OUTMIGRATION AND THE ELDERLY: A CASE STUDY OF
EMPOWERMENT BY AND FOR THE FORGOTTEN GENERATION IN
SAN PABLO HUIXTEPEC, OAXACA, MEXICO

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Forgotten Generation in San Pablo Huixtepec, Oaxaca, Mexico

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Over the last six decades migration within Mexico and to the United States has reshaped the social fabric of many Mexican families and communities. An overlooked phenomenon is the effect migration has on the elderly. As a large migrant community, San Pablo Huixtepec, Oaxaca, offers great insight into how those who are aging in Mexico are experiencing the long-term effects of outmigration. While most families benefit from the remittances received from and linkages between their family members in the US, outmigration along with a lack of state and federal support, have left many elderly in San Pablo in difficult social and cultural conditions. In response, a group of elderly community members joined together to organize a support group called 11 de Octubre (11th of October). The purpose of my research is to explore what it means to be a senior community member in rural Mexico in the 21st century by capturing the lived experiences of members of 11 de Octubre. My research serves as a case study on group empowerment and consists of two phases. In the first phase I collected quantitative data using surveys in order to explore participants’ ages, number of immediate relatives (son(s), daughter(s), or spouse) who are living in the U.S. or elsewhere, household size, and their relationship to household members. In the second phase I collected qualitative data by interviewing 15 participants. The interviews consisted of open ended questions in order to explore their subjective view of aging, their perceptions of 11 de Octubre, and what a support group like this means to them. Research on the elderly is critical to our understanding of shifts in family structure that impact a large segment of Mexico’s population and that have not been addressed through public policy or in familial and community social structures. This research provides insight into aging, shifts in traditional family structure, and the potential success of community-based programming that emerges from the elderly.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING MY RESEARCH PURPOSE

Mexican migration within Mexico and to the United States over the last six decades has reshaped the social fabric of many Mexican families and communities. As a result, communities that face high rates of outmigration confront a cultural shift that is redefining what it means to grow old in Mexico. The purpose of my research is to produce a case study that explores the lived experience of being a senior community member in rural Mexico in the 21st century. I do this by recounting the process of self-empowerment in creating an organization dedicated to the third generation, called 11 de Octubre (11th of October), and by capturing the lived experiences of several elderly individuals who form part of the support group. By capturing the process of creating an organization and the elderly’s views on what a non-familial, support group such as 11 de Octubre means to them, along with the services and personal enhancement it provides for them, I hope to contribute to the development of more community based support groups in other parts of Oaxaca and Mexico.

Mexico bears a confluence of prehistoric civilizations, colonization, and an ever growing transformation as the country increases its economic and political participation in global economies. Along with these movements come challenges that are greatly borne by rural areas in Mexico to include elimination of subsidies for farming, decreased autonomy for small-scale farmers, increased migration to urban centers, and an inability to employ workers with low levels of education. As a result, outmigration from the rural areas in Mexico has occurred in greater numbers and includes larger portions of families rather than the more traditional outmigration of one or two laborers. Understanding the effects of migration as dynamic processes requires a comprehensive examination of how such processes affect both the migrants and their families who remain in sending communities (Boyd 1989; Kearney 2004; Massey 1987; Massey et al. 2002). Most migration studies focus on the immigrant at
their destination (Antman 2010; Masferrer and Roberts 2012), with little research on the impacts to families at the point of departure.

As a large sending community, San Pablo Huixtepec in Oaxaca, Mexico, offers valuable insight into how the elderly experience shifts in more traditional familial support systems. I define elderly as adults in the third semester of their life and who have obtained sixty or more years (World Health Organization 2013). Where the elderly once formed a critical element of an extended family structure, today many of the elderly live alone and have little in the way of pensions or healthcare benefits. Oftentimes they do not have the means to secure items that allow them mobility including wheelchairs, walkers, canes, and medicine; many also are unable to secure daily necessities such as food, portable water and personal care, among other necessities. In response to these struggles, a group of elderly in San Pablo Huixtepec took it upon themselves to organize a support group called 11 de Octubre. Through the group, they are able to pool resources and create a social world that provides them with meaning. It is this type of non-familial support system that gives premise to my research.

In Mexico, elderly parents traditionally relied on family members to support their later stages of life. In turn, they provided wisdom, child care, light labor, and access to local gossip. For the purposes of this research, the term familial support refers to the multifaceted relationships between the elderly and their kin including but not limited to economic, emotional, and social support. According to Kanaiaupuni (2000), living alone is uncommon for many Mexican elderly due to economic instability for all family members, limited services or institutional assistance for the poor and the elderly, and because of sociocultural norms that emphasize the importance of the family as an integrated unit.

As a dynamic life process, living arrangements of a person are influenced by a variety of sociocultural factors that shift over a person’s lifetime. Those factors include:

…marital status, financial well-being, health status, and family size and structure, as well as cultural traditions such as kinship patterns, the value placed on living independently or with family members, and the availability of social services and social support, and the physical features of housing stock and local communities.

[Velkoff 2001:376]
However, the long-term absence of family members at communities of origin is beginning to redefine the traditional model of familial support for the elderly that in turn affects the way in which they experience their later stages of life.

Through statistical analysis of Mexican census data, Francisca Antman (2010) found that parents who have migrant children are affected emotionally and physically by their children’s absence. She posits that although it is commonly believed that parents should benefit from their migrant children’s remittances, little is known about what portion of remittances is actually going back to their elderly parents. Furthermore, parents who have children who lack the legal documentation to cross between borders may suffer emotionally from their children’s absence. Lastly, she asserts that parents may lack physical support in the form of hours of care from their children as a result of migration. She concludes by stating that the vast increase in migration in recent history combined with the rapidly growing elderly demographic in Mexico raises concerns over how the elderly will cope in such a context.

As a developing country, Mexico faces rapid rates of aging making this type of cultural transition a pressing issue. The Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO 2008) revealed that between 2005 and 2050 the population of adults 60-plus will be around 26 million, with 75% of this increase occurring after 2020. They project that in 2030 one in every six Mexicans will be 60 and over and by 2050 that ratio is expected to be one in every four. The strongest contributors to this rapid aging are falling fertility rates and longer life expectancies. However, the rapid growing aging demographic is not just a Mexican issue; rather, it is a global issue.

Cultural anthropologists have long been interested in kinship ties, rites of passages, and cultural and social constructions. Central to these themes were the voices of community elders who provided anthropologists with oral histories, folklories, and information regarding community dynamics (Sokolovsky 2009). Though historically elders have been involved as key informants to anthropologists, anthropologists remain relative newcomers to the field of aging and aging studies (Clark 1967).

By capturing the lived experiences of elderly individuals in rural Mexico I hope to shed light on what the aging experience means to individuals who exist within the larger context of local, national, and global transitions. In addition, my research will add to the
body of literature on aging through a description of the support group 11 de Octubre. The program can shed light on the ways in which the elderly view these types of non-familial support systems. Research such as this is important because “while measures of informal social interaction have been viewed as crucial in gerontological theory and research, too many studies have failed to examine the qualitative characteristics and cultural meaning that social networks hold for the elderly” (Sokolovsky 2009:377). In this way, my research may help the implementation of more non-familial support systems throughout other parts of Mexico.
CHAPTER 2

GLOBAL AGING AND GLOBALIZATION

GLOBAL AGING

In the following two sections I invoke a conversation about global aging and globalization. The conversation about global aging delineates the rapid aging occurring around the globe, illustrating the important role qualitative studies will play in the assessment of issues that arise from the rapid aging populations. The latter conversation on globalization will address the overarching aspects that have clearly played a part in the construction of the current social and cultural situation being lived by the elders in San Pablo Huixtepec.

In many parts of the world aging is a grave political and social concern because of the growing numbers of people living longer and the inability of traditional family structures to continue to incorporate them into extended family networks. Both developed and developing countries are going to see a drastic increase in the 60-plus sector of their populations in the near future. According to the National Institute on Aging (NIA 2007), in 2006 there were approximately 500 million people worldwide who were 65 years and older. By 2030 they estimate that this number will reach 1 billion, making one in every eight individuals on the planet 65 and older. More striking is the NIA’s estimation that a 140% increase in populations 65 and older will occur in developing countries by 2030, creating further stress on countries that already struggle with high levels of poverty and poor infrastructure.

Optimistically this rapid global aging represents accomplishments in health, medicine, and economic systems that aid people in overcoming obstacles to longevity (Kinsella 2009). Increasing the lifespan of humans, however, comes with great political, economic, and social responsibilities that includes planning for an aging population that will have a greater period of dependency on others. Developing countries especially must create social policies that adequately address the long-term care needs of the elderly who may lack the resources to live autonomously, such as health insurance or other forms of access to
healthcare and retirement programs that provide adequate resources for living (Giles and Mu 2007).

Studies have shown that the outmigration of children in developing countries has restructured the traditional familial support for the elderly (Hashimoto 1991). In China for example, the economic growth of the country that began in the 1980s has drawn young people from rural areas into more urban centers (Giles and Mu 2007; Yi and Wang 2003), leaving the elderly in their home communities. As a result, the traditional forms of extended family living together have been transformed similarly to that of Mexico, giving new meanings to old age and the aging experience in many parts of China.

For example, anthropologist Hong Zhang (2009) notes that amongst these new market forces and urban-centered development strategies in China, the aging experience for the elderly remaining in sending communities has taken on drastic changes. Not only do the elderly oftentimes end up caring for themselves and working long into their old age, but also they end up taking care of their grandchildren. Surprisingly, however, many elderly individuals reported that they would rather live by themselves as they did not want to be a burden on their family and it gave them a sense of independence.

