To Stay or Return Home: Decision Taking among Undocumented Mexican Migrants in the United States before the Tightening of the Border and Anti-immigrant US Polices

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Abstract

The Year 2007 coincided with the economic crisis in the United States and the war unleashed against drug trafficking in Mexico. As a measure, the US governed has strengthened the southern border and implemented tougher antimigrant policies. Meanwhile in Mexico, organized crime has taken control over the border making the border-crossing a dangerous, expensive, and not always successful action. With limited possibilities to regularized their migratory status, the current political atmosphere in the US after the outcome of the elections in 2017, and with scarce opportunities back home; the fulfillment of economic goals and secureness of their family welfare have become decisive among active migrants while considering their stay in the US. By comparing the macro trends and the ethnographic record through in-depth interviews, this project tackles the questions, how the current scenario has affected the decision to stay or return home among active migrants, and how the dynamics have shifted in recent years after the end of the Great Recession and current Trump's administration?

This work found that despite the end of the Great Recession, border surveillance, conditions of violence in Mexico and anti-immigrant policies prevail, limiting the circularity of migratory flow that was characteristic for more than thirty years. With this option limited, migrants have opted to remain in the United States to meet their economic goals and ensure their well-being and that of their families. Fear and Uncertainty caused by the current context have favored further segregation among migrants and weakening their social networks.

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List of Abbreviations

DHS - Department of Homeland Security

EAP - Economic Active Population

INEGI - National Institute of Statistics and Geography

IRCA - Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986

NAFTA - North American Free Trade Agreement

Introduction

Migration from Mexico to the United States, a long-standing phenomenon since the nineteenth century in the west and low-lands of the country, has intensified since the eighties in areas of central Mexico[1] and recently in the south,[2] where previously there hasn't been a significant tendency to migrate abroad. The growth of migration in these areas in only two decades (1980-2000) has been exponential. This is attributed to the impact of the neoliberal policies adopted in Mexico and recurrent crises that have displaced millions of Mexicans from their motherland to find opportunities abroad, mainly the United States.[3] Before 1970, the number of Mexican migrants in the United States remained below one million people[4]. The ravages of neoliberalism and the spread of the "migration fever" were so significant that thirty years later, in 2000, a total of 8.1million Mexicans[5] were estimated to be living in the US and, in 2007, this number reached an estimated 12.8 million.[6] This number subsequently fell to 11.7 million in 2014.[7]

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, states like Morelos, Puebla, Guerrero, Veracruz, Oaxaca, the State of Mexico, and Mexico City[8] became main emitters of migrants in the country.[9] This was in addition to the states which historically have had high proportions of

[1] Binford, Leigh, *Lo local y lo global en la migración transnacional. La economía política de la migración acelerada internacional de Puebla y Veracruz: siete estudios de caso* (México: Luna Negra, 2004), 4.
[2] Wayne Cornelius, D. Fitzgerald and L. Muse-Orlinoff, *Mexican Migration and the U.S. Economic Crisis: A Transnational Perspective*. (La Jolla, California: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, 2010), 27.
[3] Binford, *Lo local*, 6.
[4] Jeffery Passel, D'Vera Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, "Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero –and Perhaps Less," Pew Hispanic Center, April 23, 2012. Accessed May 30, 2017, http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/04/23/net-migration-from-mexico-falls-to-zero-and-perhaps-less/.
[5] R. Alarcón, R. Cruz, A. Díaz-Bautista, G. González-König, A. Izquierdo, G. Yrizar y Zenteno, R., "La crisis financiera en Estados Unidos y su impacto en la migración mexicana," *Migraciones Internacionales* 5: 195.
[6] Passel et al., "Net Migration".
[7] Jorge Durand, Douglas Massey y Fernando Riosmena, "Capital social, política social y migración desde comunidades tradicionales y nuevas comunidades de origen en México," *Revista Española de Investigación Sociológica* 116: 102.
[8] Binford, *Lo local*, 8.
[9] Durand et al. Capital Social, 104.

migration, such as Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas.[10] Unlike the low-lands and western Mexico, migrants from central Mexico have mainly migrated to the states of Washington, Georgia, Nevada, Florida, Colorado, North Carolina, New Jersey, and especially New York[11] where they have found employment mainly in the service sector[12] and the construction industry.[13] As the flow from these newer contributing regions began in the nineties, most migrants did not qualify for the IRCA amnesty (1986-1987)[14] relegating them to the status of undocumented migrants limiting their employment niches and access to services and social benefits in the United States.

Between 1990 and 2006, thousands of Mexicans travelled to the United States without documents for periods of three to five years, returned to their community and, if the economic situation demanded it, they migrated again to the United States as many times as necessary[15]. Circular migration was motivated by the abysmal wage-gap between Mexico and the United States, the constant demand for flexible and cheap labor in industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction and services in the US, the conditions of poverty and precarity in Mexico, the locality of these two countries, and the relatively "easy" and "low-cost" of the border crossing when compared with the current scenario. [16]

[10] Jorge Durand and Douglas Massey, *Clandestinos. Migración México-Estados Unidos en los albores del siglo XXI* (Zacatecas, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2003), 45-46.
[11] Binford, Lo Local, 8.
[12] Blanca Cordero, Economía política y formación de expectativas locales en la emigración y masificación de la migración de huaquechulenses a Nueva York, (Puebla, Mexico: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2004), 31.
[13] María D'Aubeterre and Leticia Rivermar, Aquí en Pahuatlán la migración al norte ya se acabó". Auge y contención de un flujo migratorio en la Sierra Norte de Puebla, (Puebla, Mexico: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2014), 170.
[14] Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA).
[15] Alejandro Canales, Los inmigrantes latinoamericanos en Estados Unidos: inserción laboral con exclusión social, (Guadalajara, Mexico: Universidad de Guadalajara, 2006), 93.
[16] Ronald Mize and Alicia Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) xii.

