



Luchando y Echándole Lucha:
THE ABILITY OF WOMEN OF *NACO*, SONORA
TO NAVIGATE
THROUGH OBSTACLES AND BORDERS

A Research Paper presented by:

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

Social Policy for Development
SPD

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The Hague, The Netherlands
December 2018

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List of Acronyms

NWI	Naco Wellness Initiative
CSBN	<i>Casa Saludable Barrio Nuevo</i>
CSC	<i>Casa Saludable Colosio</i>
U.S.	United States
CAME	<i>Centro de Atención Múltiple Estatal</i> (State Multiple Care Center)

Acknowledgments

Este trabajo de investigación pertenece a las mujeres de Naco, Sonora, con las que tuve el honor de compartir el verano de 2018. Son sus historias, experiencias y sentimientos las enseñanzas que conforman esta investigación. Lupita y Norma, gracias por confiar en mí y abrirme las puertas de *Naco Wellness* y sus Casas Saludables. No tengo palabras para describir mi admiración por su ustedes. A las chicas de Barrio Nuevo y la Colosio, les agradezco el abrirme su corazón y sus heridas ¡Gracias por compartir su lucha! Tom Carlson, thank you for trusting in my project and being involved, you are truly an inspiration. I specially thank the ISS SPD major for conceding me the Research Grant that made possible the enriching experience of Fieldwork.

I always told everyone how I had a dream team of supervisors for this Research. Kasia, since the day I went to your office showing you my drawing of *ambos* Naco you made me believe that I had an amazing project ahead. Thank you for giving me the confidence to believe that I am a good researcher. Your guidance and shown interest definitely shaped this process the best way I could ask for. Roy, I could say you were my chosen mentor during this whole M.A process. Thank you for always listening. Vane, ¡Gracias por presentarme a Gloria Anzaldúa!

I thank my friends in The Hague and abroad for accompanying me through this process. My library sisters, we did it! Thank you for the shared hugs, tears and laughter. Meury, no se como le hubiera hecho sin ti y nuestras múltiples sesiones de *FaceTime*, ¡Nuestra amistad define perfectamente el estar en las buenas y en las malas! Brayan, por haberme acompañado en días de lluvia y días de sol. Antonio y Agustín, ¡Mis chicos consulares! siempre echándome porras.

Finalmente, mi más grande agradecimiento va a mi familia, por su apoyo incondicional y darme la oportunidad de perseguir mis sueños. Mamá, ¡Tu lucha es mi lucha, tu y yo sanamos juntas! Tu fuerza esta presente en cada palabra de este trabajo. Papá, gracias por siempre escuchar atento mis ocurrencias e impulsarme a volar a través de ellas. Ana Michelle, ¡No hay persona que me haya dicho tantas veces lo mucho que cree en mí! Gracias por recordarme que puedo. Miguel Arturo, esas platicas en las que ambos nos emocionamos hablando sobre nuestros proyectos a futuro me impulsan a perseguir mis metas.

Abstract

As part of feminist scholarship on the Northern Mexican border region, this paper contributes in changing the perspective of seeing women as passive victims of borders to subjects with agency. This research, done at the border town of Naco, is based on a feminist ethnographic approach and encounters done with a specific group of women that participate in Naco Wellness Initiative, a health NGO. Following a Feminist Standpoint Epistemology, I prioritize women experiences as the main source of knowledge for this research.

Through Borderland Theory, the borders that are present within these women lives are conceptualized beyond the material border that divides their community between Mexico and the United States. It shows through an intersectional approach how women perceptions and encounters with these borders are dependent on aspects, such as place of origin, class, education, migratory status towards the U.S., number of children, marital status and relations, and so on.

Using critical approaches to development interventions and women empowerment, this research explores how women appropriate the Naco Wellness Initiative projects and give different meanings to them according to their specific needs, which are mainly born out of the borders they face towards Mexican institutions and gender relations. For instance, the reason women join these projects go beyond their given agenda on health, and more on personal obstacles or needs women need to tackle. Also, it shows how through their interactions, women are shaping their own empowerment agenda. For example, expanding their identities beyond their given role of mother or wives.

Privileging women's narratives, this research follows a grounded theory approach and emic categorizations to give light to the way women participants navigate through borders and obstacles. *Echarle Lucha* or *Luchando* is how they conceptualized their actions, which according to them, were born out of their desire and intentions to keep moving forward against some of the complexities present in their every day lives at the borderlands.

Relevance to Development Studies

Within the field of Development Studies and Social Policy, this research contributes to the critical discussion on development interventions and women empowerment. Regarding development interventions, this research explores the contrast of perceptions between the donors, in this case Naco Wellness Initiative, and the program recipients, in this case the participant women, around the agenda of the organization programs. In relation to women empowerment, this research aims to understand through a Feminist Standpoint Theory, what does it really mean for women to interact with development programs that establish outsider agendas, how they respond to these experiences and the meaning that they give to them.

Keywords

Borderlands, Borderland Theory, *New Mestiza*, *La Facultad*, Development Interventions, Women Empowerment, Gender Relations, Navigation, *Luchando*, *Echándole Lucha*

Chapter 1 Introduction

Between the years 2016 and 2017, I lived between the border towns of Douglas, Arizona in the United States and Agua Prieta, Sonora in Mexico. During this time, I worked really close with organizations in both sides of the border, including the health organization Naco Wellness Initiative (NWI) in the town of Naco, Sonora. Through my interactions with the organization, the high level of participation that women had caught my attention. I noticed and heard how these women were encountering a mix of oppressions and obstacles that are consequence of both their distance from Mexican institutions but also their proximity to the U.S. Following a personal interest in learning the different ways women navigate through everyday oppressions, but also an aim on developing my engagements with these group of women, I decided to develop my MA dissertation on their experience.

In this research I explore how some women navigate the borderlands; a place of complexities, where women experience material and metaphorical borders from both Mexico and the U.S. and the elements they daily face can translate into both oppressions but also ways to overcome those oppressions. Taking into consideration each women experience is shaped differently based on their place of origin, class, education, migratory status towards the U.S, marital status, and so on. Thus, the research aims to contribute to the existing feminist scholarship of women at the borderlands, portraying them as active agents rather than as “as passive victims of forces beyond their control” (Hansen and Mattingly 2008: 3).

This research is based on the stories I heard and engagements I developed after four weeks of almost daily encounters with some women participants of NWI, where experiences and emotions were shared between these women and myself. I intend to reveal those dynamic in the way this research paper is written. Through the different chapters of this paper I resort to a feminist ethnography (Abu-Lughod 1990; Stacey 1988) and a feminist grounded theory approach (Keddy et al.1996) as research method, approach to analysis but also to writing, where the narrations and experiences shared by the women of Naco constitute the knowledge that I privilege. In chapter 1, I give an account of the research questions and the theoretical and conceptual framework. In Chapter 2, I show where and how this research was conducted. Here, the feminist epistemological and methodological grounds of this paper will be further elaborate on (Abu-Lughod 1990; Anzaldua 1987; Davids and Willemnse 2014; Haraway 1988; Harding 1992; Lavie 2011; Stacey 1988; Nencel 2014). Based on grounded theory, chapter 3 sets up the context, constructed by the perceptions and contradictions of these women’s experiences at the borderland. Chapter 4 explores women interactions and interpretations of NWI projects, interweaving the stories of different women who are part of these spaces. The chapter 5 is a result of two Conversation Circles at these spaces, where women negotiated and chose the principle obstacles that they as women of Naco face, and also conceptualized through their own words and embodied experience how they navigate through them. The last chapter presents final conclusions.

1.2 Research Questions

How do women participants in Naco Wellness Initiative activities engage with the obstacles present in their everyday life at the Northern Mexico borderlands?

Sub Questions

1. What are the borders that these women perceive as present within their lives?
2. What are the meanings that these women give to Naco Wellness Initiative programs and how these programs impact their lives?
3. What are the main obstacles in their everyday lives that these women identify and how do they navigate through them?

1.2 Situating the research questions theoretically

The study of borders is not an easy task and is full of conceptual complexities (Hansen et al. 2006). Now a days, borders are being theorized out of different multidisciplinary perspectives. Geographers focus on territory, political scientist on the power relations inherited in the borders, sociologist and anthropologists on social relations and groups and the existent binary distinctions between them, and so on (Newman 2006).

Classic border literature makes a distinction between the border or boundary, and the political frontier or the borderland. The borderland has been defined as “the region or area in relative close proximity to the border within which the dynamics of change and daily practices were affected by the very presence of the border” (Newman 2006: 150). As an institutionalized field, borderland studies was born as with the ultimate goal of understanding “the complex processes that shaped politics, economics and culture among the US-Mexico border” (Naples 2010: 506). An important contribution to this field is the edited book by the sociologist Pablo Vila (2003), “Ethnography at the Border” which gathers a compilation of a multidisciplinary ethnographic work done in the Ciudad Juarez- El Paso borderland. The author’s explore the subjects of women and identities, specifically women’s work on *maquiladoras*, and focus on the cultural construction of reality, acknowledging that the social boundaries of the border cannot be separated from the social and economic problems (Vila 2003).

1.2.1 Feminist Approach to the Study of Borderlands

A feminist approach to the study of borderlands recognizes how women’s lives are “being shaped by transnational social processes, ideologies and discourses” (Hansen et. al 2006: 3) and how they are being affected in a particular way by living within physical and metaphorical boundaries. Feminist scholarship has contributed significantly to the study of women who inhabit borderlands; it has allowed changing the perspective of seeing women as passive victims of borders to subjects with agency. Most of the works under this framework “highlight gender as a dimension in oppression, identity and resistance” (Hansen et al. 2006: 8). Within the Mexican-US borderland context, feminist scholarship moved beyond

the focus of mainstream debates on women work in *maquiladoras* and pointed out other aspects of their engagements with borders, such as “employment, activism and social justice, health care and sexuality, rape and militarization and migration” (ibid.). A book that is considered as pioneer within this approach is *Women on the U.S-Mexico Border: Responses to Change* edited by Vicki L. Ruiz and Susan Tiano (2008), which analyse women’s lives in the borderlands beyond the maquiladora exploitation. Some other ethnographic research around border dwellers, bringing up different issues around power relations, ethnicity, gender and identity, are (Senoguz 2018; Akyüz 2017) in the case of Turkish Borders and (Ballinger 2003; Green 2005) on the borders of the Balkans.

1.2.2 Borderland Theory

Within the broad and interdisciplinary field of borderland studies, Borderland Theory (Anzaldúa 1987), was born out of the field of Chicano Feminism as a Feminist Approach to analysing the borderlands, representing an epistemological framework which conceptualizations are influenced by third world feminism, humanities and cultural studies. Borderland Theory conceptualizes borderlands as a metaphor for other types of crossings beyond the material border. The institutionalization of this field has meant the application of Borderland Theory into the fields of migration studies, Mexican- American studies, women studies and diaspora studies (Naples 2010).