Similarly Giles and Mu’s (2007) qualitative study in China examined the impact of elder parent health on the migration decision of adult children. Giles and Mu found that if an elder was ill it would reduce the probability that younger adult children would participate in the labor markets in an attempt to honor the traditional forms of familial support systems. However, these decisions to return often caused intrafamily conflict. The pressures of having to care for the ill parent caused conflict between siblings because those who had to return could no longer pursue economic growth in urban centers. This type of qualitative research gives depth and meaning to the way in which the elderly view themselves in the context of traditional family transformations and new pressures that families face when elders are left in sending communities.

The value of qualitative studies on aging in developing countries is especially crucial because changing models of traditional family support may be perceived differently by each individual, community, and nation thereby giving added value to the perceived subjectivity of each individual. In India for example, the traditional co-resident familial support for the elderly is changing throughout the country raising questions as to the benefits or
disadvantages of such a cultural shift. Moreover, this issue is leading to greater dialogue as “the new cultural spaces of aging constitute vehicles through which people are practicing, conceptualizing and debating not only aging, but also gender, generation, personhood, visions of the good and the bad, and the nature of India as a society, culture and nation” (Lamb 2009:438).

**GLOBALIZATION: SETTING THE STAGE**

In the 21st century with the rapid growth of human achievements in technological advancements, medicine, and scientific discoveries, what do all these human achievements really mean? How is today different from yesterday, and how will tomorrow appear? These rhetorical questions frame my reflection on this research. As we move forward in this ever interconnected and evolving world, what does it mean to reach the third generation of life during this ‘modern’ era? With these loaded questions I set the stage for my theoretical approach to my research which takes place in a contemporary time, dealing with very modern issues, which encapsulate a, some may argue, not so ‘modern’ demographic.

To begin setting the stage for my anthropological examination on the changes in familial dynamics due to outmigration, I begin by outlining the overarching conditions that have led to such changes. As such globalization, I argue, sets the backdrop to the story of worldwide changes in familial dynamics and aging. Globalization is the term “used to describe the movements or flows—of information, products, commodities, capital, and people across national boundaries” (Browner and Sargent 2011:6). While the global movement of such flows is not new, the 21st century has presented to us an undeniable connectivity of complex sociocultural, economic, and political relations. Denying such macro connectivity would limit our understanding of the local whether it is here at home in the U.S. or abroad. As stated by anthropologist Michael Kearney who invokes the work of the American Anthropological Association’s (AAA’s) 1994 *Survey of Departments*:

> In other words, we are dealing with “the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” 38:64. Furthermore, implicit in this idea is the assumption that globalization is deepening. [2004:218]

This intensification of worldwide interrelations has strengthened the tide of global changes that have transformed social-cultural, political and economic structures. Known as world
systems theory, “In this scheme, the expansion of markets into peripheral, nonmarket or premarket societies creates mobile populations that are prone to migrate” (Massey et al. 2002:13). Furthermore, Massey et al. state, “Migration is a natural outgrowth of the disruptions and dislocations that occur in this process of market expansion and penetration” (2002:13). Moreover, it is not just the expansion of the global markets, but rather, the expansion of technological advances that limit human labor needs while at the same time creating larger labor demand for educated and skill-specific labor that is not borne in the countryside. However, what is not clear from this transitional period are the long-term sociocultural effects of such global transitions. Through my interviews I aimed at capturing the larger long-term effects of outmigration and how the elders who remained in San Pablo are experiencing and articulating such cultural changes amidst the globalized world in which they live.

**THEORY: SUBJECTIVITY**

In San Pablo Huixtepec, migration has played a large role in sociocultural transformations of traditional family support systems for the elderly. The theoretical paradigms of development, dependency, and world systems have been the main theoretical approaches within anthropology for studies of migration. The primary focus has been the encapsulation of the national and international flows of people and commodities (Kearney 2004). However, these paradigms address more macro aspects of the system that influence the individual’s decision-making on migration, which limits our understanding of the actual lived experience of the people that anthropologists so often seek to capture. A void in data exists on those who do not migrate but rather either choose or have no other recourse but to remain in place. It is here that my research contributes to the advancement of research on migration and provides a foundation for future work.

In order to delve deeper into the individual lived experience and production of meaning from the elderly who remain in sending communities, my research is guided by subjectivity (Biehl et al. 2007). For the purpose of this thesis I invoke Biehl et al.’s description of subjectivity from their interdisciplinary volume. The volume explores contemporary forms of the human experience and how it is packed and unpacked through subjectivity, “subjectivity is the means of shaping sensibility. It is fear and optimism, anger
and forgiveness, lamination and pragmatism, chaos and order. It is the anticipation and articulation of self-criticism and renewal…” (Biehl et al. 2007:14). As so, my interviews were geared toward encouraging my participants to reflect on their experiences as individuals and then try to describe to me what these experiences feel like to them. By focusing on the subjective experience of each participant, I was able to better place the individual experience within the greater structure and dialogue occurring as a result of outmigration and shifts in traditional familial support patterns.

In addition to Biehl et al.’s description of subjectivity, I understand the paradigm to hold our participants as ‘subjects’ in multiple fields of life. As such, the way in which they experience phenomenon is through the prism of their multiple locations as subjects. Their experiences of a variety of phenomena such as underdeveloped public policy, family abandonment, poor economic conditions, and cultural transitions, were part of a larger dialog that forms the way in which they must make sense of their lives in a time of great transition. In this sense, I use subjectivity as a pragmatic tool to explore the deeper sociocultural, political, and philosophical issues facing the elders in San Pablo. As Biehl et al. state, “As we open up philosophical and ideological issues in current uses of subjectivity for productive discussion, we can also open the door to “capturing the moment,” the point in time between the subject and his or her sense of being alive” (2007:28). In capturing the moment through their subjective experience, I was able to glimpse the complexity that came with my participants’ articulation of their perceptions of San Pablo of today. As discussed in a later section, there is an irony that arises from the ideas of progress for the community and the belief that the younger generations have a better future. Articulating the present state of San Pablo and its ‘new’ culture was perhaps difficult for the elders because of the rapid changes in family and community structures that have all but left them behind.

To explore this idea I turn to the work of Homi K. Bhabha (1994), who asserts that culture is always being negotiated, redefined, and interpreted as we move along the continuum of time. The elders in San Pablo are in a sense in a state of liminality since they are not of the old but neither of the new, which makes it difficult for them to articulate the present. Bhabha (1994) asserts that changes in temporality create a blurriness or disorientation of who we are and where we are going. It’s a moment where notions of culture get redefined and rearticulated. In this context, ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ are not used as a
fixed image of the past, but rather as a fluid and dynamic process contemporary with and analogous to modernity (Bhabha 1994; Rabinow 2008).

By capturing the elders’ subjective experience I was able to capture the fluidity of culture and traditions mentioned above. More specifically, I noticed a change in the way certain cultural value placements shifted over time. Here I refer to Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘capital’ explored by David Swartz (1997) in his book *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Bourdieu saw individuals and groups drawing upon a variety of cultural, social, and symbolic resources in order to maintain and enhance their positions in the social order. Bourdieu categorized capital into four generic types of capital: economic (money and property), cultural (cultural goods and services including educational credentials), social (acquaintances and networks), and symbolic (legitimation) (Swartz 1997).

In the San Pablo of the past, more value was placed on cultural capital and less value was placed on economic capital. Elders were seen as holders of wisdom and knowledge, granting them the respect of the younger generations. However, with the increase in migration, education, technology and the infiltration of global markets in San Pablo, the elders are no longer seen as a viable resource in the attainment of social status or upward social mobility. Today, the tide has changed for the youth to get an education and join the skilled labor force, emphasizing economic capital as the main resource to maintain and enhance their positions in the social order. The above mentioned shifts will be discussed further in the sections below. My participants’ subjective experiences thus serves to shed light on not only their own lived experienced, but also on larger cultural transitions and formations taking place around them.

**METHODS**

My research took place in San Pablo Huijtepec, Oaxaca, where I spent a combined period of five months. I spent the last three months working closely with *11 de Octubre* while conducting my research. In order to delve into the question of what a group like *11 de Octubre* means to individuals who are part of the group, I surveyed 45 out of the 67 members and interviewed 15 participants including the group’s organizer, Don Rogelio, and the Dr. Simi (a non-profit organization) representative.
My research consisted of two phases. In the first phase I collected quantitative data using surveys in order to explore members’ demographics. I inquired about members’ ages, number of immediate relatives (sons, daughters, or spouses) who are living in the U.S. or elsewhere, household size, remittances, education, current or past occupation, and type of government aid if any. Surveys were one page in length and administered to all willing participants after their biweekly meeting. The group provided me with a table and chair outside the room where they met so I could conduct my surveys. I administered my surveys over a period of three meetings. The surveys were brief because the main objective of the surveys was to gain a demographic understanding of those who comprise this support group. However, the length of time I spent with each participant varied. While conducting my surveys it was a great opportunity to get to know the group members’ on a one-to-one basis. Some expressed to me that they admired my work and that they thought my research was interesting. Others would share a bit about themselves and were interested in learning more about my personal life.

In the second phase I collected qualitative data by conducting at home interviews. The interviews consisted of open ended questions designed to explore their subjective view on aging, the way in which they perceive the changing dynamics in the village and in traditional familial structures, perceptions of 11 de Octubre, and what a support group like this means to them. I interviewed 13 group members who were recruited at their biweekly meeting in addition to Don Rogelio and the Dr. Simi Foundation representative who works closely with the group. Participants who were interviewed from the group were volunteers that were notified of the project at a regular meeting. The first 13 volunteers were reviewed for qualification. All 13 volunteers qualified and formed the interviewees. Selection was thus random and voluntary. I was shown where each participant lived by one of the men who goes door-to-door notifying group members of meetings. Don Santos was gracious enough to volunteer his time to take me to each address. I would mark down the location of their home on my map and take a picture of their front door so that I could return at a later date.