In 2007, circular migration was threatened. This year coincided with the start of the "Great Recession" in the United States, severely hitting the construction industry, manufacturing and, to a lesser extent, the services sector.[17] Meanwhile, in the other side of the border, the war unleashed against drug trafficking by Mexican government in 2006 precipitated a wave of violence that continues to this day. As a precaution, the US government has reinforced its border with Mexico and implemented laws that facilitated the deportation of undocumented immigrants; while in Mexico, organized crime took control of the northern frontier making the border crossing an expensive, dangerous, and not always successful action. [18]

The result was a significant, if not massive, increase in Mexicans returning to their homeland and the decrease in the number of Mexicans trying to cross to the north. From 2010 to 2015, many academics and government officials from both countries predicted that at the end of the "Great Recession" (2007-2014), the flow of Mexicans to the United States would grow at the pace that it had in the last three decades. However, recent data presented in 2015 and 2016 by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Migration Policy Institute, the Pew Hispanic Center, and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, for its acronyms in Spanish) estimates that the net balance of entries and exits to and from the US remains negative.[19] Likewise, in 2017, with the start of Trump's Administration these measures have been intensified aiming at a further decrease in this figure.

[17] Elaine Levine and Alan Lebaron, "Immigration Policy in the Southeastern United States: Potential for Internal Conflict," *Norteamérica* 6 (2011): 36.
[18] Alison Lee, Crisis económica global, vigilancia/violencia fronteriza y sobreexplotación: Cambios en los patrones migratorios internacionales en Zapotitlán Salinas, (Puebla, Mexico: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2014), 124.
[19] Ibid., 127.

Despite the US economic recovery since late 2009, the conditions of violence in Mexico, the tightening of the border and the intensification of anti-immigrant polices without an apparent change in the coming years. This has led to a reconsideration of the northern migration option and to consider the postponement of the stays among migrants already established in the United States, to fulfill their economic goals and to ensure their well-being and that of their families.

Research Statement

The context as outlined leads me to explore in this work: a) the macro trends of Mexicans influx to the US in recent years; b) the economic and social survival strategies of undocumented Mexican migrants trying to stay afloat in the US; and c) how the intensification of anti-migration laws and border control measures against irregular immigrants embraced by the current administration have affected the everyday life of migrants and their families. The research for this work took place in the city of New York and features the testimonies of undocumented migrants from the state of Puebla, Mexico, a region of recent migration. This work builds off my undergraduate thesis "Economic, family and social reintegration of returning migrants in Zapotitlan Salinas, Puebla facing the global economic crisis of 2007" by continuing the trajectories of previously interviewed migrants, adding new testimonies of migrants from neighboring communities, and by giving a broader perspective of the interaction of migrants with Mexican and private institutions established in the US.

Chapter Description

The first chapter of this work presents the methodology used for this research. It briefly describes how the interviews were achieved as well as the content and main questions asked during the interviews. Subsequently, it presents some of the relevant events that took place during this visit, which broader my understanding of the dynamics of migrants and their families in New York City, and that allowed me to delimit the slopes studied in this work. The last section of this chapter presents a table with a brief description of the migrants interviewed such as name, age, occupation, and the time they have spent in the United States.

The second section of this paper presents the theoretical framework for this research. The lines of this chapter frame the international migration in suit to why and how this phenomenon has taken place. To respond to these questions, migration is presented through the fields of power, social fields, hegemony, and the multi-scale approach, which together represent useful theoretical tools to understand the phenomenon in a local, national, and global level highlighting the importance of historicity and continuity of social events. To this analysis are added the terms dispossession, displacement, and labor regimes that explain the movements of migrants across border in time and space. Finally, this section is complemented with the effects of neoliberalism to situate the case of Mexican migration to the United States.

The third chapter gives a brief introduction to the migration flow of Mexicans to the United States. This section presents the temporalities and differences existing between the flows coming from the west and low-lands, known as the historical flow, and the center and southern Mexico. This chapter addresses the issues of accelerated migration, the "new" sending regions, previous and new destinations of migrants and main labor niches of each tradition. At this point, this section

intends to give a general idea about the profiles of the migrants and the main antecedents in the migratory flow of Mexicans towards the United States. The aim is to make clear the division between these regions from the historically emitting regions of migrants and the incorporation of new regions.

The fourth chapter presents the trends in recent years of the migratory flow of Mexicans to the United States. It shows how this flow has been affected after the Great Recession of 2007-2014, the beginning of the war against organized crime by the Mexican government, and the beginning of the recent Trump's administration. These trends are contrasted with the ethnographic record and the testimonies of migrants who witness these anomalies and who face daily conditions of fear and uncertainty without knowing what the future holds for them in the north. This section presents some of the main changes in recent years, such as the limitation of social networks and mobility within the destination, the impact of previous and new anti-immigrant measures and their interaction with institutions.

The last chapter presents a brief conclusion of the main findings of this research, the limitations and topics that must be covered in future investigations. Given the recent start of Trump's administration, it is too early to know how its mandate will affect the flow of Mexicans to the United States, but it certainly provides an approach to some possible trends that been already recorded in previous years.

Methods

This research took place in the spring of 2017 in New York with undocumented migrants from the community of Zapotitlan Salinas, Puebla, whom I have previously interviewed, and migrants from neighboring communities contacted through snowball sampling. This work builds off of my undergraduate thesis, the thesis focused on return migration during the "Great Recession" in the US and the economic, social, and familiar dynamics of reintegration of return migrants to their communities. Likewise, I had the opportunity to interview members of public and private institutions such as the current and previous representatives of the office of community affairs of the Mexican Consulate in New York, as well as members involved with the migrant community in economic, legal, and educational themes though voluntary work, NGO's, and academic institutions.

