Slantwise living, confianza, dense relations, affect, tandas, love, marriage, transborder living, and crossing borders cannot overcome the judicial and economic systems created to extract the maximum value from human beings. But Paloma like many other women have tried their very best, but in this case victimized, one woman directly by the American judicial system, and others in different ways culturally, socially, and even with economic successes, emotionally and psychologically directly and indirectly. For Paloma and like others the resulting loss, disappointment, grief, and psychic injury became important parts of their daily lives, but none of these defeated them but certainly marked them for good to different degrees.

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