The interviews took approximately one hour and were conducted in Spanish. Since the interviews were conducted at their homes, I would spend several hours with each participant talking and establishing a relationship outside of the interview script. At each home I was treated with respect and they always made me feel like a welcomed guest. I was
always offered something to eat or drink and participants always took the time to show me around their homes.

Additionally, I used the participant observation technique during their meetings. These meetings proved to be a great place to listen to and observe the group’s dynamic democratic process where within each individual’s opinion is heard and acknowledged. I also observed and worked closely with Don Rogelio in order to gain an understanding of the inner workings and administrative aspects of the group.

After all my interviews were conducted, I transcribed them and translated them from Spanish to English. As a native Spanish speaker with a college level of Spanish fluency, I was qualified to conduct the translations. After the translations and transcriptions of my interviews, I extracted themes that were then coded and trended for correlations. I looked for major themes and trends that formed the topics covered in this thesis. My transcripts, coding and themes were reviewed and verified as accurate by my advisor Dr. Ramona Pérez. Any discrepancies were discussed and agreement was reached by me and Dr. Pérez. All of the quotes in this thesis are in the English translation that I produced and I am solely responsible for any errors or misinterpretations.

The total number of interviews was too small to do much more than create collective trees that allowed me to focus on the major issues that are impacting their lives. These issues included access to adequate food resources, transportation, medical care, and loneliness. I discuss these issues within the context of the formation of 11 de Octubre, but focus more on the how the formation of their organization fills other kinds of needs and empowers them in a new way that appears to fall within Bourdieu’s idea of social capital. In the following chapters I provide a brief history of San Pablo, an overview of my entrance into the community and my relationship with the community members before embarking on a description of 11 de Octubre and the struggles faced by the elderly and their benefactors in a climate where their value as members of the community has declined alongside their own abilities to be independent.
CHAPTER 3

SAN PABLO HUIXTEPEC AND BEGINNING FIELDWORK

SAN PABLO HUIXTEPEC

Located in the region of the Valles Centrales, approximately twenty miles outside the capital city of Oaxaca sits San Pablo Huixtepec, or locally known as San Pablo. The quaint colonial village has a long history of Zapotec traditions mixed with colonial infusions. Today the inhabitants of San Pablo exhibit the *mestizaje* produced by a mixture of Zapotec and Spanish heritages. Phenotypic diversity in San Pablo runs the gamut of strong indigenous physical expressions to European traits such as light colored hair and light colored eyes.

The town’s beginnings are not quite clear in terms of its precontact history. The oldest archival records indicate that it was established around 1520 by the Spanish. As one walks through San Pablo, the desire of the community to retain its history while also demonstrating more modern architecture is very evident. The retention of Zapotec influence is seen through the contemporary rendition of an ear of corn as the central focus of the water feature in the town plaza that leads to the two story municipal building. The agricultural fields that surround the hub of town are also subtle reminders of the sustained retention of the Zapotec heritage. The colonial influences are seen in the church and chapels’ architecture, the municipal building arches, and also in the cemetery where large catholic symbols and sculptures beautifully honor those who rest beneath them. The impact of remittances is most evident in the modern style of people’s homes, internet cafes, satellite dishes on rooftops, and new cars and trucks. Along with these expressions of material gain are also U.S.-based gang related graffiti that marks territories, encapsulating some of the new identities that the youth often bring back with them from the U.S.
The town is composed of four major barrios or ‘neighborhoods’ called ‘el Barrio de Jesús,’ ‘el Barrio San Pablo,’ ‘el Barrio de la Soledad,’ and ‘el Barrio de San Antonio.’ The barrios form the hub of the municipality of San Pablo, which has approximately 8216 citizens according to Nuestro Mexico (n.d.). Out of those 8216 citizens, roughly 2996 people are minors and 5220 are adults; 1027, or 20%, of the adults are older than 60 years. The municipality is governed by elected officials and is composed of seven town council members that include the ‘Presidente Municipal,’ ‘Síndico,’ ‘Regidor de Hacienda,’ ‘Regidor de Educación,’ ‘Regidor de Seguridad,’ ‘Regidor de Transito,’ and ‘Vialidad y Regidor de Panteón’ all of whom serve a three-year term.

The rich soils of San Pablo are producers of crops such as corn, alfalfa, beans, tomato, chile de agua, agave, watermelon, and garbanzo among other yields that both feed the population and serve as resources for commerce. Livestock such as pigs, chickens, donkeys, horses, cattle, and goats are also used for commerce and consumption by the local populace. I was told by one of my participants that when she was growing up they always had pigs around and a few chickens just in case the weather was bad and the land did not produce. She explained that having that livestock was a sense of security. To this day she continues to take care of pigs and chickens despite being in her 80’s and living by herself.

**LOCAL CULTURE**

The culture of San Pablo vibrates with various social events and festivities. As a primarily Catholic society, San Pablo has various religious based festivities that celebrate different Catholic saints and religious holidays and occasions. As part of these religious festivities Sanpableños celebrate baptisms, first communions, confirmations, and marriages. There are also other communal celebrations that are nonreligious such as Mexican holidays, children’s school events, community events and quinceañeras (when a young lady turns fifteen). Most festivities and some social gatherings include live music and dancing. As part of the community traditions most of these celebrations are sponsored by mayordomías or tequios, which serve as forms of social services from community members.

At most celebrations guest will customarily bring food, cases of beer, soda, atole (a drink made from corn grain) or locally produced mezcal. The culinary delights of San Pablo include quesadillas, chalupas, tacos, mole negro and mole rojo, tamales, tortas, sweet
breads, and the newer additions such as hamburgers and hot dogs, among other dishes. Also, customary are tortillas that tend to complement much of Sanpableños’ meal regimen from breakfast to dinner.

During my time in San Pablo I attended several religious celebrations, family gatherings, and community events, which included the inception of a new sports complex for the youth, a Semana Santa celebration, a Mother’s Day celebration, and a book release of the historiography of San Pablo. At each event I was always treated with courtesy and respect. I tasted new foods, heard their local bands, and of course enjoyed their local mezcal.

**COMING TO SAN PABLO**

I first came to San Pablo on June 18, 2012 as part of a group of San Diego State University students who were taking part in a field school directed by Dr. Ramona Pérez. The field school was a six-week course that taught students about the intricacies of conducting field work and about the different theoretical and methodological approaches to such work. Our group of students was divided into several subgroups that conducted fieldwork in one of two locations. I was assigned to go to San Pablo Huixtepec. As part of our preparation before going into San Pablo, we were briefed by Dr. Pérez on what prior groups had found in their studies and she assigned us a task. Our group was assigned to go into San Pablo to set up interviews with individuals who had family in Seaside, California to find out how and if those individuals maintained cultural ties with their family members in the U.S..

One of our first assignments upon arriving was to go into San Pablo to map out major streets and landmarks which would help us familiarize ourselves with the village. As part of this reconnaissance, our duties were to get to know some of the locals and to spend time in the community eating the food and familiarizing ourselves with the local culture. This exploration was a week project.

As I walked around San Pablo with my group members, we spoke to as many people as possible. However, one person in particular changed the course of not only my focus in San Pablo, but also of my focus as a researcher. Her name was Doña Alejandra, who at the time was 78 years of age. As I got to know more about her and her home, she told me that her home was a place where they held meetings for their group. I asked her to what group she
was referring. She paused for a second and then told me to speak to a man named Don Rogelio also known as ‘El Sastre’ or ‘The Sewer’ who was the organizer of the group. She said, “Speak to him and come back I would be happy to speak with you some more.” Needless to say I gladly accepted. I quickly pulled out my graphing paper where I was drawing my map and drew down the directions she gave me. I thanked her for her time and continued with our journey around San Pablo.

![Figure 1. Doña Alejandra and I outside her home.](image)

**GETTING INVOLVED WITH 11 DE OCTUBRE**

About a week went by and I was able to come back to San Pablo on my own to find Don Rogelio. I followed my map and asked people along the way where I could find Don Rogelio or ‘El Sastre.’ Several people pointed me in the direction that led me to a dirt road that had houses lining both sides. There were two kids playing outside and I asked them if they knew which house was Don Rogelio’s. They said, “Yes, it’s that one” and pointed to the house right behind me. I laughed and thanked them. I knocked on the tin door which was then answered by a woman, Don Rogelio’s wife Doña Rosalia. I told her who I was and that I was looking for Don Rogelio. She said, “Yes, come in. We heard you were coming.”

I entered their home and she cordially offered me a seat. I sat outside the kitchen on a small cement patio on a plastic chair. The house was a series of four small rooms, including the kitchen lined up horizontally to the street. The home was modest with a small yard that included a washing board and an outside bathroom under a tin roof. In front of the room furthest from the street was an old but pristine sewing machine. Outside the third room,
sitting on a chair, was their son Javier. Javier was in his early twenties and was being cared for by his parents since he was paraplegic.

After a few minutes Don Rogelio came out to greet me. He seemed like a very polite man and instantly made me feel at home. He and his wife offered me something to drink and eat, which I accepted. Don Rogelio asked me about my work in San Pablo. I told him a bit about what I was doing and then I asked him about his group. He then told me that he was the organizer of a community support group for the elderly called *11 de Octubre*. He told me a bit more about the group and shared with me some of their needs. He spoke about two things he was working on for the group: the acquisition of a donated piece of land for the construction of a community center for the elderly and a vehicle to transport the elders to and from doctor visits. He then asked if I knew of anyone who could perhaps help with the donation of the vehicle. He told me that his deceased brother who lived in the U.S. had donated a vehicle to a group he had many years ago that assisted kids who had disabilities with transportation to and from school. At that moment I made one of the biggest commitments of my life.