During my undergraduate thesis fieldwork (2011-2014), I monitored 16 households in Mexico over 18 months. The monitoring of the households over a year and a half allowed me to establish a close relationship with some of the interviewees and gradually gain their confidence which is reflected in the quality of the interviews. In the following years, some of the members of these households migrated back to the US. In this occasion, I had the opportunity to interview them in New York, which expanded the history of their personal and labor experiences both, in the community of origin, and in their destination in the US.

In total, I conducted 11 interviews with undocumented migrants established mainly in the Bronx and Queens' area, and 6 members involved with the migrant community. Broadly speaking, the interviews focused on the migrant's life history prior departure, the conditions that motivated them to migrate to the US, the difficulties they experienced while crossing the border, their

working and social experiences in the US, the sending of remittances, family relationships, goals achieved, reasons to remain in the US, incidents or mishaps with US authorities, access to governmental services and programs from both countries, and their dynamics and daily routines both, at work and at home.

Given the close relationship with these migrants, I was invited on several occasions to meetings and social gatherings of the community members, their places of work, sporting events and to their houses in New York. Through these people and the given interaction in these places, I had the joy of contacting other migrants from nearby communities and from the state of Puebla. In these interviews, some of them in a more informal way, I met some members of the community who have been living in New York for several years and who amplify my understanding of the social and labor dynamics in the north. Among their stories, I repeatedly found very present the discourse of nostalgia for returning to the community, the precarious conditions that forced them to leave their hometowns, the intense rhythms of work to which they are subject to, and crystalized memories of the community such as frictions with family members or individuals of the community even after so many years and miles of distance.

Despite an overall good acceptance and cooperation from the migrants, mistrust, lack of time or interest were perceived among some of the interviewees leading to evasive answers while talking about sensitive themes or mishaps with US authorities. Nevertheless, the monitoring methodology employed with migrants previously interviewed enabled this research to update their stories while marking new phases of their life experiences and perspectives or opinions that changed from the last interview conducted. The names of the interviewees as well as some details

of the interviews have been omitted and/or modified in this work for the protection and privacy of the interviewees and their families

Through observant participation I became aware of the importance of trust and solidarity as fundamental in the interaction with community members and migrants from other nearby towns. They are not only friends or acquaintances, but colleagues, employers, employees, members who have helped them to find a job, a place to live and so on. However, these relationships have their negative nuances, friction between colleagues, friends and family members, gossip, envy and reputations to mention a few, that affect the dynamics among these individuals and their social circle.

On this occasion, I had the opportunity to interview representatives of the Mexican consulate in New York. These members are involved with the migrant community in ways ranging from volunteers, members of NGO's and academic institutions. They have focused on topics such as legal assistance, workshops on household administration, labor rights, tax paying, and ways to access to federal programs despite their migratory status. The main topics of the interviews were the way they approach and were received by the migrant community, the continuity they give to their programs, their involvement with US and international governmental and private institutions, and the main changes that have occurred since the beginning of current the Trump administration. Through these interviews, I broader my understanding of the role of institutions and their interaction with the migrant community, such as attention, and quality of the services. To bridge these two levels, in interviews with migrants one of the vital question was if they have been involved with these institutions and if they felt that they have benefited from them. The feedback

about their services had opinions that ranged from very positive to extremely negative in some cases.

Name	Age	Migratory Status	Occupation	Time in the U.S. Since Last Trip	Date of interview
Beatriz	35	Undocumented	Restaurant/Laundry	5 years	April 7, 2017
Veronica	33	Undocumented	Catering/Restaurant	7 years	April 22, 2017
Raul	48	Undocumented	Construction	2 years	April 8, 2017
Mauricio	34	Undocumented	Restaurant	10 years	April 11, 2017
Jorge	18	Undocumented	Student/Restaurant	5 years	April 8, 2017
Aurora	16	Citizen	N/A	5 years	April 8, 2017
Jesus	32	Undocumented	Restaurant	6 years	April 14, 2017
Laura	33	Undocumented	Restaurant	8 years	April 13, 2017
Pedro	37	Undocumented	Restaurant	7 years	April 11, 2017
Jaime	40	Undocumented	Restaurant	11 years	April 18, 2017
Leonardo	29	Undocumented	Restaurant/Supermarket	4 years	April 16, 2017

Table 1. Interviewed Migrants and General Information.

Theoretical Framework

The Mexico-US circuit is a largely unidirectional one. The circuit, given its 100-year history, has allowed the production of a wealth of academic research. These research works have mainly focused on the moments prior to the migration, the social and economic effects in the community and places of destination and a vast literature in transnational migration highlighting the importance of networks, solidarity, connectivity, locality, and spatiality of the phenomenon. However, some of these approaches have not answered the vital questions of how and why large-scale migrations take place.

The aim of this section is to frame Mexican migration to the US in the complex realm of economic global relations that have reconfigured the dynamics of individuals and capital mobility in the last half of the century. Positioning historically undocumented Mexican migrants in different temporalities in terms of dispossession and displacement in the era of globalization, transnationalism and uneven relations allows us to situate this influx in the global economic dynamics where they join the army of cheap workers at the bottom of the US labor hierarchy.

For this, I focus on the importance of the fields of power, social fields, hegemony, and the multi-scalar approach to reassess the importance of historical continuities and existing connections between local, regional, national and global levels. Subsequently, I refer to the terms of dispossession, displacement and flexible accumulation as major factors that have forced individuals to abandon their homelands in search of a better life. Later, by referring to this migratory phenomenon as the "perfect work force" we can gain a better understanding of how the practices of domination and subordination are produced and reproduced in a scheme delimitated mainly by global economy in specific time and space. Finally, there is a brief description of the

implementation of neoliberalism in Mexico and its implications in the country over more than three decades.