To develop this research, I use Borderland Theory as a theoretical framework, in order to theorize the complexities in which women of Naco engage with in their everyday life at the borderlands. It opens up the possibility to expand the definition of physical, social, political and economic borders which women of Naco live. According to Anzaldúa, “living in the borderlands creates a third space between cultures and social systems. The word borderland denotes that space in which antithetical elements mix neither to obliterate each other nor to be subsumed by a larger whole, but rather to combine in unique and unexpected ways” (Cantu 2012: 6).

Besides the US-Mexico borderlands, Anzaldúa’s Borderland Theory has been used by scholars outside the context of the borderlands of Mexico or the United States. Maria Henriquez Betancour has used this theoretical framework to conceptualize the borders that African immigrants face by living in the Canary Islands (Cantu et al. 2012: 10). Ewa Majewska, activist and feminist philosopher from the University of Warsaw, relates Borderland Theory to the experiences of Belarusians, Ukrainians and Russians at the Polish border; She talks about ‘La Mestiza from Ukraine’ (Majewska 2011).

Smadar Lavie (2011) engaged with Anzaldúa’s concept of *La Facultad* to approach the way Mizrahi and Palestinian women ‘stay put’ in the borderlands of Israel and Palestine, ‘Staying put’ is defined here “as a source of empowerment, a means of dancing delicately on the hyphen while concurrently rejecting it, in the hopes that life becomes easier, if one is able to enter the Ashkenazi mainstream” (Lavie 2011: 102). To understand the way the women of Naco navigate through the social imposition given either by gender norms or the socio-economic implications of the border wall, I will follow the women of Naco own conceptualization of their *Facultad*, which according to Anzaldúa (1987) is “the agility to navigate and challenge monocultural and monolingual conceptions of social reality” (Cantu 2012: 7). By navigation, I follow Henrik Vigh (2009) understanding, moving the analytical gaze “toward the way people not just act but interact with their social environment and adjust their lives to the constant influence (in *potentia* and *presentia*) of social forces and change” (Vigh 2009: 433).

Anzaldúa (1987) talks about a new subject that lives within the borderlands, the *New Mestiza*, who copes the dichotomies of the borderlands “by developing a tolerance for con-

traditions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (Anzaldua 2012:101). In doing so, the *New Mestiza* develops a new consciousness, a ‘*mestiza consciousness*’ a third element among the duality she encounters, which “breaks down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (Anzaldua 2012:102). Melissa W. Wright has focused on the agency and resistance of borderland women, in her work “Maquiladoras Mestizas and a Feminist Border Politics”, she investigates the political, economical and cultural dynamics in the northern Mexican border. She follows the stories of three women that defy the discourse of Mexican women as disposable in *maquiladoras*. Wright engages with Anzaldua’s *New Mestiza* vision to conceptualize these women’s “hybridity and in their proclamation of themselves as women who know both sides of the border and the subjects who inhabit those places” (Wright 1998: 121).

1.2.3 Empowerment

Empowerment is a concept largely present within the discussions of Women and Development (Deveaux 1996; Kabber 1999; Bisnath 2001; Cornwall 2016). Within this research, I will explore the model of empowerment brought by Rowlands (1997) work with Women in Honduras, which strongly resonates with this research, as both explore the interactions of women with local development projects. Rowlands explores a feminist interpretation of power which includes ‘power to’ and ‘power from within’, and acknowledges that “interpreting ‘power over’ entails understanding the dynamics of oppression and internalized oppression. Empowerment is thus more than participation in decision making; it must also include the process that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions” (Rowlands 1997: 14). Rowland proposes Personal Empowerment, Collective Empowerment and Empowerment within Close Relationships. For this research I will be using the first two. Within this, the aspects of empowerment can be categorized into three groups; ‘Contextual’ or ‘material’, ‘structural’ or ‘inner psychological’. I focus on the last, which involves the undoing of internalised oppression.

By gender relations, I understand the relations between men and women as socially constituted (Whitehead 2006). In the case of women, as “being always perceived and treated as members of a gender category about which there are all kinds of stereotyped beliefs, and which is inferior to the alternative gender category, that of men” (Whitehead 2006: 11) which is seen in the position of women in the workplace, the household, ideologies and identities.

Chapter 2 The Where and How of this Research

2.1 Naco Wellness Initiative

As Gloria Anzaldua stated “the U.S Mexican border *es una herida abierta* (an open wound) where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldua 2012: 5). As being part of the “Third World”, Naco, Sonora has been target for different types of development interventions. It is common to see community activism coming from the U.S side of the border to organize projects in religion, art, education, health and migratory law, where experts but also volunteers try to share with their border community the advantages they have from living in the U.S side of the fence. One of the most prominent development interventions in Naco, Sonora has been the Naco Wellness Initiative (from now on NWI), which was the site of this study. This local organization was first established on the U.S side of the border in Naco, Arizona. Initially, it gave health screenings once a month to people from both the U.S and Mexico in their clinic in Arizona, but since the majority of people attending were from Mexico and new immigration regulations prevented the Mexican population from crossing, in the year 2010 it opened its first clinic in the Mexican side called *Casa Saludable* (CSBN), located in the Barrio Nuevo neighbourhood, near downtown and the border. Later on, with the objective of serving the people that lived in the outskirts of the town, *Casa Saludable Colosio* (CSC) was established. Currently, Lupita, the director of the organization, in charge of CSBN, and Norma, a health promoter in charge of CSC. The presence of NWI has filled some gaps that social provisioning of the Mexican Government has failed to fill; in 2010 the Mexican Government registered only 4 medical units and 3 doctors in town. Also, 46.6% of the population didn’t have the access to health services (INEGI 2010).

The main agenda of the organization is to provide body and mind wellness, by giving free health services and programs of all type addressed to families; nevertheless, the majority of its participants are women. The standard service offered in both spaces is health screenings, but because of contextual causes, both for its size and location, each space has different programs. CSBN recently inaugurated a new building, which is a big brand new space, equipped with six computers, a TV for videoconferences, a big mirror for zumba classes, a full-equipped kitchen and a storage room. In contrast, the space of CSC is just a room with limited space. As a result, CSBN can offer a bigger variety of programs. Beyond health, NWI has served as a link to bring together different types of community projects from both sides of the border. An important example is the *Conexiones Familiares Program* or Connections Project, which looks to improve the school performance of Mexican children with dual citizenship who attend schools in the U.S and whose parents do not hold a U.S. visa and therefore cannot attend official school meetings.

2.2 Navigating my encounters between *El Barrio Nuevo* and *La Colosio*.

In order to explore the proposed research questions, I conducted a feminist ethnographic approach in Naco for a period of four weeks, during the months of July and August. I combined participatory observation, in-depth interviews, discussion groups and informal dialogues. A feminist approach is taken through this research epistemological position, research methodology, and analysis and writing style. I ‘start thought from women’s lives’ (Harding 1992), legitimating women as the principal “knowers or agents of knowledge”

(Harding 1987: 3) in this Research Paper, acknowledging that there are no single women experiences, and that these “are determined by class, race and culture” (Harding 1987: 7). Through self-reflexivity, I approach the situatedness of the knowledge (Davids and Willemse 2014) that it’s being produced by the encounters and experiences I had with some of the women of Naco, recognizing my own position, these women position and the context of the research (Rose 1997). I resorted to a reflexivity approach following “the feminist desire to create a more egalitarian research relationship” (Davids and Willemse 2014) this is important when approaching the research questions, as a way of prioritizing women experiences and meanings over my own interpretations.

Bringing up the question of ‘What kind of knowledge do we want to produce and be a part of?’ Within this research, I choose to privilege the stories, feelings and subjective experiences of the women of Naco whom I worked with. Therefore, as analysis, I start from the position of the women participants by looking at their narratives (Fraser 2004) and the meanings they give to their own experiences. During my encounters, I directly reflect with women while some themes were coming out. I also resorted to thematic analysis when looking at the In-depth interviews and field notes. Nevertheless, I acknowledge I am still the one who narrates, writes and structures this paper. (Stacey 1988)

Looking to be clear on my positionality, every time I met a woman I took the time to explain what this research was about, encouraging them to ask any question they might had. I also told them that any conversation we had or information they shared was going to be under the principle of confidentiality; therefore, the names of participants used in this research were changed. With the exception of Lupita and Norma, whom because of their specific roles as women who run the organization I could not hide their identity. Therefore, I asked for permission to write their real names and emphasize their stories.

The first time I encounter NWI was 2016, on a Health Fair organized by them at Naco, Sonora. I attended as part of the Mexican Consulate where I was working on. I met Lupita, the director of the organization; we then started to collaborate in different projects. In March 2018, I sent an email to Lupita, sharing my interest in doing research with the women participants of NWI. The following day she had already responded “With pleasure we receive you here in Naco and of course we support your research project. Here you have a house and your friends from Casa Saludable”, this meant that I had assured ‘access’ to the space, the access to my participants stories was still just a possibility. 4 months later I was already in Naco, as we had established I had a planning meeting with the NWI staff; the president of the organization, Tom, a US man on his 70s; the director, Lupita, born and raised in Naco, in her 40s; the health promoter, Norma, born in the south of Mexico, on her 40s; and me, perceived as someone who used to work in the Mexican Consulate in the US side of the border and now a MA researcher from a European institution, born and raised in the neighbouring state of Sinaloa, in my 20’s. During our conversation, they explained to me what was the current situation of the organization and I further shared with them my research project. In that meeting I learned in which activities I was going to be able to be a part of and learned the different dynamics happening within the NWI, by this, I mean the two spaces CSBN and CSC.

My participatory observation, allowed me to get an insight on women’s interactions and the meanings they give (Jorgensen 2011) to their participation in both spaces. My presence in CSBN, where the main projects and activities of NWI take place, allowed me to be part of board meetings, the Garden Project graduation ceremony, physical therapy sessions, ‘*escuelita*’ for kids, and day to day encounters of people with this space. Here, I was part of the group of women who do Zumba every morning. For the purpose of this research I will not be using my embodied experience as part of my data or any analysis to the dance in

itself, zumba class was a space to meet the women and learn from their personal approach to this activity, by conversations and observations.

Norma coordinated one of the principal projects going on, the Garden Project (from now on GP), therefore I relate it to CSC space. Also the majority of its participants regularly attend CSC. Through the four weeks of my research I was accompanying her in different activities related to this project, which led me to meet the women who were part of it, engage in conversations with them while they were proudly showing me their garden. The last two weeks of my research I conducted participatory observation on the physical space of CSC, being part of activities that were happening such as the 'diabetic club', the *Loteria*, or just spending time at the space.

