Migrant daughter coming of age as a Mexican American woman

[Name of the Writer]

[Name of the Institution]

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***Introduction***

Initially intended to be written as one of the mere oral history papers, “Migrant Daughter: coming of age as a Mexican American woman” is an inspiring book co-written in the first person by Mario T. Gracia and Frances Esquibel in 2000[[1]](#footnote-1). The book tells a motivational and worth reading story of a Mexican origin woman who belonged to rural areas of New Mexico. Giving an account of great depression, the book tells the story from Frances's perspective when her family decided to move to California to survive the great economic shutdown. From working in fields as labor with her father to presenting Mexican American identity in her American educational career. Frances ultimately rose to success as she won a scholarship to University of California, Berkeley and became of the few Mexican American women to set an extraordinary example for the world. The book is exceptional in a way because it was initially an oral history paper written by a student for the class of Mario T. Gracia, a history professor in University of California, Santa Barbara, as he wanted students to become aware of Mexican Americans, struggles in the U.S.A. When he checked the paper for assessment purpose, he immediately got impressed by Frances Esquibel's life experiences who happened to be the aunt of the student. He then approached her personally and the detailed information was compiled in the form of a book. This book gives a detailed insight into the experiences Mexicans comes across in their New Mexico state and then as struggling immigrants in the U.S.A. The book covers all the dimensions including struggle as a poor family in New Mexico, great depression and its impact on Mexican families, gender and cultural identity, language barriers, cultural change etc. Furthermore, the book also gives an account of the determination and efforts that were put together by a minority to represent her culturally diverse background on educational platform. The purpose behind the well-documented book was to redefine the U.S.A from the eyes of a Mexican American woman who transformed her life successfully despite the social and cultural restrictions set for her. This paper critically analyzes all the accounts that were faced by Frances Esquibel during her struggle against the socio-culturally different environment she experienced in the U.S.A. *The paper argues that Frances Esquibel’s life is a definite example of the mistreatment U.S.A used to give too many Mexican immigrants in the 1990s.*

***Analysis***

Frances Esquibel was brought up in a patriarchal society and in a very traditional setup of male dominance. Her grandfather used to assist the whole family with the help of the land that was inherited to him from the ancestors. Frances mother was a housekeeper whose responsibilities were very central to her feminine role. There was no high school for women back then and her mother used to travel extra miles for seeking education[[2]](#footnote-2). The education system was segregated. She had a very ethnically diverse family. Despite the diversity in the family, her blood relations always kept unity and moral values on top for their children. When the Great Depression occurred, they had to move to California in search of better economic opportunities. It took time in adjusting to the society of Americans due to this huge difference in the environment. Labeling themselves now as a family to be the “Migrant Soul”, she said that, I wasn’t sure why we were moving again, but by then I had internalized the fact that lack of permanence was a way of life for us.” Her family again opted for migration after spending 3 years in Tagus Ranch, California. Reason for this decision was the search for a better work opportunity and proper housing to assist the family. The author also highlights the aspects of ethnic duality she had to face in her Junior High School in Visalia, California where they moved.

Frances faced drastic changes in her move out from Barrio as the family was finally financial enough to have a house and she was able to receive a scholarship as an outbreak to the free world. Her mother played an important role in the financial matters of her family this is why they were able to achieve the milestone of better housing after for years as workers in the field. Barrio was a very difficult place to live and the movement from that place proved to be fortunate for her. With the positive change in geographical location and improvement in economic conditions of the family, Frances efficiently availed the opportunity of a scholarship due to her determination and hard work. They made Visalia their permanent home and her parents eventually died and buried there. With the upgradation in education, she tried her luck in office work and succeeded in acquiring different jobs. In Berkeley, she interacted with Ed Tywoniak who was of Polish descent and exchanged views on courtship and marriage in which she told him, “The fact that I was crossing ethnic barriers was not a consideration.”