Fields of power, social fields, hegemony, and the multi-scalar approach

In the social sciences and other fields that study large-scale migration, there has been a tendency to reify a set of social relations and transform them into static things.[20] While positioning nation-states, ethnicity, culture, and society as unit of analysis, these components have become "containers" [21] conceived as integrated and united systems that interact with other equally integrated systems.[22] Extracted from their historic, economic, political, and social contexts, social phenomena are easy to isolate and categorize by its supposed internal and homogeneous qualities.[23] However, decontextualization and historical discontinuity do not allow an analysis of how these social processes are the result of unequal and dynamic interconnections between individuals, groups, and institutions from local to global levels.[24] Social phenomena must be understood as the product of processes that have developed through time, contact, connections,

[20] Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick-Schiller, "Methodological nationalism and beyond: nation-state building, migration and the social sciences," *Global Networks*, 2(2002), 310.
[21] Ayse Caglar, "Locating Migrant Hometown Ties in time and space: Locality as a blind spot of migration scholarship," *Historische Anthropologie* 21(2013): 29.
[22] Sasskia Sassen, Cracked Casings. "Notes Towards an Analytics for Studying transnational process." In *New Transnational Spaces: International Migration and Transnational Companies in the Early Twenty-First*, edited by L. Pries (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 139.
[23] Eric Wolf, *Europa y la gente sin historia*," (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987), 16.
[24] Nina Glick-Schiller, "Explanatory frameworks in transnational migration studies: the missing multi- scalar global perspective," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 (2015): 2277.

links, and interrelations. By doing so we can "[…] locate historical moments of reconfiguration at which whole new objects can appear."[25]

As a theoretical approach for understanding large-scale migrations we must consider that in the last "five centuries, the world has been organized within multiple intersecting networks of unequal power that have taken the form of processes actuated by dynamics of capital accumulation that encompass the world."[26] In the global era, further changes have taken place with the expansion of capitalism which have modified the daily lives of people even from remote places in time and space with outcomes based on their position in the social hierarchy in a dynamic, changing and heterogeneous process.

At this point, "social fields" and "fields of power" are useful analytical tools in situating locality in a broader picture. The social fields are understood as "systems of social relations composed of networks of networks that may be locally situated, or may extend nationally or transnationally."[27] Meanwhile, "fields of power"[28] analyze the local within broader social networks, socially and historically configured in specific places and times.[29] These analytical tools allow us to approach the complexity of local history and social relations, while recognizing that observable local relationships have been structured by global economic processes, from which "local" stories form constituent parts of global dynamics.

[25] Lisa Malkki, "Refugees and Exile: From refugee Studies to the National order of Things," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), 497.
[26] Glick-Schiller, "Explanatory frameworks", 2277.
[27] Nina Glick-Schiller and Ayse Caglar, "Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality in Migration Studies: Migrant Incorporation and City Scale," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 24 (2009), 180.*
[28] William Roseberry, "Cuestiones agrarias y campos sociales," In *Las disputas por el México rural, ed.* Sergio Zendejas and Pieter de Vries (Zamora, Mexico: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1998),77.
[29] Leigh Binford, *Tomorrow We're All Going to the Harvest: Temporary Foreign Worker Programs and Neoliberal Political Economy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 17.

Nina Glick-Schiller[30] proposes that, in addition to the understanding of the conceptualization of economic, political, and social dynamics at the global level based on power relations, the approach to the migratory phenomena must answer one of the basic questions in social theory; how to address the unevenness of multi-scalar global transformations. In the multi-scalar approach "local, regional, national pan-regional and global are not separate levels of analysis but are part of mutually consisting institutional and personal networks of unequal power within which people both with and without migrant histories live their lives".[31] The multi-scalar approach allows us to situate migrant populations into the global dynamics of power inequalities in which other social groups are immersed and affected by constantly restructured global processes and different ways of capital accumulation.[32]

Likewise, the concept of hegemony elaborates more on the specific constellations of power relations, how they are produced and reproduced in the lives of individuals and how they are experienced, naturalized and resist power. Hegemony "deals in a way with ever-changing and highly versatile power relations capable of taking very different forms in different contexts."[33] On whom powers relies and on whom not, the relations between oppressor and oppressed and the peculiarities of these – often experienced through differences of class, gender, ethnicity, and 'race' – are the approaches privileged by this concept that contribute to the understanding of the processes that generate such inequalities. Power relations are produced and reproduced by a complex combination of force and consent by narratives and 'hard' realities that exist beyond discourse.[34]

[30] Glick-Schiller, Explanatory frameworks, 2278.
[31] Ibid., 2276.
[32] Binford, Tomorrow We're All Going to the Harvest, 13.
[33] Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, cultura y antropología* (Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra, 2004), 122.
[34] Blanca Cordero, *Ser trabajador transnacional: clase, hegemonía y cultura en un circuito migratorio internacional* (Puebla, Mexico: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2007), 24.