The last two weeks of my encounters, I coordinated two conversation circles at CSBN and CSC. Following a Grounded Theory approach (Keddy et al.1996), I intended to give space to the women to discuss the common obstacles present in their lives and how they categorize their reaction to them. Chapter 5 is based on this dynamic.

With the aim of accessing women "ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words" (Reinharz 1992: 19 as cited in Hesse-Biber 2011) rather than in my own, I conducted nine in-depth Interviews with four women who are part of the zumba group, four women who are part of the gardening project, and one woman who couldn't be part in any project because of her busy work schedule. Approaching the nine interviewees happened fluidly during the first two weeks of interactions. The access was mainly negotiated through my proximity to Norma and Lupita, which defined how women opened up to me. Also, they told me who would be willing to be a participant and helped me schedule some of the encounters. I approached women who showed availability as well as interest. For instance, Karla, 42-years-old, approached me and said: "Hey I am an example of a what you were mentioning, a border mom" following one of my comments on how interesting I found the dynamics of parenting in the border.

I also conducted different interviews beyond the women participants, including NWI President and governmental officials. Informal dialogues with the team of NWI, the women participants and governmental officials of Naco were part of my daily encounters.

2.3 Which women of Naco?

I aim to stay away from what Mohanty (1984) calls the production of "The Third World Woman"¹, distinguishing that the group of women I encountered only represent a specific group within the women of Naco: half of Naco population, 3,163, are women and I only encountered nineteen. Overall, the findings of this research do not have universal applicability to all women (Rose 1997). The participants are different positioned within Naco society in regards to age, origin, US migratory status, education, marital status, and so on, which shape these women's experiences (Harding 1987). However, I acknowledge the commonality of their participation within NWI, as (Intemann 2010: 785) asserted "membership in certain groups will be relevant to the kinds of experiences one has because of how it affects one's social, political and material circumstances". This research represents a majority but not the whole participants of NWI. The specific group of women I encountered is those who were part of activities happening during the summer, therefore, the

¹ "Done mainly by western feminist scholarship, which is a type of discursive colonization. Seeing woman as a category of analysis which assumes all women as an homogenous group, ignoring classes of cultures." (Mohanty 1984: 33)

women that I encountered and their lived experiences could have been different if I was present in other period of time and engaged myself in other dynamics. For instance, Lupita told me that if I had been involved in a Prenatal-care project, the context of the participants in CSBN would have been similar to the ones on CSC. Yet, as I observed and heard from the participants of this research, people from a lower socioeconomic status live in the outskirts of town, social context that influences the background of the women who participate on CSC.

In the CSBN, I principally encountered women attending Zumba classes and in CSC I encountered women who were part of the Gardening Project. In both places I met women who attended the space for other type of services. Out of the nineteen women I encountered by interviews and conversation circles, eleven were in their 40's, three in their 30's, two in their 20's and two on their 50's. Regarding their place of origin, only four women out of nineteen were born in the south of Mexico²; two of them migrated as children and stayed in the border while their dad went undocumented to work to the US, the other two migrated as youth, looking for a job. The rest are from the state of Sonora, from Naco in its majority. Nevertheless, out of the three women who hold a US visa, only two of them were born and raised in Naco. The women I approached in each space, CSBN and CSC, represented different socio economic status; one out of eleven women from CSC hold a U.S. visa and two out of six women from CSBN do; from CSBN, three finished high school and three secondary school, in the case of the participants of the CSC, only two women finished high school and eight studied until secondary school; in CSBN, four women were officially married, one women in a partnership and one was a single mother, in the case of CSC, three women were officially married, seven were in a partnership and one was a single mother; regarding their occupation, women from both groups identified themselves as *ama de casa* (house-keeper of housewives), yet, some of them had other occupations: from CSBN, one photographer, one hair-stylist, one director of NWI and one zumba instructor. Only one woman didn't have a paid work. In the case of CSC two women were identified as merchants, one maquiladora worker, one security guard, one health promoter, one nanny and one maid. Three women didn't have a paid-work.

2.4 Limitations of this research: Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?

While writing this paper, I often think of Smadar Lavie, 'screen-testing' of Fatma, her research 'informant', for a star performance role in her scholarly show: "which theory, which setting and costume, would be best frame Fatma's lived reality on the poststructural-deconstructionist-postcolonial cognition big screen?" (Lavie 2011: 105).

Feminist scholars have critically assessed the possibility of conducting a truly feminist ethnography (Stacey 1988; Abu-Lughod 1990; Lavie 2011; Nencel 2013; Willemse 2014). The main matter in question is the power dynamics present in the relations between the researcher and the researched. Stacey (1988) unfolds this question, exposing how it is impossible to level those power relations, as the researcher, being the one who is in power to write the story, will always have the last word on what to write and what to avoid. Rose (1997) points out how the researcher will always hold the power in "deciding what questions to ask, directing the flow of discourse, interpreting interview and observational material, and deciding where and in what form it should be presented" (Rose 1997: 307). Also,

² Guanajuato, Guerrero and Michoacán.

by following the researched demand on what to avoid, we contribute to some silences (Stacey 1988). In the case of this research, some stories were avoided, not only as a consequence of the limited space given; some women requested me not to mention some sensible topics, I as well decided not to put emphasis on issues that might hurtfully interfere with their lived dynamics. Stacey (1988) also problematizes how the researcher it is freer to leave the built relation it developed with the researched. Tears by both the women and myself accompanied interviews and conversations. The connection developed with Lupita and Norma was special, I trusted them and they trusted me. But, they opened their hearts and wounds to me merely for my Academic upbringing? What I am really contributing to these women lives?

More than questioning if there can actually be a feminist ethnography, Abu-Lughod (1990) questions the difference that feminist ethnography could make on both the research and the writing in the life of “other cultural groups”. For Abu-Lughod, adding the feminist component to ethnography breaks with the myth that the researcher stays outside of the researched dynamics, bringing up the situatedness of knowledge: “we are part of what we study and we always stand in definite relations to it” (Abu-Lughod 1990). This it’s the take that I emphasize within this paper, more than seeing my feminist approach as a practice that is ‘free of sin’, I recognize it as an approach that is humble in recognizing its flaws. Willemse (2014) brings up the embodied knowledge production that comes within feminist ethnography, which “departs from knowledge production as being situated and produced in encounters with others, how knowledge is produced in intersubjective knowledge processes.

Despite the fact that as a Northern Mexican woman I share commonalities with the women of Naco, I am conscious that I stand in a privileged position towards them regarding my education and socioeconomic status. I presented myself as a Masters degree student in a European Institution; when 11 out of 19 women participants stopped their studies at secondary school and none of them hold a higher education degree. I as well hold a ‘power’ position as part of my previous work where they saw me as a ‘governmental official’. My positionality definitely shaped the way these women decided to engage with me and the information they shared; it already shaped my pre conceptions of these women lives and the assumptions out of which I came out with my research problem, which were shown in the questions I asked during my interviews and also they way I directed the dialogues we had. On the other side, the majority of the participants were double my age, which represented a power position based on their age and lived experiences. Also, they had the control of which narrative to share with me.

Chapter 3 : Women of the Borderlands

The aim of this section is to get a sense on how women participants of NWI experience the borderlands. The main themes I expose here were the principal elements that came up in the In-depth interviews I conducted with nine women. Through this chapter I introduce Lupita and Norma, by sharing their personal stories, I intend to give an intersectional understanding of how the complexities of the borderland are experienced different and how different lived experiences shape which borders women perceive in their lives. It is important to point out that both of Lupita and Norma stories share the similarity of standing under the privilege of working with NWI, which its not representative of the women who are involved in the projects. The concept of the *New Mestiza* will be used to refer to the experiences of these women within their lives at the borderlands.

3.1 A town where nothing happens...

This study is located in the town of Naco, Sonora, which was born simultaneously with Naco, Arizona in 1897 as a cross border point connecting the two mining towns of Cananea, Sonora and Bisbee, Arizona. Therefore, Naco and Bisbee are considered to be the border towns of Naco, Sonora: the first one is directly crossing the border and the second one is located 20 minutes away. Both sides of the border share a similar number of habitants, and at the U.S side, people from 'Latino' or 'Hispanic' roots are a majority. According to the latest census by the Mexican Government in 2010, the number of the population of Naco, Sonora was of 6,401 habitants (INEGI 2010). In the same year, the Government of Arizona registered a population of 1,046 for Naco, with 83% 'Hispanic' or 'Latino' and 5,192 habitants for Bisbee, 36% 'Hispanic' or 'Latino'. (US Census 2017)

I heard from local people that Naco was a forgotten town, by both the state and Mexican society, where nothing, aside from migration and narco dynamics happen. The latest data from 2010, shows that out of 6,401 habitants, 45% lived in situation of poverty and 6% in extreme poverty (INEGI 2010), this due to the lack of social services; 76.3% of the population didn't had access to them (INEGI 2010).

Naco lacks economic activities and there is limited data regarding its population occupation. Before 2008 U.S. economic crisis, which influenced a dramatically decrease of people trying to cross to the U.S., Naco economy was impulse by migration dynamics: hostels, restaurants, and clothing stands. (Perez 2015) Also, the human smuggling business represented an important amount of money fluidity in the town. Because of lack of job opportunities, people tend to go to the cities of Agua Prieta and Cananea, which are located 40 minutes away. In the border city of Agua Prieta, the main economic sector is manufacturing and in Cananea is mining.

Women living on Naco encounter different levels of challenges and oppressions. They live within highly hierarchical power structures represented by the physical wall that divides their community and collocates them in a specific place regarding their citizen status, in both the Naco community and within their households. Moreover, they encounter gender inequalities and violence that is being reproduced within their households and their community practices; in 2011, the state of Sonora ranked 4th place nationally in violence against women, being emotional violence the most common (Hernandez 2016). Regardless of this data, domestic violence was not an issue brought up by the research participants; only one of them mentioned experiencing economic violence. I acknowledge that domestic violence is a sensible topic, and the silence on this matter could be explored in different ways. For

the purpose of this research I will focus on these women spoken struggles and I will not dig into those silences.

3.2 The physical and other borders

The physical borderline, 'The border' or '*La frontera*' that divides Naco between countries has evolved throughout the years. It was not until the 1960's that for the first time both populations were physically divided by a barbed wire netting. In the year 1994, as a consequence of the US government Gate Keeper Operation³, a stronger metallic fence was gradually built and new crossing regulations instated (Gallon 2017). In 2017, a higher and stronger border replaced the older one (Arochi 2017). This changes strongly affected the local dynamics of both towns, specifically people from the Mexican side, who due to new U.S. migratory regulations were then unable to cross to the U.S.