![Figure 2. Don Rogelio, myself, and his wife Doña Rosalia.](image)

**COMMITMENT TO 11 DE OCTUBRE**

I told him that I did not know of anyone at that moment, but that I would do my best to help their group. I told him that in order to serve some purpose to the group I had to learn more about them and his cause. I took it upon myself to help for several reasons. The first of which was responsibility. I felt that being in their community and sharing their space in their
homes and lives placed great responsibility on my shoulders to be there willing to open
myself and my life to them as well. Secondly, I was very compelled by Don Rogelio’s
genuine passion for his service to others. And lastly, I saw it as a great opportunity for me to
do some applied anthropology and to grow as a researcher and person. In conclusion to our
meeting Don Rogelio invited me to attend their next meeting so I could meet the group.

**MEETING THE GROUP**

A week later I arrived at Doña Alejandra’s house at the scheduled 10 a.m. meeting
time. I quietly entered through the back of the room. There were some forty individuals
sitting in rows on plastic chairs waiting as others trickled in. In the front of the room was
Don Rogelio sitting behind a desk. He saw me walk in and called for me to join him and the
committee members at the front of the room. As he called out to me, the many people in the
room turned their heads to see whom he was talking to. I said good morning to them and
walked to the front. I felt honored that he had asked me to the front, but I also felt a bit
intimidated with so many community elders in one room. Some of them had lived three of
my lifetimes and their wisdom and knowledge was felt through every inch of my being. It
was definitely a powerful experience.

As instructed I walked to the front of the room and sat down next to Don Rogelio and
his committee members. On that committee I saw a familiar face which instantly made me
feel more at ease. It was Doña Alejandra. I greeted her and I told her that I had come back as
she asked; we both laughed. I also introduced myself to the other committee members and
talked a bit more with Don Rogelio. While waiting for the meeting to begin, I asked him
questions about items in the room, his agenda, and other things that helped me get familiar
with my surroundings and the situation.

Don Rogelio waited for an additional forty minutes after the scheduled meeting time
to let those who were tardy arrive. The meeting began and the group started with their prayer.
There were sixty elders in this room reciting the same prayer, which sent chills up my spine.
After the prayer, Don Rogelio moved on to the agenda. I was the first order of business. He
asked me to tell the group a bit about myself and my purpose.

I stood up and the room went silent. I had never been so nervous in front of a group of
people before. I suppose I felt the weight of the commitment I was about to embark on. I told
them that I was a graduate student from San Diego State University and was doing a project in San Pablo as part of my college course. Then I told them that after speaking to Don Rogelio and hearing about their group and some of their needs, I wanted to do whatever I could to try to help them in achieving those goals. I told them that I was not giving them false promises, but that I would give them my word that I would do what I could to help their group. I thanked them for allowing me to join their meeting and sat down. They clapped and Don Rogelio stood up and thanked me for coming in and spending time with them.

As soon as I left the meeting I began thinking of ways to help the group. I returned to Oaxaca City and the first chance I got I shared this information with Dr. Pérez to receive her guidance. She thought for a moment and simply said, “Make it your thesis project.” Those words gave me an unbelievable motivation and asserted the fact that Don Rogelio and 11 de Octubre were to become a large part of my life.

I went back to Don Rogelio and asked him if I could do my thesis research on the group while at the same time figuring out ways to assist them. He gladly agreed; however, he said that the idea would have to be voted upon by the group. On the next meeting I came prepared to present my thesis idea. I had also taken immediate action in days leading up to the meeting and negotiated a donation for a piece of land with a man who held many hectares and who expressed his desire to do something for the community. The deal was not certain but it showed my level of commitment for this cause.

During my final meeting before returning to San Diego, I presented my thesis idea to the group and told them about my negotiation for the piece of land. After I was done, they were once again asked by Don Rogelio what they thought about my proposition. He had them vote by raising their hands. To my delight they all raised their hands in agreement. I thanked them and told them I would be back soon. On my way out many of the group members shook my hand and wished me a good trip and said they were going to pray for me, which I appreciated.

**RETURNING TO SAN PABLO**

Fast forward a year and a half and I came back to San Pablo with the help of the Tinker Foundation Field Research Grant through the Center for Latin American Studies. During this time I was once again accepted by the group and Don Rogelio. They extended a
very warm welcome as if I was an old friend coming back to visit. During this time I shared with them the interest of a production company that may want to produce a documentary piece on Don Rogelio and the group. I also had the interest of a news agency who was interested in doing a piece on their group. To me they were small victories because we came in seventh on the documentary list from the six slots available and the news segment has yet to take place. Even though we did not make the documentary series for that season, the group and what they are doing was passed around by people who had the ability to reach many around the globe via media. Nonetheless, it was great to see the group, Don Rogelio and his family. During this visit my time was short and was focused on securing permission to conduct longer term research. We bid farewell until my next return six months later.

**RETURN TO OAXACA PART 3: RESEARCH BEGINS**

I seem to grow as a student and person every time I go out into the field. Arriving in Mexico on February 20, 2014 was a nice reminder that for the next three months I would be living and experiencing a culture very familiar and at the same time unfamiliar to me. I arrived in Oaxaca de Juarez at 7:30 a.m. I took a cab to the Zocalo (the town square) where I knew I could get a warm tamale and hot chocolate for breakfast. After finishing I went straight to Cielo Rojo, which is the hostel where I would be staying for the next three months. Upon arrival, I was kindly greeted by my friends and owners, Efrain and Mau. We took some time to catch up and share memories from my last visit here six months prior.

After settling in I called Don Rogelio to see how he and the group were doing. He told me things were going well and that the group was still going strong. He also mentioned that the negotiations over the land a local man agreed to donate for the construction of a community center for 11 de Octubre in my first visit was still being worked out. He said that he and the committee were going to meet with the man and the municipal president to try to formalize the land donation. I could not believe what I was hearing. The very day I had arrived was the day that they were going to discuss the issue that I had been waiting to hear about for almost two years, ever since my first informal negotiation and donation took place. I asked permission to join the meeting and he immediately agreed.

It was 9:30 a.m. and the meeting started at 11:00 a.m., however, the bus ride there takes an hour and it takes another fifteen minutes to walk to the bus station from the hostel. I
wasted no time. I hung up the phone grabbed my recorder, a backpack, some money and ran out the door. I ran through traffic, weaved in and out of people walking on the sidewalk, and was able to make it to the bus station a minute before the bus took off for San Pablo. I was breathing hard and sweating, but I was elated that I had made it just in time.

During the bus ride I took my shirt off to let it dry so I would not show up a sweaty mess. With so much happening my fatigue disappeared and my desire to sleep forgotten; I was so excited that I was going to be able to be part of this very important meeting. I could not have planned a better beginning to my fieldwork.

**MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT 02/20/14**

I arrived in San Pablo and walked down to the municipal building. Outside I saw Don Rogelio and the four women who form part of the *11 de Octubre* committee. They all greeted me with smiles and hugs which made me feel welcomed. Don Rogelio and I spoke for a while before it was time to go upstairs to see the president. We walked up to the second story of the municipal building and Don Rogelio checked in with the president’s secretary. As we waited to meet with the president, Don Rogelio was a bit worried because the potential land donor had yet to show up. After about ten minutes I felt a tap on my shoulder and was warmly greeted by the land donor. I was very happy to see him. We all chatted as we waited for the middle school directors, who were meeting with the president, to finish. We all stood there as time kept ticking by. After an hour and fifteen minutes of waiting the land donor grew restless and I could tell his patience was running out. He excused himself and said that he had to go home for a minute to take care of some things.

At that moment we did not know if he would return. Another fifteen minutes passed and finally the middle school directors came out. Right before we got called in the potential land donor appears and tells Don Rogelio that he does not appreciate waiting an hour and a half and that he will not attend the meeting. As he walks out of the secretary’s office we get called into the president’s office. At this point we had gotten so close to the arrangement that it seemed unreal that the land donor was literally leaving at the last second.

We all took a seat in the president’s office and you could clearly feel the disappointment from the committee members and Don Rogelio. After the initial greeting and introductions the president’s assistant apologized for the extensive wait and explained that
they wanted to give each individual and group the time they needed to express themselves. They knew that the land donor had gotten very upset over the long wait. The president asked if one of the group members could go see if the land donor would change his mind. Don Rogelio thought it was a better gesture if they reached out to him. The president’s assistant agreed and went out after him. I too felt obligated to talk with him as I had made the negotiation for this deal in the first place. I excused myself and walked out behind the assistant. The potential land donor was still there standing at the foot of the stairs of the second floor. We both asked him kindly to please join the meeting but he stormed off saying, “No, I will not come in, that is just the way I am.” We respected his decision and went back into the president’s office.

The president and Don Rogelio discussed further action. The only thing within the power of the president was to send for him to see if the potential land donor would agree to a meeting at a later date. The president brought in his secretary and she read off his available days early in the week. On Wednesday at 1:00 p.m. he had some time to meet with the group again. He also suggested that the Sindico be present at the meeting so that if the potential land donor did show up the land donation could be finalized. The committee and Don Rogelio agreed to these conditions for further action and the meeting was dismissed after fifteen minutes.

Having gone through a rollercoaster of emotions, I was quickly reminded of the unpredictability of field work and the amount of patience it takes when working with different individuals and groups. Nonetheless, the process of learning the nuances of such cultural interactions was important for me as a researcher.

**SECOND MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT 02/26/14**

The second meeting with the president began 45 minutes later than our scheduled time of 1 p.m. The meeting was, again, brief lasting 15 minutes. The land donor didn’t show up, so as part of our final effort the president said he personally was going to his house to see if the land donation still stood. The land owner had previously signed a document giving the group a piece of land 80 by 15 meters; however, he wanted to reduce that to 40 by 15 meters. What Don Rogelio needed was to get a signed document that stated that there had been a reduction in size; another situation where things did not quite go our way. At this point all we
had left were patience and persistence, but the frustration over the political and social errors that stood to derail the project were all too real.