The constant social fight for the access of power and resources propitiates the struggle where the unequal relations of power are decisive during the development of structural processes.[35] In this context, hegemony as an analytical tool expands our theoretical framing in which migrants experience the processes of subordination and class in their daily lives.[36] Likewise:

> […] It makes it possible to observe the contradictions of the culture of workers and processes of domination, where coercion and consensus are intermingled and in different forms of life, subjectivities, and practices, which are at the same time relevant in the reproduction of inequality relations in which subjects are involved.[37]

Historical processes, 'fields of power', 'social fields', multi-scalar approach and hegemony pose the migratory phenomenon not as an isolated or static process, but as part of a historical process of the expansion and transformation of capitalism with local-regional-national-global particularities immersed in networks of unequal social relations in a complex social structure.[38] These range from individuals, families, and communities, to states, corporations, and international organizations in constant interaction.[39] In connecting individuals into the local, regional, national, and global processes, it is necessary to understand global economic and political relations and the way in which individuals embody, internalize and experience hierarchical power relations at different stages of the migratory process.[40]

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[35] Faranak Miraftab, "Displacement: Framing the global Relationally," In *Framing the Global: Entry Points for the Search*, edited by Hilary Kahn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 42.
[36] Binford, Tomorrow We're All Going to the Harvest, 14.
[37] Cordero, *Ser trabajador transnacional*, 26.
[38] Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick-Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society," *International Migration Review* 38 (2004): 1009.
[39] Alejandro Portes, "Conclusion: Theoretical Convergences and Empirical Evidence in the Study of Immigrant Transnationalism," *International Migration Review*, 37 (2003): 877.
[40] Miraftab, "Displacement: Framing the global Relationally," 44.

Dispossession, displacement, and labor regimes

In the rise of the globalization and transactional studies the global economy approach has engaged "[…] in marking two features of much social science: the explicit or implicit assumption about the nation-state as the container of social processes and the implied correspondence of national territory and national exclusive territoriality."[41] While approaching the migratory phenomenon, we must frame the migratory flows as results of the processes of globalization and a long relationship of capitalist exploitation between 'north' and 'south' that go beyond the nation-state and territorial jurisdictions of nations.[42] "Consumption in the era of global capital accumulation is strongly rooted in the marginalization and exploitation of the immigrant labor force".[43] By challenging these theoretical approaches, we can go beyond while framing the different ways in which unequal relations are perpetuated in global capitalist processes.[44]

One of the main contributions of sociology and anthropology to the study of international migration has been the analysis of the close relationship between production, accumulation, and consumption processes. In a contemporary world where globalization and free market capitalism have marked major patterns of individual and capital flows, it is necessary to situate large-scale migration in understanding the causes that propitiate these scenarios: dispossession and displacement.[45] By doing so, it allows us to render the invisible "stories of dispossession and displacement that produce a migrant labor force in the first place, […] telling the story of migration

[41] Sassen, "Cracked Casings," 187.
[42] Binford, Tomorrow We're All Going to the Harvest, 15.
[43] Mize and Swords, "*Consuming Mexican Labor,"* xxv.
[44] Miraftab, "Displacement: Framing the global Relationally," 45.
[45] Glick-Schiller, Explanatory frameworks, 2279-2280.

without its interwoven stories of displacement offers not only an incomplete but also an inaccurate picture".[46]

Dispossession and displacement are strongly linked to the labor regimes that have characterized global relations since the last century.[47] At the end of the 1920's and until the mid-1960's the accumulation regime was characterized by high incentives for production that favored high levels of consumption by factory workers.[48] This regime known as Fordism consisted of 40 hours of work per week with high wages that kept a balance between production, accumulation, and consumption. During Fordism, employees had social security, job stability and high wages that allowed high consumptions rates.[49]

Since the 1980's, global economic crises have strongly affected the economic and financial structures of capitalism leading to a regime known as "flexible accumulation."[50] This regime has had as its main features "the flexibility of labor relations and processes, labor markets and products and consumption patterns. It is characterized by the emergence of totally new sectors of production and new ways of providing financial services, but above all by the intensity of commercial, technological and organizational innovations."[51]

The flexible accumulation regime described by Harvey is characterized by a process of abrupt and gradual transformations that in the long run have drastically changed the global

[46] Miraftab, "Displacement: Framing the global Relationally," 38.
[47] David Harvey, "*La condición de la postmodernidad. Investigación sobre los orígenes del cambio cultural*," (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu Editores, 1998), 143.
[48] Ibid., 144
[49] Ibid., 145
[50] David Harvey, "*The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism*," (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 23.
[51] Harvey, "*La condición de la postmodernidad,"* 156.

economy. The main transformations have been greater geographical mobility of capital and labor and a concentration of capital in the services sector. As part of the labor conditions, "this accumulation regime is linked to the loss of power of the unions and the increase of temporary workers, subcontracted and without social security."[52] These groups have constituted surplus populations with no place in their homeland who need a wage to survive but do not have viable means to achieve it.[53]

The flexible accumulation regime has been accompanied by flexibility, precariousness, labor plurality, the disposability of workers and the imbalance between the relation of production, accumulation, and consumption. In this regime,

> … the labor market has undergone a radical restructuring. Faced with strong market volatility, increased competition and declining profit margins, employers have taken advantage of weak union power and surplus labor forces (unemployed or underemployed) to push for more flexible labor contracts and regimes. It is difficult to make a global picture because the very purpose of this flexibility is to meet the often very specific needs of each firm. Even for regular employees, systems such as the "nine-day fortnight" are increasingly common, work schedules averaging a forty-hour a week a year but forcing the employee to work harder at peak times and compensate with shorter hours in periods of low activity. But more important has been the shift of regular employees to temporary or part-time contracts or subcontracts.[54]

In this labor regime, Harvey highlights workers divided into functional labor and two subgroups of numerical workers. Functional workers are a small group of highly qualified individuals with good salaries and social security; but not exempt from the demands of adaptability and flexibility that this accumulation regime demands. On the other hand, the first subgroup of numerical workers has a lower labor training, lower economic remuneration and social security,

[52] Cordero, *Ser trabajador transnacional*, 156.
[53] Linda Green, "The Nobodies: Neoliberalism, Violence, and Migration," Medical Anthropology 30 (2011): 368.
[54] Harvey, "*La condición de la postmodernidad,"* 173.

which are the key elements for the demands of the production processes. In the second subgroup are temporary workers, subcontracted, part-time or called upon at specific times leading to less job security than the previous subgroup.[55]

"Through wage labor, different territories are reinserted subordinately into international capitalism. Thus, geographically distant, unequally social and economic regions are mutually interconnected."[56]. An emblematic example of these processes has been the flow of Mexicans to the United States, who have been inserted predominantly into the bottom of the US labor hierarchy. The undocumented status of most Mexican migrants contributes to the deportable conditions they live in as a cheap, exploitable, disposable, and disorganized workforce. At the same time, the increasing demand for low-skilled labor in the US, have favored the deplorable working conditions of low remuneration, exploitation and without social security to which Mexicans are exposed. Despite this, due to the deplorable economic conditions in Mexico, migration to the north remained as the most viable mean of ensuring the well-being of more than 10% of the Mexican population.