Within their stories, women exposed how they relate in different ways to the bordering process. For instance, Norma, 42-years-old, used to live next to the border as a child. She remembers that close to her house there were some hills she used to visit, obstructed by "three stripes of wire". "I remember that my youngest brother used to cross the wire and say 'I am going to whistle in English' ". She then told me that she never crossed, as it never caught her attention "I didn't see it as a big deal, it was the same land here and there". She remembered how her siblings got free bread on a local church. I asked her if migration authorities ever caught them, she didn't recall seeing them around. Carmen, 43-years-old, who arrived to Naco when she was 17, also used to cross every Sunday to take free food from a church, she remembers that "Instead of a wall there was a type of shade cloth... Sometimes the migration authorities caught us and sent us back to Mexico, sometimes they let us go. After 8 days, we were crossing again." The experience of both Norma and Carmen resonates to the US government surveillance increment along the habited sections of the border. (Spener 2004)

Some women, who were born and raised in Naco, remember crossing the border with a local permit⁴. For instance, Adriana, 40-years-old, used to cross when she was younger, but when the regulations got stronger she never applied for a Visa. Karla, 43-years-old, also shared how "The local permit was really easy to get, it was processed right in the customs offices". Women remember they mainly crossed to do grocery shopping and visiting family in the other side. There are also exceptions, for example, Rosa, 30-years-old, who has never crossed to the U.S. despite living her whole life in Naco. Before she was born her parents crossed and worked in the US for a while, her mother didn't like it so they came back. Once she was born they didn't want to cross anymore. For Rosa, the border is irrelevant.

Borderland Theory conceptualizes borderlands as a metaphor for other types of crossings beyond the material border (Anzaldúa 1987; Hansen et al. 2006) between Mexico and

³ Gatekeeper is a "territorial denial," or "prevention through deterrence," strategy that attempts to thwart migrants and smugglers from entering the United States through the forward deployment of Border Patrol agents and the increased use of surveillance technologies and support infrastructure.

the US. Four women I encountered came from the south of Mexico; Guerrero, Michoacán and Guanajuato, whom remarked how different living on the north was from their places of origin. When Norma talked about a trip she had to Michoacán, she mentioned the big difference from Naco, specifically culture and the way people behave. For instance, the way families interact with each other. Mariana, 49-year-old, as well identified that the interactions within families was the thing that affected her the most when arriving to Naco. Within this example, it can be seen how some women identified stronger borders within the north and south of Mexico in issues such as social interaction, than the actual border within Mexico and the US. This of course is explained by their lived experiences in “both sides” of Mexico, experience they do not have towards the US.

3.3 Lupita, a woman of *Barrio Nuevo*

Lupita is the Director of NWI and is in charge of *Casa Saludable Barrio Nuevo (CSBN)*, which is her neighbourhood. Before being part of NWI, she was involved in different activities. She first worked in a little ranch that her mother in law used to have. Then, she opened a pharmacy in her garage but had to shut it down after two chain pharmacies came into town and took away her clients. After becoming unemployed, she started volunteering for the *DIF* (National System for the Integral Development of the Family) municipal office. One day, while she was on the *DIF* office, one ‘American’ man arrived and shared his interest on working with the community of Naco: his plan was to give free health screening once a month for families and was looking for a place to do this. Without thinking twice, Lupita told him that she had a free space on her house. That’s how she met Tom, the founder of NWI, and started her involvement with the Initiative. She has now been part of it for nine years. At the same time, she has engaged in other activities, she considers that the community outreach that NWI has given her, opened the door for her to get involved with politics: she was a municipal Councilor for public security, and this summer she ran as secretary of government, but didn’t get elected.

Lupita is 43-years-old, she was born and raised in Naco, Sonora. Being the oldest of 7 siblings, she was raised by her grandparents, as her mom was ‘really young’ when Lupita was born. Lupita is a mother of three children. As she was a holder of the border local permit, two of her children were born in the United States; one of them its part of the United States army. Because she violated the terms of the permit by having her children in the US she has not being able to get a tourist Visa, as a consequence, she considers she has lost really important things to her children, such as academic successes, graduations, sports activities and the birth of her grandchildren: “It is painful not being able to enjoy those moments because of not having a visa”. Several times she has applied for a tourist visa but it has been denied, now her most plausible option is to be ‘migrated’⁵ by her son who is enrolled in the army. She is currently in the process. Now all her children are grown and the school activities might not be a priority, but is indispensable for her job at NWI being able to cross and be a part of outreach activities that are done in the US. Lupita considers one of the blessings of her life has been her husband, as he has always supported her on

⁵ “Immigration to the United States that happens based on family ties (when a US citizen or, in some cases, a green card holder petitions for a relative to join them)” (Lind 2018)

the different projects she has taken, but also, they share the household duties, which Lupita recognizes as important.

Lupita recognizes the big effect that living on a border town has on her life. For starters, she was raised in a neighbourhood next to the border. Even though now a days she cannot cross the border, her children have been a “transmitter of that culture” (referring to US culture), which she tries to understand. As *The New Mestiza*, she has shifted out of habitual formations, including ‘external’ elements rather than excluding them (Anzaldua 1987). For instance, her son enrolment in the U.S. army and what this means for Lupita perception of that institution, as she is proud of her son being part of it. Also, how her own job is dependent on people from the US, who according to her, are supporting everything that happens in NWI. Within her daily activities, she often deals directly with people that are funding or organizing projects, thanks to that she learned English, she is really proud of that.

3.4 Norma, a woman of *La Colosio*

Norma is a health promoter of NWI and it’s in charge of *Casa Saludable Colosio*, a wing of NWI, which is located in the outskirts of the town, Norma’s neighbourhood. She is also the facilitator of the Gardening Program (GP). She first approached NWI after her last child was born; she was going through post-partum depression and she found a space within the organization to overcome it, as she told me “Naco Wellness it’s a space for women”. She was also a participant of the ‘Diabetes Club’ and the GP. Now a day, she is a facilitator for both programs.

Norma is a 42-years-old woman, born in the state of Michoacán, Mexico, which she considers as south of the country. As many other people living in the northern border of Mexico, her family migrated north when she was a small girl, with the aim of looking for a better life. Her father crossed the border all the way to Colorado, where he worked for 5 years. Her mom and her siblings stayed in Naco. Her father came back as the plan was always to stay until he saved enough money to buy a house and a car. It was just 2 years ago that her parents went back to Michoacán.

Norma has a good relationship with her four children, she believes its because she always stayed home to take good care of them; making sure they had food on the table and also being there to help them with their homework. She as well represents the authority in her household, as for some time, her husband left them for another woman and all their children saw for some years was their mother. They now live together “but each of us on our own”. As many other women from Naco, Norma has a complicated relationship with her partner. Norma’s parents are really conservative: she relates this to the “values that are lived in the south”. For instance, the reason she went back to her husband is because her father went and talked to him directly, as he didn’t want her daughter to be seen around as a single mother.

When I first asked Norma if living on the border represented something for her she told me “for me it’s the same”. I even asked about the wall, or if she considered herself as a border woman, and with the head she nodded “no”. After a long talk, she reflected that in fact every aspect of her life it’s intertwined with the dynamics of living in the borderlands, but maybe she doesn’t see it as something special because she is used to it. She reflected on the illness of her daughter: “When she was born, they told me she was going to live 2 years the most”. Thanks to a US NGO focused on kid’s health, her daughter has been able to get check ups and treatment once a year in Nogales, Arizona. Now, thanks to a humanitarian permit, Norma has crossed the border with her daughter seven times. She thinks that if it hadn’t been for that opportunity her daughter would probably hadn’t make it. She also

pointed out how her job is dependent on people from the US, as they are the ones who give the funding for her salary. She then commented how she has the best experience of living at the border.

3.5 Border mothers

I took the term border mothers from the women themselves, as I heard that's how some of them refer to their experience: *mamas de la frontera*. Having children in the U.S. side of the border has been a common practice within Mexican border communities, this in order to benefit from some of the opportunities of having a U.S. nationality, such as education or jobs. Out of nine interviewees, three are considered border mothers. For instance, Ana, 45-years-old, gave birth in the U.S. to two of her children, who now attend school at Naco, Arizona. At difference with some of her friends, she holds a tourist visa, which allows her to attend school meetings and activities. Ana acknowledges she holds a big privilege, as there are those parents of dual citizenship children who not even hold a tourist visa, which is the case of two of the women I encountered. Karla, 42-years-old, had her four children born in the US. It now has been almost six years since she cannot cross, as a result her role as a mother has been deeply affected, as she cannot be part of all of her children school activities such as football games or Christmas events. Nevertheless, she acknowledges the big opportunity that this education represents for her children. This shows how in the case of Ana, the physical bordering process brought up other borders in her motherhood, this by her inability to be a part of her children experiences.

Some women who their children weren't born in the US recognize the disadvantage this represents for their children education. For instance, Celia, 40-years-old, mother of three, mentioned: "as a mother I feel sadness that my children cannot study in the US. It's a frustration to know that my son has unsuccessfully tried to get a visa twice. Its important for them to move forward, there are more opportunities there". In this case, the expressed frustration of Celia was towards her children not being able to access opportunities on the U.S. rather than on Mexico. The proximity to the U.S. and seeing how others experience the advantage of it, created a new border in Celia's ability to provide education to her children. Now she is not only encountering the lack of provisioning from the Mexican side, but also her inability to access the one in the U.S. Nevertheless, not all the women I talked to aspired to that. For instance, Adriana, 40-years-old, mother of three, commented: "The children of some of my friends were born in the US. Here people tend to do that. They asked me why I didn't do it. I don't know, there is no specific reason. Why should I?" In her case, she aspires that her children go to study in the south of Mexico, where their father lives.

Besides the women I encountered, two years ago I was part of an unofficial graduation ceremony in Naco, Sonora, for Mexican students that attended high school in Naco, Arizona. This was the first of its kind, and came up as a result of mothers wanting to be a part of their children academic life. In this case, in order for women to cross the border blocking them from their children academic experience, they did not cross the physical border but brought to their 'side' what was bordered. This resonates with how *The New Mestiza* "Has to shift out of habitual formations... movement away from set patterns" (Anzaldúa 1987: 101). In the women of Naco case, this can be translated as moving away from the institutional settings of U.S. education system.