**THIRD MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT 03/04/14**

The president did not have very promising news in our third meeting. After waiting an hour and a half after our scheduled time at 5 p.m., he arrived at the municipal building and settled into his office. After about five minutes he called the group in. The four ladies on the committee, Don Rogelio and I entered his office. We were joined by his assistant. The president informed us that they had gone to look for the land donor, but each time they went he was under the influence of alcohol, preventing them from discussing business with him. This is an important cultural and political regulation that is critical to a durable transaction. It is against Mexican law to engage in any financial transactions between the government and private citizens when alcohol is involved. They said that they would try again to see if they could conclude this matter. Don Rogelio then spoke and said if they were not able to come to an agreement perhaps there was a chance the municipality could donate a piece of land that was in the possession of the municipality. The president said he would see if that was an option and would let us know next time we met. The meeting again concluded after 15 minutes. We thanked him and walked out.

**FOURTH MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT 03/10/14**

Don Rogelio and I got into a moto taxi and headed to the municipal building, where we met the rest of the committee at 4:30 p.m. for our scheduled 5 p.m. meeting with the president. We once again sat outside the secretary’s office after checking in. We had seen the president’s assistant before heading upstairs at 4:45p.m. and he told us that he was meeting the president for a meeting at the Casa Cultural. He said it would not take long. After two long hours of waiting patiently the president finally arrived. Right away we were invited into the president’s office.

The president and his assistant both started the meeting by apologizing for their tardiness. They then began updating us on the situation with the land donor and the land. The assistant said that as promised he had gone to speak to the land donor, but that every time he went he could not find him sober. Then the president followed up by saying that we should
start exploring other avenues for the land. Don Rogelio then asked the president if he had any updates on the land that belonged to the municipality. He said that he did not want to say no to that option, but he could not say yes either. He said since the land was under the authority of the municipality he would have to discuss this issue with his committee. He said that another possible option was a piece of land the municipality was thinking of purchasing for a daycare center. He said that if the acre and a half was bought that he would donate a piece to the group.

**REFLECTIONS ON THE MEETINGS WITH THE PRESIDENT**

The community of San Pablo Huixtepec continues to function as a small town where local politicians are also neighbors. The political system mirrors the national system in that candidates align with a particular political party and voting takes place at the same time as state and federal elections. The formality of the electoral process creates a social and political divide between the elected officials and their neighbors that exists during their tenure but returns to the person next door once their term is complete. Thus all interactions are both political and social, and statements are made about priorities and status in subtle but obvious ways. As the meetings between Don Rogelio, the members of 11 de Octubre and the municipal officials unfolded, the lack of priority given to their needs became evident. In addition, the constant tardiness by the government officials to the meetings further evidenced the low status of the project, and the group, had for the officials.

Understanding the need of the governing officials to acquire as much social capital as they had political capital, the project offered little either monetarily or in terms of social capital. I also believe that the refusal of the potential donor to return to the meeting after waiting so long can be seen not as a temper tantrum, but rather, as a protest to the diminishment of his gesture by the municipal president.

The conclusion to these events is still in progress as of the date of this thesis. As Don Rogelio depicted, the road to change is not a quick one, but rather, a persistent one. Don Rogelio understands the interactions between him and the government officials only too well. His drive and dedication despite the insults and disappointment is, to me a great example of a community leader.
CHAPTER 4

11 DE OCTUBRE: SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ELDERS

EXPLORATION OF 11 DE OCTUBRE GROUP MEMBERS

The group is comprised of 45 females and 22 males over the age of sixty. The average age of group members is 76 years young, with the eldest member having achieved 92 years of age. Over 91% of all group members surveyed were born and raised in San Pablo and only 16% had ever lived anywhere else; 100% of group members reported never wanting to leave San Pablo. Out of the 45 group members surveyed, 77% had children in other parts of Mexico or in the US. Through their narratives I was able to gain insight into what it means to be an elder in rural Mexico today and what having a support group like 11 de Octubre means to them.

11 DE OCTUBRE: GROUP BEGINNINGS

The story of 11 de Octubre begins with the vision of Don Rogelio. The following is what he told me during our interview about how and why he started the group. As with all of the translations in this thesis, the translations are mine, as all conversations occurred in Spanish.

Yes, well first of all I would like to tell you that for me personally, these people of the third age deserve the respect, love, and support more than anything from each one of us. And that’s what motivated me more than anything to start this group, seeing the necessities these people have. Before the organization was founded, the truth is, I took notice of some of the necessities of these people. Many of them after the age of 60 end up by themselves, sometimes they are abandoned by family members and it is difficult for them. I thought about organizing them because by being organized we would be able to attain more outside resources that could assist us with some of the necessities they have. In the beginning, I gave myself the homework to go visit them at their homes to invite them to see if they wanted to belong to a group of people of the third age with the end of trying
to find some benefits for them. [Don Rogelio, personal communication, May 10, 2014]

That vision took place in 2002 when Don Rogelio was fifty-five years old. He started his campaign in August or September of that year. He went to their homes to invite them to participate in the group; most of them agreed. During those visits they shared with him how they lived and the profound loneliness they endured. In capturing this realization he noted, “…who was going to think about them, who was going to know how they lived, who was going to take care of them?” (Don Rogelio, personal communication, May 10, 2014). He was able to visit 50 addresses of elders he thought might benefit most from his community support group. They all expressed interest in forming part of his organization. He planned a meeting to see if indeed that many people were interested.

He asked one of the elders who agreed to participate if they could meet at their home as it had sufficient space for everyone. The first meeting he had with the group was October 11, 2002. In that meeting he was more concrete. He told them what his objectives were and that his intention was to work in conjunction with them to see what necessities they had. Some understood his purpose and others did not right away. Some thought they were going to receive money, and he told them that no money would be received; however, he would try to obtain other means of assistance. The majority was in agreement that the group be organized.

He told them that they needed to make this more official and that they should appoint a committee so he would not be alone in running the group. Today, the committee consists of a President, Treasurer, a Secretary, First Committee Member, Second Committee Member, and Third Committee Member. Also, Don Rogelio suggested that they needed a name for their group. He asked them what they wanted to be called and someone suggested they be called Huixtepecanos. To that someone suggested 11 de Octubre because that was the date of their first meeting. The majority was in favor of this unique name that carried the symbolism of their collective identity.

In order to constitute the group and make them an association so that they could apply for support from outside resources, Don Rogelio needed to submit an Acta de Asemblea (Act of Assembly) listing all members present at their first meeting and a copy of the voting credentials of all members who planned to be part of that association. The second step was to
go through the Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in order to receive an official permit so that the notary could make their official documents. Once complete, the notary drafted the official documents. During this time they also drafted up the constitution for the group and their amendments. From that point on they were an official association. Their name officially became ‘Association de Personas de la Tercer Edad 11 de Octubre de la Villa de San Pablo Huixtepec.’ They became an official association on March 23, 2003.

**Requirements for Becoming a Group Member**

The following are the requirements to become a member: (1) A copy of their birth certificate that shows they are above sixty; (2) A copy of their voting credentials; (3) A copy of their Clave Única de Registro de Población (Unique Population Registry Code); (4) A copy of their proof of address; (5) Lastly, they require a photo and the filling out of a form that asks about general information so they know who each group member is.

**How Meetings Are Organized**

The group convenes biweekly; however, when there are urgent matters to discuss they meet with a twenty-four hour notice. The group has two men in charge of calling group members to meetings. Don Rogelio notifies the men of the meeting and they go door to door on bicycles calling group members to attend. If participants are not home, a flyer is left under their door informing them of the upcoming meeting.

As mentioned before, the group meets at Doña Alejandra’s home. Usually the women who get there early sit around a table outside and speak to each other about their lives. The men who show up early usually start setting up the chairs in rows inside the room where the group meets. Furthermore, each month two group members volunteer to maintain the cleanliness of the room and restrooms in preparation for the meetings. The cleaning usually involves sweeping inside and around the perimeter of the room and making sure the bathroom (a portable bathroom sitting on top of a dirt hole) is clean and stocked with toilet paper. The group takes great pride in providing a dignified place to meet.

Once the cleaning is done and the chairs are set up, group members begin to file in. Some arrive in moto taxi, others walk, and a very few get dropped off by a family member.
Don Rogelio usually shows up early and works out any details on his agenda. In front of the room next to Don Rogelio the committee members sit facing the group. Usually the meetings start about half hour after the scheduled 10 a.m. time since it takes some longer to arrive than others. This seemed to be an issue during some of the first meetings I attended when members would insist other members show up on time.

Once the group settles in, Don Rogelio starts their meeting with a prayer. At the front of the room they have a Catholic saint with a lit candle at its feet, which they all turn to during prayer. Once the prayer concludes, Don Rogelio moves into the agenda for the day. Also during this time, Don Abram goes over the minutes from their last meeting. If there is something the group needs to vote on or discuss they make time for such discussion after the reading of the minutes. The discussions are facilitated by Don Rogelio; however, everyone gets to voice their opinions. At times there are disagreements and heated discussions; nevertheless the group always reaches a conclusion.

To finalize the meeting, attendance is taken. Attendance is important because the food stipends from the Dr. Simi foundation (the Dr. Simi foundation will be discussed further in the next section) are given out based on attendance. Often times they run out of some items and those who have less attendance will receive whatever is left over. Also, once a month there is a collection of $15 pesos, about $1.00 U.S. at the time of this thesis, which is used for other group expenses including toilet paper and cleaning supplies. The treasurer collects the money as each person’s name is called from the roll sheet, and turns it over to the larger committee to be counted. Money is never spent without the consensus of the group. Meetings usually conclude after an hour and a half to two hours.

After the meeting is adjourned, all members help put the chairs back in a stack in the back of the room and use that time to talk amongst themselves. The committee members stay after all the group members are gone to discuss any further matters. They talk about future plans for the group and communicate about any issues the group may have. Overall they have a very organized format for their meetings.