The Perfect Work Force

Despite the deplorable conditions that Mexicans face in the United States, millions of them continue to migrate to the North.[57] Added to the dispossession and displacement approaches, the "double frame of reference" and the comparison between wages[58] help us to understand more about the motivations to embark on this journey and expose these conditions.[59] These terms refer

[55] Ibid., 174.
[56] D'Aubeterre and Rivermar, "Aquí en Pahuatlán," 17.
[57] Binford, Tomorrow We're All Going to the Harvest, 16.
[58] Roger Waldinger and Michael Lichter, "*How the Other Half Works. Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor*," (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 23.
[59] Sassen, "Cracked Casings," 185.

to the fact that among most of the Mexican migrants there is a comparison between their situation in the community – labor conditions, wages, welfare, relations with institutions and services- with the conditions experienced in the destination where they migrate.[60]

The point of comparison has been shaped after more than three decades of neoliberalism in Mexico. During this period, neoliberalism has contributed to the vulnerability and poverty of millions of Mexicans, mainly in rural areas - where most of the migrants come from - and increasingly penetrating urban areas where there was previously a "relative" stability.[61] This has left a workforce surplus without any place within the economic structure of the country frustrating their desire to "be someone" and "do something".[62] On the other side of the border, the scenario is complemented by US employers who have at their disposal a wide range of disorganized workers willing to work for low wages, deplorable conditions and without benefits or social security because of their status as "undocumented".[63]

These points of comparison added to the notion of "being someone" and "doing something" and the desire for success in the communities of origin have shaped the profile of those migrants who "work to death" as "the perfect workforce".[64] Most Mexicans in the United States migrate temporarily without seeking to establish themselves permanently in that country, especially those coming from regions of recent migration as the central and southern[65] parts of the country.[66] Nostalgia and longing to return to their homeland have encouraged migrants to be willing to self-exploit to achieve their goals and objectives in the shortest possible time and then

[60] Waldinger and Lichter, "*How the Other Half Works",* 25.
[61] Binford, Tomorrow We're All Going to the Harvest, 16.
[62] Cordero, *Ser trabajador transnacional,* 163-164.
[63] Waldinger and Lichter, "*How the Other Half Works",* 26.
[64] Cordero, *Ser trabajador transnacional,* 165.
[65] Binford, *Lo local,* 9.
[66] Durand and Massey, "*Clandestinos,"* 52.

return to the community (Cordero 2007). In this case, self-exploitation dynamics produce and reproduce the uneven power relations and accumulation regime processes. The "... immigrant labor has the characteristic of occupying the lowest positions within the social and power hierarchies in their places of origin that make "self-exploitation" the best and most natural means to reach the desired standards."[67]

Neoliberalism and its effects in Mexico

Neoliberalism in Mexico is an economic model adopted since the late eighties to date that has encouraged "individual freedom, personal responsibility and the virtues of privatization, free market and free trade, which has legitimized draconian policies aimed to reestablish and consolidate the power of the capitalist class."[68] In Mexico, this model was embraced to reduce the recurring financial crises that had existed in the country since 1982, adopting the policies and practices of the free market model as regulators of economic and political relations in the country.[69] The disadvantageous situation in which Mexico is positioned in relation to other countries has resulted in the almost abandonment of the countryside, social polarization, the exacerbation of poverty in rural and urban areas, a high rate of unemployment and underemployment[70], unequal growth between wages and inflation, among others.[71]

[67] Cordero, *Ser trabajador transnacional*, 177.
[68] Harvey, "*The Enigma of Capital," 36.*
[69] Mize and Swords, "*Consuming Mexican Labor,"* 7.
[70] Armando Bartra, "*Cosechas de ira. Economía política de la contrarreforma agraria*," (Mexico D.F: Editorial Itaca, 2003), 23.
[71] Jorge Egurrola and Luis Quintana, "¿Puede ser peor? La dimensión regional de la crisis," *Metapolítica* 69 (2010) 69.

Over two decades' neoliberalism in Mexico has intensified and with it its negative impacts in the country. In 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, the United States and Canada was signed encouraging the opening of these countries' markets for trade by allowing the flow of capital and goods, but not the free transit of people.[72] During these years, rising energy costs and increasing demand for grain from emerging economies such as India and China led to an increase in the prices of grains, oils, vegetables, and meat.[73] At the same time, in these years there was a considerable increase in the rates of international migration that certainly are not a coincidence but a direct effect of these policies that hit the central and highlands of the country strongly.[74]

The opening of the market and the cut in subsidies in the crop fields since the mid-1990s have favored that Mexico imported most of the grains coming mainly from the United States and Canada, making the country (like many others) dependent on these economies.[75] In response to neoliberal policies, many Mexicans from rural areas and increasingly from urban ones have migrated to the United States to survive the continuing economic crisis with its precarious and vulnerable conditions that for more than three decades have prevailed in the country. Migration to the United States has taken off with renewed strength in new areas that previously did not account for considerable departure of people to the north.[76]

[72] Mize and Swords, "*Consuming Mexican Labor,"* 13.
[73] Felipe Torres, "Rasgos perennes de la crisis alimentaria en México," *Estudios Sociales, Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas* 18 (2009):131.
[74] Binford, *Lo local,* 17.
[75] Bartra, "*Cosechas de ira,"* 23.
[76] Binford, *Lo local,* 4.