3.6 Violence as a norm and the presence of narcos and *polleros* as a push for ‘economic prosperity’

When talking with the women I interviewed I shared how when I searched for information of women in the Mexican Northern border, I met different texts which largely emphasize in violence, both by organized crime but also specifically towards women. I then asked how did they relate to that in their every day dynamics. Through some of their statements, they rejected those claims; on the contrary, all perceived the town as safe and calm. Nevertheless, in these conversations contradictions were exposed. For instance, Adriana, 40-years-old, commented:

“Here you don’t see that much, it is calm. Before, when I used to go out, it was calmer. Something happens here and BOOM, because it’s not seen so often. But it it’s known that every now and then someone gets ‘levantado’ (picked up). It’s known that they pick up people who are working or so, it is seen a lot within youth. But it is really calm; it’s a good town. At night you even see more, once I got to see that armed people took someone. It doesn’t directly affect you but it’s amazing because of the same calm of the town”

After the same question, Karla, 42-years-old, responded: “You could say that it’s a calm town. Here there are people that take care of it as well. Lately it has been heard that they threat those who are messing around, and if they keep doing it they are kicked out of town”. Through her comment, she exposes presence of organized crime assuring security. These observations demonstrate that the town is suffering from perpetual violence, principally from the organized crime. The contradictions embedded in the narratives about the town show the normalization of violence within their daily lives.

Through my interviews, it caught my attention that the majority of the participants referred to a period where there was economic growth in Naco; some recognized that this was due to the presence of narcotraffic or migrant who intended to cross undocumented to the US. For instance, Rosa, 30-years-old, said: “The people that come from other places (referring to the migrants) are a big help. They are here and they need a place to eat and a place to sleep, then people here get jobs. They either open a restaurant or a hostel... When there are no people you can notice the crisis. It has been happening for 10 years now”. The border these women face towards Mexico can as well be seen in how these women perceived the migrants who were coming from the south of Mexico as others. Adriana, 40-years-old, also commented:

“It is bad that I say it, but the town was going really well; the businesses, the families. There was prosperity in town; you could see new cars, the town looked different. Everyone benefited, it was because of the narcotraffic and also the migrants who used to cross the border, you saw a lot of them, a full block full of people walking... And I am telling you because I used to work in a pharmacy, the owner used to bring stuff from the US and they were sold almost immediately.”

Once I heard this, I directly asked the women how their life dynamics were in the period where there was more ‘economic movement’ in the town. The responses that I got as well supported the presence of Narco and migrants as something positive for the economy. For example, Ana, 45-years-old, said: “Good, we used to do better... the majority of people from Naco were involved on it in some way or another (referring to ‘migrant business’)... Now it’s not possible, now the mafia decides were migrants are going to arrive. Before, all people could do their business with the migrants, not anymore.”

As it is seen, the period recognized as ‘economic prosperity’ was part of how some of the women overcome certain obstacles. While talking with Norma about the most difficult

period of her life, I asked what helped her get through it. She mentioned a conversation with her dad, where she shared her concerns on how she was going to support economically her four children after her husband left them:

“He told me, ‘Do not worry, you have seen that there are a lot of people that are crossing the border. Open a restaurant and you take care of it with your children’ I worked 5 years at the restaurant. There was the time where the town was full of money. From the restaurant profits I used to buy medicine for my daughter and pay the bills, all by myself”

This period as well represented an obstacle for some of these women. Both Ana and Adriana, whom mentioned this period as one of prosperity, went through situations where family members were directly affected by the insecurity that the presence of organized crime brought to the town. Adriana commented: “One day, something happened in Agua Prieta, there were a lot of deaths. A lot of people from Naco were kicked out; within them there was the father of my children”. Ana, mentioned: “The biggest obstacle that I’ve had is that I don’t know where my son is at, they took him away, the mafia.” Nevertheless, none of both women stopped identifying the period as positive. Their experience shows these women ability to navigate (Vigh 2009) through elements that contradict each other, where the same element, in this case the presence of organized crime, represents both obstacles but also a way to overcome them.

In the borderlands

You are the battleground

Where enemies are kin to each other;

You are at home, a stranger,

The border disputes have been settled

The volley of shots have shattered the truce

You are wounded, lost in action

Dead, fighting back

(Anzaldúa 1987: 216).

3.7 Conclusion: Navigating the borders as *New Mestizas*

Through this chapter I show how the borders that these women are facing in their daily lives go beyond the U.S. physical border, and in some cases metaphorical borders towards Mexico are present. Anzaldúa concept of “*La New Mestiza*” can be applied to talk about how Lupita, Norma and the women of Naco cope with the dichotomies of the borderlands “by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (Anzaldúa 2012:101) and the ability to navigate through that.

Through the stories of Lupita and Norma, it can be seen how different elements impact these women perceptions and experiences of the borders. For example, Lupita recognized in first instance how living in the border seriously shapes her life. In the contrary, at first, Norma rejected the claims that the border had an effect on her life. Also, while Lupita mentioned to welcome U.S. values in her life, Norma showed a closer relation to the values of the south of Mexico. Despite both women’s everyday lives being intertwined with the presence of border in some way or another, different elements are present in their experi-

ence as woman of Naco. For instance, their place of origin, their relation to there husband, their children citizenship, and so on. Being Lupita from *Barrio Nuevo* and Norma from *La Colosio*, the stories of these women give light to and in some way are representative of the different women I encountered in both spaces. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that all women have the same experience.

For Anzaldua, "*New Mestizas*" are people who inhabit multiple worlds because of their gender, color, spiritual beliefs and other experiences (Anzaldua 1987). In this Research, *New Mestizas* are made out of these women experiences of motherhood, where some are daily crossing borders of language and institutions as a result of their children education on the US, but also on these women perception of which education opportunities are more feasible for their children, where sometimes seems easier to cross the material border to the U.S. than the institutional borders with Mexico; also, *New Mestizas* are made out of women daily encounters with the social borders towards Mexico, in relation to culture or social relations; the ability of these women to conveniently navigate through the contradictions brought up by the presence of organized crime also represents an asset of a *New Mestiza*.

Chapter 4. *Casas Saludables* are what these women make out of them

This chapter aims to contribute to the critical discussion on development interventions and women empowerment. Through a Feminist Standpoint Theory, it aims to understand what are the meanings that these women give to NWI programs and how these programs impact their lives. First, I describe the Zumba and the GP projects. I then thread on the conversations I held with women participants of those projects, my observations, and the conceptual understandings of development projects and empowerment. I explore Olivier de Sardan (2005) anthropological approach to development interventions, to describe the way these women interact with the programs of NWI. To conceptualize the ‘empowerment’ experiences that women participants had out of these interactions, I will follow Rowlands (1997) dimensions of personal empowerment and collective empowerment.

4.1 Zumba

According to Lupita, NWI started to incorporate zumba into its programs as an initiative from the people who were involved in the ‘Diabetes Club’, as they wanted to exercise. At first, they used videos, then they had an instructor, then went back to the videos, and so on. Through time, the group of people who attend this activity has gone beyond the ones involved in the ‘Diabetes Club’. CSC, which is active with the ‘Diabetes Club’, used to have Zumba classes as well. They had the space as an obstacle as the building is just a room but they managed to do it. Eventually they stop, as the building is on the terrain of a church, which minister thought Zumba was ‘inappropriate’. Now a day, they are negotiating being able to dance again. Currently, CSBN opens its space to a Zumba teacher to give classes to two groups of women twice a day. The participants have to pay a weekly fee to the teacher, which has delimited the group that attends to people who have the economic possibility.

The Zumba group is active in charity activities, engagement that has been a result of being within NWI networks. For instance, once a week they give participatory performances to people from *Casa del Adulto Mayor* (House for the elderly) or kids from the *CAME* (school for kids with special needs). They also volunteer on special projects, for instance, in Christmas time U.S. organizations donate gifts to the children of Naco through NWI and women of Zumba help to deliver the presents.

During the 4 weeks I was part of this group, I experienced how companionship was an essential part of the class dynamic. For example, some women arrived together by bike each morning; whenever it was someone birthday a reunion was organized; they have a *Whatsapp* group; and they hang outside of the class. Personally I felt welcome since day one, for example, when the women asked the teacher to play the song ‘*El Sinaloense*’⁶ to give me a ‘proper welcome’. Also, at my last day at Naco, some of the zumba participants organized a farewell lunch for me.

⁶ A representative song for the state of Sinaloa, where I am from.

4.2 Gardening Project

Following an informal collaboration engagement with the Master of Public Health of the University of Arizona, the academic institution shared the Gardening Project, with the objective of promoting healthy eating in the community. It trained NWI health promoters who then were on charge of teaching local people. While I was in Naco, NWI received a visit from people from the agricultural department of the University of Arizona. NWI show them the gardens, with the idea of getting support from that department, which could mean a donation of seeds or another collaborative project. The project teaches people about soil preparation, organic composting, planting, garden maintenance, mulching and seed collection. At its beginnings, the program was addressed to people with diabetes and hypertension; eventually single mothers and elderly joined, who saw the project as a type of therapy. I consider the Organic Gardening program as part of the CSC space, as Norma, has been the facilitator for the past two years. Also, she was the one who show me around the different gardens who were part of the project and introduced me to women participants.

Despite the fact the project comes from a U.S. institution, agriculture and gardening is deeply embedded within Naco society. Nevertheless, as I heard from Norma, it is usually a job done by men. After 3 years, the project, has reached approximately 75 families. During the last edition, officially 12 families were registered, but the ones attending the classes were the women. Also, there is a project specifically for children. What this project is bringing to the table is the involvement of women into this activity. Rosa, 30-year-old, shared how she used to be closed to the gardening dynamic beyond the NWI project. For instance, Rosa shared how agriculture practices have always been present within her family and she has been involved in one way or another. The new knowledge she acquired with this program it's a more technical and structured way to take care of the garden, which she recognizes, has been positive. For example, the irrigation system she built.

4.3 Discussions on Development Interventions and Empowerment

In a conversation a held with Lupita, as director of NWI, she commented on how the GP went beyond what NWI was expecting as “everyone (who joined) has built their own personal history with their gardens.” After the engagements with the participants, I translate this statement into how the participants joined NWI projects for different reasons that go beyond learning how to garden, or in the case of Zumba, to lose weight, looking to attend a specific personal issue. According to Olivier de Sardan (2005) target groups can appropriate a project through the principle of selective adoption, where the target population picks specific parts of a project, which benefit them, and the principle of side tracking, where the reason people join a project could contradict the ‘experts’ who propose it. In this case, Lupita and Norma, who are in front of both *Casas Saludables*, but also belong to the group of women who are participants, share the same meanings that women give to the projects. This contributes to allowing women agendas at the front. For instance, Lupita mentioned that her involvement with NWI has been the most important thing she has done in her life: “Being in the clinic gives me sanity; the projects, the people, meeting the women. I get more from the people that come here that what I can give to them”. Within the comment, she relates to the project as shared experience of learning with the community, not as a way

for her to impose a specific agenda. She also mentions meeting other women and getting sanity, which are meanings also given by its participants. Also, when I asked Norma what being part of NWI meant for her she commented:

“Having time for me, doing what I enjoy the most. I feel good when a person has the confidence to share with me an intimate story. Working with children is the space where I can be a girl again. Being in the garden reminds me of how happy I was with my parents in the fields. It’s my space. I feel happy, accomplished. Being able to do what I like. Having something to share, to teach and to learn.”