**The Group’s Objectives**

As an organization 11 de Octubre’s social objective is to help elders in their organization with nutrition, clothing, medical services, and rehabilitation services. Their
primary objective was to have a center for the elderly. They have yet to build a center; however, the organization has been able to achieve most of the other objectives.

As president, Don Rogelio has tried to acquire as much help for the group as possible. As he puts it, “I have knocked on many doors.” The foundation that is helping them the most is the Dr. Simi Foundation, which is a nonprofit organization that serves people who are in need throughout many parts of Mexico. 11 de Octubre is a registered nonprofit, which allows them to receive assistance from the Dr. Simi foundation as a partnership. Don Rogelio has been associated with the Dr. Simi organization for the last eight years. They have helped the group with a monthly stipend of food which consists of either rice, beans or lentils, and then oil, sugar, pasta and cereal. They also provide the group with free medical checkups and some medicine. The Dr. Simi Foundation also provided the group with plastic foldup chairs and a desk to serve their association during gatherings. Don Rogelio was also recognized by the Dr. Simi Foundation for his work with 11 de Octubre by granting the organization 30,000 pesos (US$2000), which the group voted on using to get several individuals eye surgeries that were critical to their ability to maintain their vision.

It is important to note that because of Don Rogelio’s efforts, 103 individuals over the age of sixty that are not part of 11 de Octubre also have received aid from the Dr. Simi Foundation. Once every two months, non-group members over 60 years of age can receive a food stipend that is valued at approximately 150 pesos (US$10). It contains twelve staple
items to include beans, rice, sugar, oil, oatmeal, tuna, milk, gelatin, cookies, cereal, lentils, detergent or soap and atole.

During my time in San Pablo I was able to see Don Rogelio and the Dr. Simi organizers in action during the time of this stipend. Elders trickled into the town plaza either on foot or on moto taxies. They formed a long line along the plaza under the guidance of Don Rogelio. In hand they had to have identification cards and their Dr. Simi card, which made them eligible to receive their food stipend. As part of the agreement for this stipend, individuals must not miss more than two stipend days or else they are dropped from the program. While individuals walked up to receive their stipend both the Dr. Simi representative and Don Rogelio had to take roll. That day only one individual was unfortunately dropped from the program. However, more individuals had approached Don Rogelio about signing up, so he took the first person on the list. Also, the Dr. Simi doctors were in a room in the municipal building giving free consultations to individuals who were signed up for that aid.

![Figure 4. Don Rogelio organizing the Dr. Simi community stipend.](image)

**DR. SIMI REPRESENTATIVE**

At the March 10, 2014 distribution of resources, I took the opportunity to interview the Dr. Simi representative. I asked her to tell me a bit about the role of the Dr. Simi Foundation. She told me that the Dr. Simi organization has been around for eight years and started under the umbrella of the Best Foundation, which unites pharmaceutical companies that include the Similares pharmacies and laboratories. As these companies grew, they
decided to make a social foundation that became the Dr. Simi Foundation. The Dr. Simi Foundation serves people in need in all 31 states of Mexico. The organization has 40 delegations and is one of the largest foundations in the country.

The Dr. Simi Foundation’s role is to help assist groups that are serving communities that have social needs in the form of medical care or vulnerable populations. San Pablo Huixtepec meets both criteria. The Dr. Simi Foundation believes that no sort of improvement can be made in a community without meeting the basic needs of the people. Unfortunately, not all elders in the community can be served, so it is up to organizations like 11 de Octubre to decide who in the community needs those food stipends most.

I asked the Dr. Simi representative how many other groups like 11 de Octubre they work within the state of Oaxaca. She told me they work with two other institutions that deal with elders. One is Asociación de Adultos Mayores Vivir en Plenitud, which is located in Oaxaca City. She mentioned however that the needs of that organization were different as they are located in the city and had access to more resources than those in more rural areas. The other organization they work with is called Naglotuce and is located in Villa Yalalaa, which is even more rural than San Pablo, according to the Dr. Simi representative. She said that it was a small organization but it shared a lot in common with 11 de Octubre in the sense that they were assisting many elderly in the community who lived alone due to the high rates of outmigration. Elders in this area have a place to live, but since they have little in the way of income, they often cannot afford basic necessities. To alleviate some of their needs the Dr. Simi Foundation sends them food stipends similarly to what they do in San Pablo.

I asked the Dr. Simi representative if she saw aging as a social issue in the development of Mexico. She replied, “Yes, totally. It is an issue because of abandonment. Migration in rural areas is very rampant because there is no financial opportunity in these communities so people leave. The elderly do not leave and they stay behind alone with very little resources because there are no jobs” (personal communication, May 10, 2014). She added that the major issue for people in these communities is food. She said, “The majority of the elderly have a place to live; however, they cannot eat their home, so the main issue is having a healthy diet” (personal communication, May 10, 2014).
**ADDITIONAL AID**

In addition to the Dr. Simi Foundation, the group receives the support of a private dentist who comes from the city to do work on the group members. His work is not free but it is done at a lower cost than his normal rates. He has a small dentist office set up in a room in Doña Alejandra’s house where the group meets making it convenient for group members. The dentist helps them with cleanings and also makes dentures for group members. The group also receives support from a private ophthalmologist clinic that does eye checkups and assists the group with surgeries, which are not free but are also offered at a lower rate. They also have received the support of an audiologist clinic that conducts hearing tests and provides the group with affordable hearing aids. Most recently Don Rogelio and the group have received the support of the municipal government, which brings the group a food stipend once every two months similar to that of the Dr. Simi food stipend. Additionally, the municipal government began issuing ID cards for group members, which exempt them from paying for drainage, water, garbage, and property taxes.

As the group organizer, Don Rogelio worries a lot about the members’ health and wellbeing, noting that some members have been basically abandoned by their children living in the U.S. He said that the major concerns for the elders in his group are nutrition, health, medicine, and socialization, which he said acts as another form of medication because it lifts their spirit and gives them meaning. For Don Rogelio working with the group has also given him meaning. He includes his own father in the group, even though his father has fewer needs. The inclusion of his father demonstrates the respect he has for the organization and each of its members. His dedication to the group has quite literally become his vocation; one that he has accepted for more than ten years.
CHAPTER 5

GROUP MEANING TO MEMBERS

WHY MEMBERS JOIN THE GROUP

Don Rogelio explained to me that most people come to the group because they know there will be some aid and support. The most important aspect of the group, in his opinion, is the social support it provides. When group members come to meetings he notices how they light up as they gather around with people who understand and can relate to their life’s situation. Don Rogelio also saw these meetings as a great opportunity for group members to socialize, rebuild their self-esteem, and temporarily ignore their loneliness and financial stress.

As the group organizer, Don Rogelio keeps group members involved and active in several activities including knitting classes, gelatin making, candle making, and soy-based cooking classes, among other such activities. He believes that keeping the elders active enhances their quality of life. Don Rogelio is proving successful as many participants expressed how much courses mean to them, a subject I address in more detail below.

WHAT THE GROUP MEANS TO MEMBERS

Through my thirteen interviews with group members, I found that participants’ had a variety of reasons for joining 11 de Octubre, but the key reasons included the following:

- Socialization/ Distraction
- Learning
- Food Resources
- Lower Medical Costs

These key points are discussed below.
SOCIALIZATION/DISTRACTION

As discussed in previous sections, the elders in San Pablo are facing difficult social and cultural conditions. Much of what the group has to offer is social support and members have come to see this group as an outlet from the issues of their daily lives. The group makes members feel enthused, productive, motivated and keeps them active. One participant reported always being stuck inside her rundown home and feeling depressed because she and her husband were going through a very difficult financial situation. Going to the meetings became a nice outlet for her to escape the hardships of her home life. Another participant expressed being very depressed and lonely after her husband’s death. She was encouraged by her daughter to join the group and after doing so found great motivation and inspiration from the group.

As part of belonging to this organization they had a social support network they could rely on. When someone in the group was ill, they would come together to make sure that person had personal as well as medical care. While I was there we had a money collection to support a group member who was in the hospital. I found that aspect of the group to be very special. Given that 53% of group members surveyed are widows and widowers, it meant a lot to them to have the support of their fellow peers.

LEARNING

Learning new skills and crafts was something that helped participants not only emotionally, but also financially. They enjoyed applying those skills, such as sewing and knitting, to making products to sell for extra income. Group members who chose to participate in those courses would learn to make traditional style blouses, dresses, and pillow cases. They were able to sell these items for upwards of 300 pesos, which is the equivalent to roughly $20 dollars. When referring to the benefits of these courses one participant noted, “I sell the blouses and shirts. Out of three or four shirts I knit I make 1000 to 1500 pesos [US$65 to $98].” This extra cash means a lot to those who are going through financial hardships and helps alleviate some of the financial stresses.

To add to the acquisition of knowledge, Don Rogelio would read articles of current events during their meetings. This would stimulate conversation amongst the group and would keep people informed. The current event topics ranged from politics, science, to the
local news. Group members found this aspect of the meetings not only informative, but also entertaining. This kind of learning meant a lot to them because it advanced their knowledge of the world in which they lived.

**Food Resources**

Another great benefit to members was receiving the food stipends from the Dr. Simi Foundation and the municipal government. As mentioned previously, nutrition is one of the major concerns surrounding the elders’ wellbeing. Receiving these food stipends means a lot to group member who not only use this food to feed themselves, but also use it to provide for their families. In one of the meetings it was suggested that the sugar package be taken out of the food stipend bundle since many group members had diabetes. However, that point was argued with the fact that some individuals used that sugar to make *aguas frescas* [fresh water] for their family members. Thus, the sugar remained an item in their food stipend with the caution by Don Rogelio that those who had diabetes should not be indulging in sugar products.