Frances travels a journey from being Spanish into being more Americanized with frequent change in the environment around her. Like it said in the initial chapters of the book that her father used to get angry on the use of English at home and he promoted their native language. Therefore, it can be said that there comes a complete shift in her family's social norms and rules when they become internalized with American society after migration[[3]](#footnote-3). Her father relaxes the strictness of sticking with their own ethnicity as great depression leaves them no choice other than migration. This difference is also mentioned by the author by saying that "His angry assertion that ‘(here in my house Spanish is spoken) was delivered with a menacing look." Eventually, they have to let go of their compulsion in languages and adopts the dual ethnicity in their lifestyles. Apart from this, there are many aspects in the book which clearly reflects the white privilege issues the U.S had in history. As the author mentions the segregations of schools and the strange behavior she was a victim of in public speaks volume on the difficulties faced by Mexican Americans while migrating to the U.S.

Frances's experience as a Mexican American immigrant highlights the many complexities Mexicans had to face in American society[[4]](#footnote-4). Frances tells the readers how the world looks at Mexican American women and how in return they respond back to the world. She was one of the very few Mexican American women to receive the opportunity to study at the renowned University of California. Her story tells the unfavorable conditions in which she and her family were forced to live and had to compromise on everything including their ethnic identities too so that they could provide a better future to their children. This is not the story of only Frances but every other immigrant who traveled to America to live the life they wished for themselves. However, survival in America is not that easy and many immigrants have to cross ethnic barriers only to blend with their culture and ethnicity[[5]](#footnote-5). The case of African Americans and Mexican Americans are almost the same in this regard. Both the ethnic groups had to bear enough to claim themselves to be some American citizens after spending decades in the country. This is also the thesis of Frances that not equal conditions are given to migrants to live there. Frances used observation to memorize the important events of her life. She expressed her story in oral history and this is why oral history is useful as people get to know about the history through someone who has actually lived those events.

***Conclusion***

Frances has beautifully delivered her story as a Mexican immigrant who came to America to work as labor for assistance with her father under unfavorable conditions. She astonished the readers by maintaining her dedication and efforts for her studies and didn't quite them. Belonging from different ethnic background reduced her chances of stabilizing her life a number of times but ultimately she succeeded. She went on to fulfill her dreams by availing the scholarship and graduating from the University of California as one of fewer Mexican American women in U.S. history. Due to her efforts and motivation for a better and independent life for herself, she ultimately attained a more stable position in the American society where she once was known to be merely a Mexican migrant.

End Notes

1. Abarca, Meredith E. Voices in the kitchen: Views of food and the world from working-class Mexican and Mexican American women. Vol. 9. Texas A&M University Press, 2006.
2. García, Alma M. *Narratives of Mexican American women: Emergent identities of the second generation*. Rowman Altamira, 2003.
3. Garcia, Mario T. *Mexican Americans: Leadership, ideology, and identity, 1930-1960*. Vol. 36. Yale University Press, 1991.
4. Jiménez, Tomás Roberto. *Replenished ethnicity: Mexican Americans, immigration, and identity*. Univ of California Press, 2010.
5. Tywoniak, Frances Esquibel, and Mario T. García. *Migrant daughter: Coming of age as a Mexican American woman*. Univ of California Press, 2000.

1. Tywoniak, Frances Esquibel, and Mario T. García. Migrant daughter: Coming of age as a Mexican American woman. Univ of California Press, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Abarca, Meredith E. Voices in the kitchen: Views of food and the world from working-class Mexican and Mexican American women. Vol. 9. Texas A&M University Press, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jiménez, Tomás Roberto. Replenished ethnicity: Mexican Americans, immigration, and identity. Univ of California Press, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. García, Alma M. Narratives of Mexican American women: Emergent identities of the second generation. Rowman Altamira, 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Garcia, Mario T. Mexican Americans: Leadership, ideology, and identity, 1930-1960. Vol. 36. Yale University Press, 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)