4.3.1 Participation leading to ‘personal empowerment’

As Lupita and Norma, women who are part of both the Zumba and the GP give different meanings to their engagements. One meaning which was identified was personal empowerment, which according to Rowlands (1997) is “developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalized oppression” Rowlands (1997: 15). In the case of Norma, who has diabetes, the reasons for getting involved in the GP program had a health component since the beginning, nevertheless, her involvement it is also a way of defying gender norms that limit her role as a mother or wife:

“My life has changed to a 10! I have changed my nutrition habits, I get to share my time with other people, I feel less stressed, I know I am useful. In the house I am the mom; the one who does laundry and irons. Not here, here, as the other women tell me, I am the teacher, I am the rock that holds them”.

Another example is the one of Mariana, 49-years-old. When she shared with her husband that she was going to join the GP, he responded: “What are you going to know about gardening, that job is for man”. Once Mariana cropped her first harvest, she was excited to show her husband and prove him that she was capable of gardening. Her example shows the undoing of negative social constructions, which collocated her as unable to do a specific job, and learning about her own capacity (Rowlands 1997). Also, the process of gaining skills represents a way for the women to go beyond the role they serve within the household. The case of Mariana also exemplifies the ‘principle of sidetracking’ (Olivier de Sardan 2005), as she joined with the objective of involving her son in the project, because she was worried that he spent to many hours sleeping.

As I heard from women, Zumba is a way of releasing their stress. For instance, Adriana, 40 years-old, told me how her peers have personally told her that they do not join to lose weight, but more as a way of releasing stress, to meet people and forget about responsibilities: “There is no husband, no children”. This shows how for some women, their involvement is a space outside household responsibilities. Here, it can also be explored if the main causal for these women stress its in fact their roles within their household. Rosa, 30-years-old, is a stay home mother of three due to the impossibility of leaving her kids alone. She first entered the GP because of a genuine interest on how plants turned into food. Now, when she is stressed or worried, she goes to the garden to do weeding. Carmen, 43-year-old also mentioned that being around her plants it’s a therapy.

According to Olivier de Sardan (2005), the development interactions always take place in specific contexts, “which affects the outcome of the interventions” (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 144) Within a context of deeply ingrain gender norms which are unfavourable for women, these projects represent an opportunity to go outside of that dynamic. For instance, all the women whom I encounter despite having a job outside of home, identified as *ama de casa*. The projects were mentioned by the women as a space or time for themselves; this can be related to the way they are taking a break from their role as mothers, caregivers and housewives. How they found a place to belong outside of their house, where

they can be a dancer, a gardener, a peer, or so on. In accordance, Rebeca, 22-years-old, moved to Naco four years ago to 'get together' with her partner. She shared in tears how zumba was the only space she had to interact with people outside of the family of her partner. Therefore, she was thankful with the women for opening the doors for her, as she was in need of this type of space.

4.3.2 Participation leading to 'collective empowerment'

As I could first hand experienced, the interactions the zumba participants have are strongly embedded in a group dynamic. For instance, one day after zumba class I mentioned how I was craving some pancakes, immediately the women organized; we all put money on the table and went to the grocery store next door to get the ingredients. In thirty minutes we were all having pancakes. As the participants mentioned it often, one of the perks of having zumba at CSBN was having a kitchen and being able to stay for coffee and snacks afterwards with the girls. This shows how the 'perks' contradict what for some could be the main objective of Zumba, which is losing weight.

Besides being a space for personal empowerment, the interaction within NWI spaces have given the women a collective identity (Rowlands 1997). Within the meanings given to their participation, the women mentioned an opportunity to being able to share with other women their struggles, being listened to understood, also, listening how other women might be going to similar situations. Mariana 49-years-old, commented: "The learning goes beyond gardening, it's seeing how different women unfold themselves in their daily lives. Getting to know her (Norma), to understand her. To recognize her work as a mother, as a woman". This can be related to Rowlands (1997: 78) statement: "a problem ceases to be individual shortcoming, and can begin to be seen as social or political issue that might have causes and solutions outside the four walls of the home". After both the Conversation Circles, I heard from the Zumba and the GP women, how good it felt to had the opportunity to learn that other women are as well sharing the same struggles. They expressed feelings of relief. They as well mentioned how they wanted to keep having those types of activities.

Collective empowerment "includes involvement in political structures, but might also cover collective action based on co-operation rather than competition." (1997: 15) This can be shown in how the women of Zumba are involved on charity activities beyond their classes. Which might lead to the "an identity and understanding of themselves as groups of people who could act in the wider community". (Rowlands 1997: 85)

4.4 Conclusion: NWI programs are what women make out of them.

Some women indeed joined projects such as the Gardening or the Zumba for their specific agenda, such as healthy eating or losing weight. There are the ones that joined because of a specific personal cause beyond that. Nevertheless, within narrations coming from both sides, underlies recognition of these projects as a space to move aside from their assigned roles (Whitehead 2006) within their household. Even though they still proudly identify as mothers or wives, they now also belong to other groups and can be recognized with other classifications, such as a zumba dancer, or a gardener. It could be that the NWI agenda might the empowering of people within the physical health spectre, nevertheless, I

propose that these women are the ones setting up their personal and collective empowerment agenda within the appropriation of NWI projects.

Chapter 5 Trough Tales and Obstacles

This chapter is based primarily on both the Conversation Circles at CSBN and CSC, but also on the findings from personal interviews. First, I give a review of the dynamics of both Conversation Circles and how the participants named their ability to navigate the obstacles present in their lives. Both groups came up with education and work as two of their obstacles, also, these two themes came up as obstacles in every interview I conducted separately. Therefore, what causes both obstacles is explored through women tales. In the last section, it is shown how women navigate (Vigh 2009) through them.

In this section, I will add CSC or CSBN when quoting the participants, this in order to differentiate women from each space.

5.1 How the women of Naco conceptualized their *Facultad*: *Echandole Lucha and Luchando*

Instead of me categorizing with my own assumptions what are the main obstacles present in the lives of the women of Naco and how they would name their ability to navigate through them, this exercise aimed to conceptualize together with the women their own experiences. This is based on a Grounded Theory approach, with the intention of allowing “the voices of the participants to be heard as they tell their stories” (Keddy et al.1996: 449)

Both Conversation Circles I held in CSBN and CSC consisted on the same structure. In the first part, women gathered in different groups. They were asked to discuss the obstacles they go through as women in Naco. Each team came up with three main obstacles and presented them to the group. After all teams presented, the whole group voted the three main obstacles that better represented them all. In the case of CSC, the obstacles were education, work and sorority; a group that included a Federal Government worker who was visiting Naco mentioned sorority. I acknowledge that I could further dig into what this means, but for a matter of space constraints, I will omit this. In CSBN, the three main obstacles were education, work and care of children; nevertheless, women came to the conclusion that the care of children was embedded within work.

In the second part of the dynamic, I gave each woman three different cards: red, yellow and green. Each colour represented how they reacted towards the obstacles mentioned: red being the most combative way, green the most passive and yellow a middle ground. When categorizing the red card, women identified different actions: *Luchar*, *superarse* (to overcome oneself), *fuertza* (strength), *progresar* (progress), *salir adelante* (get ahead), *chingandole* (pushing forward), *echandole ganas* (making an effort), *no decir no puedo si no lo intentas* (Do not say no if you do not try it) came up in the CSBN. In the case of CSC, the categorizations were *Motivación* (motivation), *Interés* (interest), *Echarle Lucha* (give it a fight), *Cambiar* (change), *Transformar* (transform) and *Intentar* (try). Then, they altogether came up with a category for each card. For the red card, women in CSBN decided *Lucha* and in CSC *Echarle lucha*. The other cards won't be discussed as one of them, the green card didn't come up a single time, and the yellow one will be mentioned in the text when necessary. Also, the discussions for their categorization were not significant.

Once the cards were named the following activity implicated going through each obstacle, then the participants pulled up the card that they considered defined the way they

reacted to that obstacle. I was surprised to see that without hesitating, the red card was put up by the majority of women; the most combative reaction towards the obstacles. But what did it meant?

Acknowledging the importance of following the contextual meaning of the word *Lucha* in relation to these women, my decision on privileging the emic category of this term, which it's "current in the culture itself" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 194). Also, as it is exposed by Lavie (2011) referring to the meaning of 'Staying put', "is not representational but somatic, and therefore difficult to theorize beyond the bounds of the lived. Writing up the somatic is elusive. Translating this somatism from Hebrew and Arabic to English is even more elusive." (Lavie 2011:101) In this case, this is represented by *Luchando o Echando Lucha*, as each of this women would have categorize the red card differently if it were not a group dynamic, which can be translated into how the categorization of *Lucha* it is actually lived different within each of them. Moreover, it is difficult to find a proper English translation that represents the contextualization the word *Lucha* has within Mexico, specifically within Mexican women from lower socioeconomic status, who identify themselves as performers of this action against the obstacles present in their lives. For instance, at the beginning of each Conversation Circle I conducted an 'ice breaker' activity, because the majority of the women already knew each other, it consisted on presenting another women on the group, naming three qualities about her. "*Es una mujer luchona*" (a woman who fights), came out in both groups more than once. Referring to women who were fighting or pushing against obstacles, someone who is courageous, who resists.

To better understand, it is indispensable to refer to another way the term *mujer luchona* it is approached in Mexican society: *madre luchona*. Referring to single mothers, principally from lower socio economic status who do not comply to the 'stay at home mom'; who works and supports their children but also 'has a life' outside home, for example by going to parties or dating other men. This term is used in two ways; one with a positive connotation; the other as a way of mocking the women who embrace this title, which "detract and not consider the resistance performed by women to not enslave themselves in the role of mother" (Acevez 2016 n.p.). Afterwards, I show the discussion of the obstacles these women identified and how they *Echarle Lucha* or exercise their *Lucha*. At the end of this chapter I will give a concluding discussion of the term.

5.2 Education as an Obstacle

When presenting why education was an obstacle within their life, some women, principally from CSC, emphasized on how the obstacle for them was on providing education to their children. Only some participants, primarily from CSBN, directly referred to their own personal relation with education as a struggle.