**Lower Medical Costs**

Additionally, the group members really enjoyed the free medical consultations and small medicine stipends received from the Dr. Simi Foundation. Typically if they saw a private doctor the cost could range anywhere from 200 to 500 pesos (US$13 to $33). Also, members really appreciated the discounted rates on dental work and dentures offered by the dentist. He provided consultations at the low cost of 50 pesos (US$3). They also received assistance from the Coral organization, which assisted them with free assessments for ear apparatuses. These savings meant a lot to group members because it allows them to keep their income to buy necessities such as food and medicine.

**Making a Living**

The average grade completed by group members is 2nd grade. Most of their lives were spent either working the fields or tending to the home, as discussed later. Today 8% of group members surveyed rely on a pension or benefit from a deceased spouse’s pension. Only 8% relied on a steady monthly income and the rest made side incomes with the things they were able to make or sell such as their animals, agricultural yields, and the garments they
produced. In the cases where participants had loved ones in the U.S. or other parts of Mexico (which was 77% of participants) they also received small remittances from loved ones not living in San Pablo, which were typically 1000 pesos (US$65) every two months. Lastly, 80% of all participants surveyed received the aid of the Mexican government program for the elders called 65 y Mas, which gives people over the age of sixty-five 1160 pesos (US$75) every two months. Those who were not receiving this small bimonthly stipend were not yet sixty-five years old. The decreasing manual labor demands along with the changes in the traditional familial support systems have produced a difficult situation for the elders in respect to financial stability. These changes have also caused elders to work long into their third state of life.

**VIEWS OF DEATH AND IDEAL WAYS OF DYING**

For most elders I interviewed, health was a major concern. Many have diabetes referred to as la azúcar [the sugar] by group members, arthritis, joint pain, eye problems and other issues associated with aging. When I asked them about the most difficult part of aging, many would refer to the loss of mobility in their body. One participant who was 72 years young said, “You don’t really notice aging. The heart doesn’t age. You do not notice sometimes until you look in the mirror. Sometimes I want to do things as if I was 30 years old, but then I find out that I cannot do those things the same anymore.” She repeated to me the words of her father-in-law on his death bed who said, “We were born to die. Who gets to stay?” We both laughed as we thought about the depth and truth of that statement. She told me that when she was diagnosed with diabetes she laughed when they told her the diagnosis. They asked her why she was laughing. To that she replied, “What am I supposed to do? I thought you cannot cure diabetes. Will crying get rid of it?” Sixteen years later she is still alive. She told me that death comes when it needs to come.

She was not alone in her feelings of death. When I asked participants about their perceptions of death and their ideal way of dying they all had similar answers. It was a common belief that death would come when it came, placing their life on the destiny God had planned for them. I was told several times that God would decide when it was their time. For 92% of all group members surveyed religion was an important aspect of their life. Faith
was something that many found strength and peace in especially when faced with difficult situations such as the loss of a loved one or illness.

I asked participants if they had an ideal way of dying. The common consensus among interview participants was that an ideal death would be one that took place in their home. They would not want to spend their last days in a hospital room hooked up to tubes immobilized. When I asked them what they thought about hospital care, they all shared a common answer. They would go to the doctor if it was an illness that was treatable. If it was something they could not cure, they would prefer to be at home where they were comfortable and could be surrounded by those they cared for most.

In cases where group members had minor illnesses and needed medical assistance, most would go to the Seguro Popular, which is the local health clinic in San Pablo. Through my surveys I found that 99% of all group members had access to this local clinic. The consensus among interview participants was that the clinic had okay service; however, they did not like the long lines, long waits, and at times impatient nurses. Moreover, the benefits they received from using this local clinic were lower rates on medicine and doctor visits.

**BEST PART OF AGING**

On a more optimistic note I wanted to know what elders enjoyed most about their third stage of life. Participants seemed to enjoy the simple pleasures associated with family, nature, and having free time. One participant said, “What I appreciate most about aging is having time to see the beauties of nature God has created. I do not like big cities because I enjoy nature; seeing wild animals, plants and trees.” She also added that what she wanted most from her family was not material belongings, but rather, love and their presence. Similarly, another participant most enjoyed being at home receiving calls from her daughter and other family members. With the aid of Skype she was able to see her children and grandchildren in the U.S. When her children saw her on Skype they cried. She believed they cried because they saw her aging and also because they were excited to see her. Another participant said he enjoyed being with his family and listening to music.
CHAPTER 6

CHANGES IN SAN PABLO

SAN PABLO OF THE PAST

In the context of the 21st century, I wanted to explore what it was like for these elders to live in a world much different from their past. San Pablo of the past, as the elders described it to me, was a humble place that had adobe homes with straw roofs, dirt roads, no electricity, very few cars, and most had no running water. During those days school was the last priority; it took a backseat to hard work for both men and women. For most women school was not even an option. Female participants told me that school was not encouraged by their parents because their main priority was going to be to tend to the home. The men said school was an option, but that work was more important because without working you would not be able to have a family. Farming and tradesman were the prevalent careers for men, much of which was learned through apprenticeship leaving little reason to seek schooling beyond basic literacy.

In those days both men and women began their work day at sun up and ended at sundown. It was a time of abundance as far as work in the fields and agricultural yields of their lands. The land was tilled by a yunta, two oxen pulling a wooden hoe, the owner of which tended to be one of the wealthier people in the community. One participant remembered her dad going to work every morning to harvest alfalfa, chili, watermelon, and other melons depending on the season. She said, “Back in those days the melons were big and juicy. There was an abundance of food in the fields.”

In the morning the women would prepare a breakfast for the men, which usually included tortillas and cheese, and send them off to work in the fields with full stomachs. While the men worked the fields, the women would tend to the many chores of the home which included cleaning, laundry, cooking, taking care of the children, and making sure that the men had their lunch and dinner prepared to keep the production alive. Men would work
the fields wearing the customary white garment pants and shirt, leather sandals, a large hat for the sun, and when it was cold, they would throw a wool poncho over them to keep warm. One participant said, “Back in those days, people did not have the luxury of being tired all the time. Being tired was only for the rich people.” In those days in San Pablo there was a small upper-class, small middle-class, and a large lower class. As described by them, it was a hard life, but a very fulfilling life.

Their homes were simple and functioned without electricity, running water, or propane. The homes were primarily made of adobe with dirt floors and either a clay or metal roof. At night the family would come together to drink coffee, eat a light meal and tell jokes, tails, riddles, and to exchange stories. Several elders told me that it was a beautiful time during full moons because it would illuminate the darkness of the night so they could play and hangout outside. A participant said, “In those days the families spoke a lot. They were very close. Back then we did not have television or radio so we would entertain each other. Today I try to talk to my grandson about my life, but he only listens for a short while and loses interest quickly. He is more interested in playing video games.” It was a time where the most important thing for people was their family, work, and their community.

In those days families lived on one property. There would be upwards of three generations living on one property working together to maintain their subsistence. A participant said,

My father, his brothers, and sisters, their wives, and kids all lived together. Back then we all lived on the same property but in different houses. There were no walls or fences around our homes because the community had confidence in each other and worked together with each other. Today I cannot even trust my own nieces. I have to keep an eye on them when they come visit.

As depicted by these interview excerpts, in those days there was a lot of family and community cohesiveness and trust, which is perceived to have been lost over time.

**Migration and Changes in Familial Dynamics**

What seemed to shift the family cohesion was the beginning of the migratory flows to the ‘Norte’ or North (referring to the U.S.). Most of the changes in San Pablo began during the Bracero Program. The Bracero Program was established in 1942 as part of a contract labor recruitment program between the U.S. and Mexico, as part of the U.S. response to labor
shortages due to the U.S. entry into World War II. While I was interviewing participants, I 
ran into the occasional family member (usually a husband) who had actually taken part in 
this program. They told me that recruiters would come to San Pablo in big trucks asking men 
to come work in the U.S. The men would file into their truck and off they would go to a train 
estation. They would then be taken to the U.S.-Mexico border, hereinafter referred to as the 
Border, and processed. Part of the processing involved them standing in long lines and being 
stripped naked in order to receive a physical evaluation.

After the process at the Border they were transported by bus to their destination. This 
part was the most difficult for the people I had spoken to. They had a difficult time adjusting 
to the unknown place, food, and language. They described the meals they would receive in 
brown paper bags and the strangeness of the baloney sandwiches they would receive. What 
they enjoyed most, however, was the money they were making. In those days the worker 
permits allowed them to come to the U.S. as seasonal workers. These permits allowed 
migrants to come back home to San Pablo to reap the benefits of their hard work.

Fast forward twenty years and the Bracero Program had ended. However, the 
conclusion of the Bracero Program did not stop the flow of migrant workers seeking a 
brighter future for themselves and for their families. The migratory flows in San Pablo 
continue into the present day. However, it is worth noting that for migrants who have come 
to the U.S. undocumented it is now very difficult for them to return to San Pablo. With the 
recent militarization of the Border, crossing back and forth undocumented comes with 
increased risks to migrants both physically and financially. Today, many Sanpableños reside 
in Seaside, California among other cities throughout the U.S. This migration of people out of 
San Pablo, and moreover the migration of people back to San Pablo (often time deportees), 
has created a very different dynamic in the village both culturally and socially.

Changes in familial dynamics have occurred in San Pablo on several levels; however, 
the most apparent change is in the familial support systems. Now that mom and dad are 
getting to the age where traditionally the nuclear family would share responsibility for taking 
care of their parent physically, emotionally, and financially, that support system has broken 
down with transnational migration and the changes that came with it. The most shocking 
statistic that I found was that the average household size of everyone surveyed was three 
people, including the participant. On average, participants reported having five children. Out
of those five children, the majority had two children who were living in the U.S. or other parts of Mexico. This is a very drastic change to the multigenerational family living arrangements of the past described by participants.

