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Immigrants talk about life in Maine

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diet, but I say there's no such thing as a diet when it comes to vaginas," Guerette said.

Immigrants talk about life in Maine

By Ernest J. Scheyder
News Editor

What's it like to be an immigrant in Maine? Is it any different being a woman?

These and other questions were the topic of this week's installment of the Women in the Curriculum Lunch Series entitled "Immigrant women's stories in Maine: Students

present their findings from oral history." The speech was Wednesday afternoon in the Bangor Room of Memorial Union.

Ann Schonberger, the director of the Women's Studies Program, opened the speech by welcoming the audience. She said the series has been ongoing for approximately 25 years and the topics discussed are

still fresh and relevant.

"We never run out of ideas, and it's rather amazing," Schonberger said.

Up first to speak was Maria del Carmen Sandweiss, a native of Peru who immigrated to the United States in the late 1980s. Sandweiss currently is a graduate student in liberal

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studies at the University of Maine.

"The purpose of my research is to get in contact with Peruvian woman in Maine," Sandweiss said. She explained that there are approximately 234,000 Peruvians living in the United States.

"When we come here we live in Florida or New Jersey," she said. There are around 2,300 Peruvians living in Maine," she said.

Sandweiss spent time discussing the particular geography, climate and culture of her native homeland to help the audience understand more an immigrant's point of view.

"Peru keeps a long tradition in maintaining archaeology places," she said. Sandweiss also noted that the country is divided into three geographic zones, and that depending on which zone you are from, it makes it difficult to adjust to the Maine climate.

"When we come here, we have a difficult climate," she said. "In Peru we have maybe zero degrees, but not negative 50 degrees."

According to Sandweiss, when immigrants come to Maine, or for that matter, any American state, they have a tough time integrating themselves into the cultural environment. Immigrants must acclimate themselves, and a university is a perfect setting for such a transition.

"When we come here we can't be ostracized," she said. "We need to learn the language; we need to learn the culture. Here in the university we have good resources for learning grants to reach out."

Another problem Sandweiss said immigrants face is the cultural pull in both directions. On one hand, immigrants want to adjust to their new American way of life, but on the other hand they still yearn

and long for their homeland, where things came easier to them.

"We are not from Peru anymore, we are not from the US," Sandweiss said. "We are from both."

Next to speak at the lunch was Caterina Anderson, an undergraduate student of international affairs and anthropology and the daughter of an Italian immigrant. She spoke on the plight of refugees worldwide, focusing specifically on Somalian refugees.

"Female refugees have a particularly difficult time in the conditions they're placed in," she said. According to Anderson, rape, violence and infant mortality are just a few of the problems they face. However, the future is looking brighter for some displaced peoples.

"Something some people don't realize about refugees is that they can apply for resettlement to another country," Anderson said. She noted that the average stay in a refugee camp is about 5 to 7 years and most do eventually make it out, either to Europe or the United States.

"The United States accepts refugees at a higher rate [than other countries]," Anderson said.

Anderson noted that Maine Catholic Charities works to ensure that immigrants, especially females, are treated with the care and compassion they deserve. The charities work with the government to distribute the guaranteed eight months of federal aid each immigrant is entitled by law to receive.

"Most people are working and able to support themselves after four months," Anderson said.

Anderson closed her speech by discussing a talk she had with two immigrant women from Somalia who are now living in Maine. She said that while they experienced hardship, they both realize that the immigrant experience led them to a wonderful place.



CAMPUS PHOTO BY SARAH BIGNEY

LISTEN UP — Maria del Carmen Sandweiss spoke about Peruvian immigration at Wednesday's Women in the Curriculum speech in the Bangor Room of Memorial Union.