5.2.1 The obstacle is providing education to their children

Within Education as an obstacle for their women children one of the themes that came up was the lack of educational opportunities in Naco. In order to continue with higher education, people have to go to other city, which results impossible for people with not enough economic means. As both groups mentioned, in order to continue with higher education, young people need to go out to bigger cities such as Cananea, Agua Prieta or Hermosillo.

The following quotes show the economic obstacle of getting an education for their children present within women of CSC. Amanda, 34-years-old, mother of three, shared: “I believe it is going to be impossible to pay for the university for the three of them. Maybe I can pay it to one and then take off the opportunity to the other two, but that seems hard and unfair, it’s not their fault. What can you do? How can you do it?” Celia, 40-years-old mother of three, commented: “After a certain school grade, when children get out of Secondary School, there is not enough money to pay High School. So they have to stop studying. As a consequence they get involved with drugs or vagrancy. Some opt on getting married young. All these are consequences of the lack of education, of money, of alternatives. It is not enough what we make at the *maquilas* or other informal jobs”. Some women who stand in a more privileged position, shared their experiences, but also recognized how in some context of poverty, education is not an option. For example, Lourdes, 52-years-old, CSBN, commented: “We had the fortune of being able to support our son, but not all the cases are the same, in a lot of households education gets stuck, youth have to start working in order to support their family”.

Being a mother represented an important part of the identity of the women I encountered, within conversations or comments, the predominance that they give to their role of mothers was usually brought up. In this section, it is seen how through identifying as their own the obstacles of their children, “women often lack a concept of themselves as individuals with interests separate from those of their family members” (Amartya Sen 1990 as cited in Badget et. Al 1999: 316). Some scholars (Glenn et al. 1994; Garcia and Oliveira 1997) relate this phenomenon to the lack of options for women outside motherhood. I listen to this same argument when I asked one woman why she thought teenage pregnancy was strongly present in Naco: “There is nothing else to do”. The fact that women don’t have other opportunities; such as education or jobs, reinforces their identity as solely mothers. In resonance to this, is the comment of Celia mentioned above, where she relates getting married young as a consequence of lack of alternatives. Nevertheless, women who were also involved in other type of activities beyond the household also presented motherhood as identity.

5.2.2 A woman place is at home

When talking about their children, none of the women mentioned gender as an obstacle. Nevertheless, the ones that shared their own obstacles towards Education related to gender ascriptive relations (Whitehead 2006) present within their experiences. First of all, women encountered the obstacle of education as daughters, as their parents or guardians believed that a women place was at home. Lupita, CSBN, shared:

“I received a scholarship for Secondary School, I was raised by my grandparents who did not allow me to attend precisely because I was a girl. They lived under the myth that I could just get married so there was no need to study, that women don’t have to study. I consider that doing secondary school was my biggest adolescence rebellion”.

For Mariana, 49-years-old, CSC, not being able to overcome herself has been her higher obstacle, which was a consequence of an imposed obligation of family care because of being a women (Badget and Folbre 1999), as her older male siblings did have the opportunity to continue with their education: “I studied until second year of secondary school. I stopped after my mother died: One day my father approach me and told me “*Mijita*, there is no one who can help us with your siblings, you have to quit school to take care of them” I had to cook, clean and help my siblings with their homework”. Other women, got either pregnant or married, therefore they had to conform to their roles as mothers or wives

(Whitehead 2006). Ana, 45-years-old, CSBN, mentioned she wanted to become a nurse, but her dream stopped after she got pregnant in High School, as she had to take full responsibility of her child. Sofia, 57-years-old, commented: "I got pregnant really young; my husband got the opportunity to finish High School but not me, as I got to take care of our baby..."

Lupita commented: "That's how we women started to truncate our dreams. As youth we didn't study, we got married, we had children: we closed the door to move forward." As it is shown, education specifically presented as an obstacle to this women as it was perceived that there was a role they had to follow or an obligation to comply in regards of being a women before thinking on getting an education. As (Whitehead 2006: 11) mentions, "Our experience as women is of being always perceived and treated as members of a gender category about which there are all kinds of stereotyped beliefs", in this case, that women belong at home before belonging to school.

5.2.3 How women respond to Education as an obstacle?

In the CSC, eight out of ten women considered they were half *Echandole Lucha* and half trying. As they briefly mentioned, even though they were doing everything possible some things were out of their hands, referring to poverty, which did not allow them to fully *Echarle Lucha*. Only two women considered they were *Echandole Lucha*. Due to time constraints, the conversation couldn't further up.

In the CSBN, six out of seven women considered they were *Luchando*. Within this group, there was an opportunity to follow the conversation on why and how they were executing that action. Even though education as an obstacle for their children was presented, when women discussed how they respond to it the focus was principally in education as a personal obstacle. Within the discussion, women exposed they met the opportunity of *Luchar* against their obstacles once their children were grown up, which gave women the opportunity to get involved in activities that required their time. For instance, Ana, 45-years-old, is now finishing high school in a governmental online program in order to be able to study nursery. When talking about how she was *Luchando*, she mentioned, "I'm not only going to stay on the 'I want'. I am actually *Luchando* to move on, to be able to be a nurse". In relation to this, the only participant who didn't consider she was *Luchando*, was Vero, 23-year-old; according to her, she first has to attend her responsibilities as mother, and once her daughter grows up she will look for the opportunity of following her dream of becoming a psychologist.

In the cases shown above, gender norms, which delimitate the role of women, are present. Women who identified the issues of their children before their own show how their identity is based on their role at their household. That same issue is presented within the experiences of women who talked about their own struggle with education, who had to follow gender norms, either because their parents believe education was not for women or because they had to comply to taking care of their own children. Within their comments, women acknowledge how motherhood was a consequence of not having other options but also limited their opportunities to keep developing.

5.3 Work

The lack of job opportunities and poor work conditions was a perceived obstacle within both Conversation Circles. They presented this as an obstacle towards the whole Naco community; nevertheless, they strongly emphasized how this was even more difficult for women. The two main themes that came up within the held discussions were poorly paid work and the issues of balancing paid work and care work.

5.3.1 Poor work opportunities

In an overall discussion, women of CSC mentioned lack of opportunities, discriminations because being a woman, a lot of work for low salaries, and the lack of value given to women work as the main components of job as an obstacle. The experience of women in the *maquiladora* was brought up by participants of both CSC and CSBN when referring to poor work opportunities. Nevertheless, Amanda, 34-years-old, CSC, was the only *maquiladora* worker. As the conversation with her showed, there is not enough time for them to engage in activities outside work or the household, that's why usually women from the *maquiladoras* are not part of NWI activities. Amanda commented how what she earns is not enough: "This two weeks you are able to pay the bills, the other two weeks to do grocery shopping. It's living day by day. If something happens, for example someone gets sick, you are screwed, you finish your money to buy things you didn't had in mind. Then it takes a lot of time to get back on track." As a result, the majority of *maquiladora* workers, which according to Amanda are women, are also involved in other type of work. The work at the *maquiladoras* has a strong gender component within its logic, According to (Quintero 2006: 1) "the *maquila* creates an idea about the supposed suitability of the women as ideal workers to this industry due to unskilled nature of *maquiladora* work." Within the discussion on education, women mentioned how women in Naco end up working at the *maquiladoras* as a result of not having an education. As Amanda mentioned, women remain in unskilled positions: "There could be someone who knows how everything works within the company, and instead of giving you the opportunity they rather hire someone from the outside, even though that person doesn't have an idea of how the process goes. They hire people with education"

The lack of work opportunities was an obstacle present within all groups, personal interviews and also informal conversations. Nevertheless, in both Conversation Circles, there were women who followed the argument that "it is people who do not want to work". Within that argument, two shades were present. First, the comment made by women from CSBN who stand in a privilege position, either because they have stable jobs or their partners support them. Lourdes, 52-years-old, commented: "There are jobs if you look for them. People from Naco don't want to work. They want to earn more than the president. 'If you do not pay me 20 dollars for cleaning up the patio I wont do it' ". Ana, 45-years-old, who works once every two weeks cleaning a house in the US side of the border and also gets economic support from her husband mentioned: "There are jobs, my sister in law works here and in 'the other side', she was offered a job here, to clean two houses a day for 150 pesos but she said no, in the other side she earn more than the double". One similarity of the previous comments comes out of the context of Naco being a border town; people opposing earning less than what they would earn in 'the other side'. Another issue discussed after these comments was how people in Naco got used to a stronger economic flow of the 'prosperity period', now is harder for them to get used to low paid jobs. The other shade is present by women who despite of suffering directly from poor work oppor-

tunities follow the same argument. This will be further up brought up when discussing how women respond to the obstacle.

5.3.2 Paid-work vs. care-work ‘duties’ at home

Being able to balance paid work and care-work at home, specifically the care of children, was brought up as an important obstacle within both groups. Independently of having other occupations, all the women I encountered identified themselves as *ama de casa* (housekeeper or housewife), which can be related to the feminization of care-work in Mexico: women dedicate 77.3 hours weekly to unpaid care work, while men only 24.7 hours (INEGI 2016). In the state of Sonora, out of 100 people who take care of children (under fifteen), 66.5% are women. In regards to cooking and house cleaning, 68% are women. (INEGI 2015). In relation to this, Norma, commented: “We as women work way more without a salary, we wake up early, take children to school, the cooking, the clothes. a lot more of work and not paid”.

A specific issue discussed was the inconvenience of leaving their children in care of strangers in order to get a paid work. Carmen, 43-years-old, CSC, mentioned with an ironic tone how in order for women to work for a minimum wage they have to leave their children in hands of other people, and at the end of the day, they spend what they earn on that, therefore, some women decide to stay at home. She mentioned this was not the case of single mothers. Norma added that it is really difficult for women to get a well-paid job, and in addition they had to neglect their children and rely on strangers.

Another problem that was discussed was “having a husband doesn’t mean you are not a single mothers”, referring to their care of their children. Ana, 45-years-old, CSBN, mentioned: “We are the ones that are always on charge of the kids, even if we have a husband, sometimes he just gives us the money and the rest is our responsibility. Is like if the children are only ours, is a rare case the husband that gives support”. For some women, their husband ‘didn’t even’ gave economic support, Karla, 42-years-old, CSC, mentioned how she suffers ‘economic violence’ as she spends all her earnings on her children while her husband doesn’t give her money for that. These comments reaffirm care-work as an imposed duty for women. In some cases, the husbands do not even take economic responsibility, which was mentioned as a normal practice with single mothers, where the majority of the time they take full economic responsibility towards their children.