The Mexico-United States Migratory Circuit

More than thirty years of neoliberalism in Mexico have been synonymous with vulnerability and poverty in rural areas and, in recent years, this has spread into urban areas too. The changes that this model has produced have been so negative that millions of Mexicans from areas that had previously enjoyed relative "welfare and economic stability"[77] have been forced to opt for the American dream to meet their economic goals. Despite this, technocrats and the Mexican government have considered that the solution to economic hardships in Mexico lies in the intensification of neoliberal policies.[78]

The Traditional Sending Regions

The study of the Mexico-US migratory circuit has focused mainly in the sending regions of western and low-lands of Mexico from the states of Michoacán, Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Zacatecas known as the traditional sending states.[79] From the end of the XIX century until the early 1980s the influx from these regions was characterized for being mainly form rural areas, circular, finding in agriculture their main labor niche, and having the southern U.S. states of Arizona, California, Nuevo Mexico, and Texas as main destinations. This migratory flow would be significant during WWI and WWII due to the increasing demand of labor in the agricultural sector, but it would be in the later years when a migratory tradition of Mexicans to the United States would be consolidated under the *"Bracero"* program (1942-1964).[80] During these years,

[77] Binford, Tomorrow We're All Going to the Harvest, 6.
[78] Durand and Massey, "*Clandestinos,"* 52.
[79] Ibid., 64.
[80] Ibid., 66-67. The "*Bracero"* program emerged in response to the strong demand for labor in the US agricultural industry during World War II. Between 1942 and 1964 the program employed only men of working age to occupy ranks in the agricultural field. This migration was characterized by temporary round-trip contracts and employed mainly migrants from the west-low lands of Mexico.

the flow of migrants remained under 1 million Mexicans with a moderate increase in the following decade.[81]

During the *Bracero* Program, the migratory flow was characterized for being circular and temporary (between six months to two years), and for having among their ranks men between the ages of 20 to 30 years old with previous experience in the agricultural fields. During these years, the first labor networks began to manage which in later years allowed more Mexicans to find opportunities in the US agricultural industry without having to apply in the program. As *Braceros* returned year after year to work in fields, direct contact with farmers and the information spread by word of mouth in the Mexican towns about the high labor demand, motivated a higher number of Mexicans to migrate to the United States[82]. At the end of the Bracero program it was estimated that for every migrant that entered legally through the *Bracero* program, three did it in an irregular way.[83]

The seventies and eighties meant the consolidation of the migration circuit Mexico-US. After the growing demand for labor in the agricultural sector, and in later years in the construction industry and the manufacturing sector, many migrants from the west and low-lands of Mexico undertook multiple trips between the place of origin and the destination abroad[84], where, friends,

[81] Paula Leite, María Angoa and Mauricio Rodríguez, "Emigración mexicana a Estados Unidos: balance de las últimas décadas," In *La situación demográfica de México 2009* edited by Consejo Nacional de Población, (Mexico, D.F: CONAPO, 2009), 109.

[82]Douglas Massey, Joaquín Arango, Hugo Graeme, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino, Edward Tayler, "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal," *Population and Development Review* 19 (1993):437. The authors proposed the cumulative causation theory to refer to the networks created between migrants in the destination and places of origin. As the migratory circuit matures, the probability that an individual without previous migratory experience embarks on the journey using these networks increases considerably.

[83] Durand and Massey, "*Clandestinos,"* 65.

[84] Durand and Massey, "*Clandestinos,"* 72. The authors mention that during these years, the influx would be mostly irregular. After the *Bracero* program, countless migrants from rural Mexico traveled largely to the United States in search of jobs that would enable them to improve their life standards (Durand & Massey 2003).

families, and social and labor networks were already established. Over the years, many Mexicans would begin to extend their stays and even settled in the United States. In this period, in the rural west and in the low-lands of Mexico, migration positioned as a main strategy of subsistence, having integrated networks in Mexico and the United States, undertaking trips back and forth, sending remittances to their home communities and ultimately bringing their partners and children to the place of destination.

In 1987, after several years of negotiations, the US government gave way to the regularization of more than 2.5 million undocumented Mexicans under the IRCA Amnesty. By demonstrating long stays and good behavior, many migrants from the west and low-lands regions qualified for the regularization of their migratory status.[85] From this year, migrants from these regions obtained US citizenship or residence permits that would allow them to enter and work regularly and enjoy multiple social benefits in the United States.[86]

Currently, when referring to migrants from the west and low-lands of Mexico, we think of naturalized Mexicans and second and/or third generation Mexican-Americans. Given its temporality, long trajectories in the North, and higher index of legal migratory status among these migrants, awareness of community and solidarity has manifested in the interaction with Mexican and US institutions, the consolidation of migrant clubs, and networks between the place of origin and destination resembling the symbolic and social ties, and notion of solidarity and reciprocity.[87] Currently, the major social and governmental programs are aimed at migrants from these regions.

[85] Ibid., 92.
[86] Durand, et al., "Capital social," 119.

[87] Janine Dahinden, "The dynamics of migrants' transnational formation. Between mobility and locality," In *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories, and Methods,* ed. Rainer Baubock and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 57.

Mexican governmental programs such as 3x1[88] , "*Vete Sano y Regresa Sano*"[89] and "*Vienvenido Paisando*"[90] are the response to the growing interplay between these migrant populations and their place of origin.