This is not to say, however, that children purposefully let their parents live alone during their later stages of life. Often times their children who have migrated to the U.S. are not able to return to San Pablo due to the difficulties of crossing the border undocumented as mentioned above. Moreover, at times it is the elders themselves who choose to live independently from their family members. Two participants I interviewed reported living by themselves by choice. One elder told me that in this day and age it cost a lot for people to live. Since they want the best for their children they would rather not be a financial burden to them. The second elder living alone expressed not wanting to live with her daughter and her family in Mexico City. She said, “I live alone and prefer it that way. I would rather live by myself because I do not have to deal with their problems. In their home I feel like a caged bird waiting for them to let me out.” In her home she feels free and relaxed. She visits her family every so often to make sure they are okay and that is enough for her. This woman was 82 years young.

**DEVELOPMENT IN SAN PABLO**

Since so many changes are taking place in San Pablo, I wanted to see how the elders articulated these developments. One participant mentioned that a good aspect of the development of San Pablo was that youth had access to education, granting them the opportunity to obtain a well-paying job. She said, “Today people get the opportunity to prepare themselves as opposed to before, you would not see many people with any kind of education because everyone mostly worked in the field.” She told me that when she and her husband started raising their grandson after his parents left to the U.S., her husband wanted her grandson to go work in the fields with him. She would tell him, “No, he needs to go to school. Do you want him to end up like us?” Her husband would smile at her and say, “You win.” For her it was important that her grandchild got an education because she realized that today manual labor was no longer a viable option.

This theme of vanishing manual field labor was carried on by another participant who told me:
Before people had the harvest which was a sure meal. A disadvantage was that people were really poor before, but they all had work and could provide for their families from the land, they just did not own their land. Now there are a lot of cars and tractors, but the poor man who makes a living off the land cannot find jobs anymore because they use tractors now instead of yuntas [oxen] and manual labor. The jobs of harvesting are gone. There are more jobs today, it seems like, but they are really not jobs for people who work the fields and do domestic work.

As a result of diminishing employment in San Pablo, many of the youth are forced to seek employment outside the village leaving their parents behind; however, this outmigration is also seen as having benefited San Pablo. Touching on these themes a participant said, “Before people lived with their elderly parents. At my age one of my kids should be living with me. That is different today than before. The North is an advantage because family members go to the U.S. to make money and send remittances. Look around you; this is how those big walls and houses were built. Before San Pablo was poor.”

The changes in San Pablo from migration and ‘development’ go beyond the physical manifestations of such change. The changes noticed by elders go deeper than the material world and delve into the more philosophical changes pertaining to the morality and ethics of the youth. Before, in San Pablo respect for the elderly was a big part of the culture. It was customary to greet at all elders with the sign of respect ‘la mano tío’ [your hand uncle] or ‘la mano tía’ [your hand aunt] no matter if they were related to you or not.

When I asked interview participants about the changes they had seen in San Pablo, almost all mentioned this gesture of respect given to the elders, which they say is being lost. Elders feel that today the youth has less respect for them. One participant stated that in this day and age it’s a disaster with the youth saying, “They run by you and do not even acknowledge you. They pass quickly on their motorcycles with the music blaring and they have no regard for their life.” She explained to me that when she was growing up if an elder needed to cross you would stop out of respect. Another participant said, “Today things have changed. The youth today just walks by and do not even acknowledge you anymore. The forty something year olds do say hi, but not the fifteen year olds and so on.”

When I asked participants why they thought this lack of respect was happening I received several answers. Elders would point to return migration saying that the youth had brought back to San Pablo bad habits from the U.S. such as drug addiction and gang affiliations. One participant reported being afraid of going outside during night hours
“because the youth are taking drugs and doing inappropriate things.” The elders would also say that since many men have left their children and wives in the process of migration, the youth has grown up with no discipline. They expressed the loss of discipline in the home and the loss of value for family unity. I had a participant state:

Men get married and go to the North. The man leaves the woman and the woman leaves the man and there the families break up. Marriage falls apart when men leave. The man leaves and the women and children are left behind to suffer. Kids are different now because they are not governed like they were before. When my kids were children and teens my husband used to discipline our children for misbehaving with a whipping. Today parents cannot do that which in turn creates teens that have no discipline. Today youngsters do not have an education [in the sense of manners].

It seemed that migration was the key factor in this loss of respect.

Additional reasoning for this loss of respect was education and the internet. Elders felt that the youth did not see them as knowledgeable or wise because they were receiving an education and had access to information on the internet. A member stated, “Things such as Facebook are taking over kids’ lives. They do not listen to their parents or their grandparents because they are so into their technology. I wish they paid attention to the elders because good or bad that person has lived through many things and can provide wisdom and advice.” She ended her discussion by stating that the youngsters see elders as antiquated people.

**MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH**

Since the elders felt they were not being respected and appreciated by the youth, I asked them what message they would have for the youth if they could offer some wisdom. Here are several responses from interview participants. One participant stated, “I would tell them to educate themselves in school and in ethics. Have respect and discipline. Be respectful to your parents.” Another respondent said, “Advice to the young? I would give advice but the young people do not listen anymore. If I would tell them anything I would say to be careful. Do not be rude to your parents. In general I would tell them to change their education, their feelings and their way of thinking. I wish I could tell them that.”

On a more philosophical note a participant stated, “If I had a message to the youth it would be to decide what road you want to go down. You get to decide what road you want to travel. I tell my son to read the bible to find out what the two roads are—the narrow road and
the wide road.” Continuing on the same philosophical message another elder said, “My grandson tells me that he does not want to know about the past. So I tell him, look son in the past is the future and the present is the leader of the past so the present is also the future. If you do not know about the past you will not understand the present.”

Another member said, “I would tell the youth to keep working hard and to take care of themselves so that they can live to an old age. I would tell them to live a dignified life so their kids will have good examples. Kids are a reflection of their parents.” Continuing on the theme of education (used here in the sense of morality and ethics) another participant said, “I would tell the youth to behave, to live like they used to with respect and more education. The youth should be careful with their partners so kids are not brought in before the parents are ready.” She thought it was sad to see single moms with kids at such a young age. She gave me an example of a 15 year old girl who got pregnant. As can be seen from these messages to the youth, the elders feel that there has been a loss of moral and ethical education in this day and age and hope that the youth take their lives in the right direction.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

As shown in this case study of 11 de Octubre, elders in San Pablo are situated amongst several complex cultural and social transitions. By using the theoretical paradigm of subjectivity, I was able to better place their experience within the greater structure and dialogue occurring as a result of outmigration and shifts in the traditional familial support systems. One of the major changes talked about by elders in the community were changes pertaining to the youth. However, from the elders’ perspectives these changes were neither clearly defined as being beneficial or detrimental to future generations. On the one hand, education was seen as an opportunity for the youth to obtain a ‘better future’ and on the other it seemed to be replacing the traditional cultural transmission of intergenerational knowledge. Migration was also another major change which presented a similar duality. It was seen by elders as an opportunity to attain economic and social advancement and at the same time it was also the seen as one of the major causes for the loss of respect in the youth and for the separation of families.

The above mentioned changes illustrate several ironies that arise from the current cultural and social transitions taking place in San Pablo. They also demonstrate the difficulties and complexities that come with articulating the present as Homi K. Bhabha (1994) posits. Moreover, from a social scientist perspective the changes taking place, although difficult to explain by elders, provide insight into the ‘new’ cultural values of the community. The shift in the value placement of economic capital over cultural capital is placing elders in a marginal position amongst the community. Elders are no longer seen as the holders of wisdom and knowledge or even valued amongst the community for such traits as they once were. As depicted by the meetings with the municipal president, elders and their needs are not a major priority for the community due to the lack of social capital and economic capital gained from such cause. However, elders have dealt with this exclusion by
strengthening their self-empowerment with *social capital*. The relationships elders have built amongst each have created a network of assistance and support which adds value to their quality of life.

If the population of people 60-plus continues to increase and rural communities like San Pablo Huixtepec continue to experience changes in the traditional forms of caring for the elderly due to outmigration, the hardships for elders will only increase if nothing is done to put more systems in place to deal with this very important and serious social issue. The actions taken by Don Rogelio and *11 de Octubre* demonstrate what can be done at the local level to address the very difficult challenges that face many elders in Mexico and in other parts of the world. As depicted in this case study, the efforts of the group have added immense value to the lives of this forgotten generation.

As a researcher, I cannot help but wonder what will become of San Pablo in the coming years specific to the existing culture as it merges with the ‘new’ cultural trends. Also, I wonder how elders of past generations perceived the youth and their effect on social and cultural change. Is it that today youth morals and ethics are compromised by modernity or is it a cyclical phenomenon in that this perception of youth, of any generation, has always existed in the eyes of the older and wiser generations?

Future research on the changes in familial dynamics due to outmigration should include the relatives of the elders who are living in the U.S. or in other parts of Mexico. How do those family members view the changing support systems for their elderly relatives back in San Pablo? Furthermore, how do those family members living in the U.S. or other parts of Mexico expect their later stages of life to play out? Do they believe their children will support their later stages of life or do they believe that they will have to acquire outside assistance? Also, research should be conducted on rural communities that have high rates of outmigration and a large aging population that do not have a community support group like *11 de Octubre* to assists those elders. How do those elders perceive the changes in familial dynamics and more importantly how do they cope with the challenges associated with the transitions in familial support? Lastly, since elders saw so many changes in the youth of San Pablo, future research should include the youth and their perceptions of the elderly. Capturing the views of the youth may provide a better understanding of how the community dynamics are playing out.
Researching elderly populations like these is important; not only to capture what it means to grow old in rural Mexico in the 21st century, but also to demonstrate the empowerment and agency elders have through cooperative relationships. I hope this research will encourage more community-based programs that support the ever growing elderly populations throughout Mexico who can no longer rely solely on their family for support. Furthermore, by gaining insight into how elders of today navigate amongst these global transitions it may help elders of the future better understand and deal with the process of cultural and social transformation of their time. This to me beautifully encapsulates the essence of anthropology and the way it is used to understand the complexities of our past, present, and at times our future.
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