5.3.3 How do women respond to work as an obstacle?

In both Conversation Circles, all the participants considered they were *Echandole Lucha* and *Luchando* against work as an obstacle. In CSC, women commented how sometimes all they can do against the obstacle is keep pushing forward within the same structure of informal or low quality jobs. Within their comments it was exposed that all that is left doing is shifting their position of victims to one of *Luchadoras*. These are the cases of Carmen, 43-years-old, and Pilar, 45-years-old; both of them expressed their personal stories with emotion, a sense of self-pride. Carmen shared that she has been involved in all type of work in order to economically support her family; she used to sell donuts on the street with a basket over her head, she crossed undocumented to the US, she cleans houses and now she has a small shop on her house. With the following comment, she positioned herself aside of ‘weak’

women: “I started from nothing. Women sometimes are embarrassed to pick up a can”⁷. Pilar, followed with her own story:

“I don’t know if the women here know my life. Before working as a security guard I used to sell ‘*duros*’ (a fried snack) on the streets. In parties I used to pick up cans. I have eight children and I feel really proud of them because they are away of addictions. They are hard workers. I supported them on my own.”

Both women positioned themselves as *Luchadoras*. I also support this claim by the way women reacted to their stories. For example, after Pilar gave out her story, one woman commented, “That’s a *mujer luchona*” (that’s a women who fights). Within a personal conversation with Lorena, she shared how being able to overcome her obstacles gives her strength. This resonates with (Lorde 1984: 53 as cited in Sandoval 2000:195) in relation to marginality “whatever its nature... which is also the source of our greatest strength”. How does *Echandole Lucha* can be read within this example? In the case of Lorena I read it as the capacity to navigate (Vigh 2009) through the obstacles, not overcome them as the obstacles are still there. As *La Facultad* (Anzaldúa 1987), *Echarle Lucha* is a process, an ability developed by individuals exposed to marginality. As *La Facultad*, being able to *Echarle Lucha* is a skill developed out of the encounters with oppressions.

In regards to how women react to the obstacle of paid-work vs. care-work, some mentioned that what allowed them to work outside of home was having support from family members. Adriana, 40-years-old, mentioned she has always been able to work as her mother stays at home taking care of her children. Lupita, added: “My daughter is divorced, she goes to work to the US every day but she has the advantage that the kids stay with me and my husband, we take care and protect them”. This transfers the responsibilities of unpaid care-work, in most cases to other women, nevertheless, is the most plausible opportunity for women in order to be able to go out to work.

Within this section, it is important to go back to the period these women identified as one of economic prosperity, as it lights up how for some women, a way of overcoming low paid work was to be involved in activities that were related to the presence of organized crime. Women identified the presence of Narco as one of more economic fluidity and the presence of migrants directly influencing their success of their jobs; it could be the case of Norma and her restaurant or Karla, 42-years-old, and her cellular shop.

5.4 Conclusion: *Echandole Lucha* and *Luchando* is the women of *Naco Facultad*

Lack of education and work opportunities are obstacles highly present to both women and men in Mexico. For instance, in 2016, only 17% of youth, between 25 and 64 years old, had accomplished higher education (‘El preocupante nivel’ 2017). Nevertheless, in 2018 women conformed more than half of higher education graduates at a national level. Regarding jobs, women between 18 to 24 years old have a higher risk of being unemployed. (Notimex 2018) Despite this data, it is important to consider how that is not representative of every state, city or community in the country. Also, as it was already exposed in the context of this Research, Naco experiences high levels of lack of social provisioning, including education and job opportunities.

⁷ Picking up cans from the street and then selling them for cents it’s a job that a lot of people do...

There is no doubt that lack of social provisioning from part of Mexican institutions plays a predominant role in why these women experience these obstacles, nevertheless, what is more important to consider within this section, is how within these women narratives, strong gender component is underneath why women have experience these obstacles. Within education, it has principally been seen that they have to comply with gender norms within their family. Also, those who identified on a first stance the obstacles of their children as theirs, show how motherhood is a first identity. In the case of work, the *maquiladora* work recognized as the most plausible work option for women in Naco, is a result of seeing women as unskilled labour. Moreover, the feminization of care-work interferes with women direct relation to paid-work.

Motivation, effort, strength, fighting, transforming and pushing forward, were some of the actions women individually identified when sharing the most combative way they respond to the obstacles mentioned above. Nevertheless, through shared experiences and comments by these women, but also to a group discussion that decided on a common term, *Luchando* or *Echando Lucha* was the categorization these women decided that it best fits their response. Each woman might experience this action differently, as Echarle Lucha is somatic and “difficult to theorize beyond the bounds of the lived” (Lavie 2011:101). Yet, as it was exposed, *Echarle Lucha* is a process, an ability developed by these women daily encounters with marginality and oppressions. As Amanda, 34-years-old, commented, women of Naco strength comes out of “the lived, to what we see, to what we learned”. I conclude by proposing that *Echarle Lucha* is the women participants’ own experience of *La Facultad* (1987).

Chapter 6. Final Conclusions

In this paper I argue that some women participants of the non-governmental organization Naco Wellness Initiative have developed *La Facultad* (Anzaldúa 1987) to navigate (Vigh 2005) through some of the complexities they live at the Mexico-US borderlands. The complexities I explore in this paper do not represent the whole experience that these women live. Nevertheless, the obstacles I emphasize are the ones directly brought up by these women in different encounters.

Besides experiencing consequences that come out of the physical border with the U.S., such as their children U.S. citizenship and later the bordering process that impacted their mothering dynamics, or the presence of organized crime as a consequence of Naco proximity to the U.S. These women are experiencing metaphorical borders (Hansel et al. 2006; Anzaldúa 1987) towards Mexican institutions and society, in relation to social provisioning and cultural values. Yet, different elements such as origin, age, class, education, relations with their husbands, children citizenship, and so on, shape these women borderland experiences. Through their stories, women showed how perceiving the existing borders with Mexico is a matter of everyday struggles, while in the contrary, experiencing the border towards the U.S. generally required a more nuanced analysis of women social, political and economical context.

These women appropriate Naco Wellness Initiative as a way to navigate their own struggles, which some times are not the same that the organization agenda tries to tackle. Women participation in the Zumba and the Gardening Project allows them to defy their solely roles as mother or wives. Through gaining new skills women became gardeners, dancers, teachers, part of a group, and so on, which allows them to navigate through the effects of internalized oppression (Rowlands 1997) given by gender relations (Whitehead 2006), which collocates them in a specific place in their household and in society. The interactions that these women have with NWI projects can be a metaphor to their life at the borderlands; where they are constantly exercising the selective adoption principle (Olivier de Sardan 2005), picking the parts of 'the borderland project' which benefit them. The same way women appropriate NWI projects, they appropriate the ambiguities of the borderland and 'select' the elements which will allow them to move forward, for instance, the so called 'economic prosperity period' out of a context of violence.

I followed Borderland Theory (1987) feminist standpoint nature by learning directly from the women participants what are the main obstacles they identify as present in their daily life, how they respond to them and how they name their responses. Beneath both of the obstacles women identified, education and work, underlies a strong gender component. In the case of education, women could not access it because of a pre-established role of woman within their household. In the case of work, women strongly exposed the existing conflict between being able to have a paid-work and maintain their care-work duties within their household. Also how the most predominant option for women, work at the *maquiladora*, benefits from women disadvantages in the education arena.

Within these women responses to the obstacles, strength and resistance are mainly shown, while they are *Luchando* o *Echándole Lucha*, these women are transforming their marginality into strength (Lorde 1984). For some scholars this may seem essentialist (Vila 2003). Nevertheless, it was the women own decision to voluntarily moved aside from a position of victims to subjects with agency (Hansen et al. 2006), and portray themselves as *Luchadoras*.

As a final comment for the Conversation Circle at CSBN, I told the women that I had no words to thank them for all their warmth and support through this process. With a big smile, Lourdes, 52-years-old, loudly said: “*Escribiendo puras cosas perronas de nosotras*” (writing amazing things about us). Even though this was said in a playful tone, it reflected how these women were actually choosing which narrative of themselves they were sharing with me. In an arena where stories that focus on women victimhood are prioritized, it is indispensable to bring up stories that highlight women agency (Nencel 2013) into the conversation, more importantly, when the women themselves are the ones sending the message.

What does this Research Contributes?

With this research, I intend to contribute to feminist scholarship on the Mexican northern border region, especially through Chicana Feminism Borderland Theory as a theoretical approach. Starting from women lived experiences, I contribute to critical discussions on women empowerment and development interventions, giving light to how women who are involved with projects with external agendas, shape those by giving them different meanings.

A theme that I would further like to explore is the meanings that these women give to their mothering experience and the contradictions embedded within this. Borderland Theory would be an important tool to explore motherhood as a terrain of contradictions, where border mothers are not only navigating through borders of ideologies, feelings and more, but also of countries, institutions, languages, and so on.

Through exploring from women’s narratives women categorization of their ability to respond to obstacles as *Luchando*, an interesting contribution is made to the discussions of the meanings Mexican women that identify themselves as *luchonas* give to that term.

Being this an issue that I would further like to engage with, personally, I see this last MA submission, as a starting point. But how to move these process from personal to also contribute to the lives of the women I worked with? According to Nencel (2014), politics of radical empathy can serve as an important tool that allows the researcher to “move between theorizing, practice and empathy. It means that we can talk about representational practices while standing next to people such that our representations empathically demonstrate the experiences of their existences, their needs and their wants... a politics of radical empathy mandates that we dare not divorce ourselves from the prospect of closeness.” (Nencel 2014: 82)

To survive the Borderlands

You must live sin fronteras

Be a crossroads

To live in the Borderlands means you

(Anzaldua 1987: 217)

Figure 1
Norma gardening



Source: Taken by the author, July 2018.

Figure 2
Garden Project participant harvesting green tomatoes



Source: Taken by the author, July 2018.

Figure 3
Conversation Circle at *Casa Saludable Barrio Nuevo*



Source: The author, July 2018

Figure 4
Echando Lucha at Conversation Circle at *Casa Saludable Colosio*



Source: The author, July 2018

Figure 5
Women cooking breakfast after Zumba class at *Casa Saludable Barrio Nuevo*



Source: The author, July 2018

Figure 6
Mexican mother blessing her U.S. soldier son



Source: Lupita Facebook post, November 2018

Figure 7

Tom, Lupita, the author and Norma at the Garden Project graduation event



Source: NWI, July 2018

Figure 8

U.S physical border seen from Naco, Sonora



Source: Taken by the author, July 2018

Map 1
Map of the Sonora-Arizona Borderlands



Source: taken by the author in a *taqueria* in the city of Agua Prieta, July 2018

Map 2
Naco, Sonora as seen from Google Maps



Source: Screenshot from Google maps.

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