Accelerated Migration in Central Mexico: The "New" Migrants

In the mid-1980's and more rapidly in the 1990's, with different patterns from the historical regions of Mexico, the number or Mexicans to the United States increased exponentially by incorporating new communities form the center and the south of the country.[91] This new wave would no longer be concentrated only in the southern states of the US, but expanded into the states of Washington, Georgia, Nevada, Florida, Colorado, North Carolina, New Jersey, and especially New York. Given the labor focus of these destinations, most of the "new" migrants have found employment primarily in the service and manufacturing sectors of the United States and not in the agricultural industry as in the case of the historical sending regions.[92] Working in restaurants, supermarkets, and self-service stores are the leading occupations of these 'new' migrants.[93] Due to its relative late incorporation into the migratory circuit, migrants from the central areas of Mexico have been relegated to the status of undocumented migrants limiting their occupational aspirations and access to federal programs or social benefits in the US and Mexico.

[88] Social program promoted by the Mexican government and migrant clubs in the United States that promote public infrastructure works in the communities of origin of the migrants. There are three levels, contribution of the federal government, municipal and the group of migrants.
[89] "Go Healthy and return Healthy" Program promoted by the Mexican government focused on the health of migrants traveling back and forth Mexico and the United States.
[90] "Welcome Mexican". Program that helps for regularization of Mexican citizenship and the export and import of goods.
[91] Binford, *Lo local,* 7.
[92] Levine and Lebaron, "Immigration Policy," 40.
[93] Ibid., 37.

The growth of migration in these regions was so rapid than in less than two decades the center of Mexico consolidated as one of the main sending regions of migrants to the United States. Since the 1980's, migration in these areas "has developed rapidly from a reduced or non-existing baseline over the las two decades".[94] In the years 2000, it was estimated that nearly 32% of the Mexicans living in the United States were from the states of Mexico, Guerrero, Tlaxcala, Oaxaca, Puebla and Veracruz, similar number to that of the historical sending regions of Michoacan, Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas.[95] The inclusion of the center of Mexico to the migratory flow was so accelerated that in 1980 the net number of Mexicans residing in the United States was 2.2 million; while in 2000, only two decades later, 9.3 million were reported.[96]

The late incorporation of this region to the migration influx is due to a period of economic growth and stability known as "the golden years" that the central area of Mexico experienced in the sixties and seventies.[97] Since the early eighties, the recurrent crisis in the country, the increasing unemployment rates, low wages, and a migratory circuit in full swing, led more people to undertake the journey to the US, where friends, family and acquaintances were already established. At first, they were young men who migrated to the north. With the consolidation of the transnational networks and the poor local conditions in this region, more men, women, and even whole families migrated to the US.[98]

[94] Binford, *Lo local*, 2.
[95] Fundación BBVA Bancomer y Consejo Nacional de Población, Anuario de migración y remesas México 2016, México, D.F: CONAPO, 2015), 58.
[96] Leite et al., "Emigración mexicana", 112.
[97] Nora Lustig and Miguel Székely, "México, evolución económica, pobreza y desigualdad, (1997): 12, accessed May 21, 2017, http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=364047. Between 1951 and 1970 the central region of Mexico was characterized by the growth (GDP) of 3 to 4% per year with an average inflation rate of almost 3% per year.
[98] Binford, "Lo local," 5.

The Ethnographic Record

The End of Circular Migration and the Postponement of Stays

Since 1940's until early 2000's Mexican migration to the United States was characterized by being circular. Prior to 2001, migrants traveled to the United States for periods of three to five years, returned to their places of origin and, if the economic conditions demanded it, they returned to the US. This was motivated by: the wage-gap between both countries; their geographical proximity; the "easy" and "cheap" border crossing as compared to the current situation; and the conditions of precariousness and economic vulnerability in Mexico for more than three decades. However, since the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and increasingly after 2007 with the Great Recession, circular migration was threatened thus affecting the dynamics in the migratory circuit of Mexicans to the United States.

Between 2002 and 2004 unauthorized immigration to the United States became a central issue to national security under the Patriot Act Law[99] resulting in the tightening of the border with Mexico, and complicating the irregular border crossing.[100] During the 2000s, the US implemented federal and state laws against unauthorized immigration such as SB1070[101] in the state of Arizona, the Operation Streamline[102], and the verification of the legal status of workers with the E-Verify program.[103] Likewise, in 2007, with the onset of the crisis, the Obama administration intensified

[99] It is a law launched since October 2001 under George W. Bush administration that allows investigators to use the tools to investigate crime and, drug trafficking and possible terror links. https://www.justice.gov/archive/ll/highlights.htm

[100] Rafael Alarcón and William Becerra "¿Criminales o víctimas? La deportación de migrantes mexicanos de Estados Unidos a Tijuana, Baja California," *Norteamérica* 7 (2012): 128.

[101] Ibid., 130. Law that allows authorities to request proof of residence or citizenship based on racial features.

[102] Ibid., 130. Law that punishes the unauthorized border crossing with penalties that go from two months to three years of jail.

[103] Ibid., 131. Requirement for employers by the authorities to verify the legal status of their employees.

these measures at a federal level seeking to remove from US soil migrants convicted of serious felonies through the empowerment of the department of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).[104] In the period 2007-2010 it was estimated that around 1.7 million Mexicans were removed from the United States considerably affecting the net balance of Mexicans in the United States.[105]

Meanwhile, since 2006, with the start of the war against drug trafficking by then-president Felipe Calderón, Mexico has captured the attention of the worlds media for the violence experienced in the country as a result. Eventually in 2016 Mexico was positioned as the second deadliest country in the world.[106] An interminable war between government and organized crime has left high rates of civilian deaths among Mexican and non-Mexican migrants alike. This in large part down to the organized crime that controls the illegal crossings into the United States.[107] This has contributed to an increment in the prices and risks associated with crossing the border illegally, made more salient by the lack of a guaranteed crossing to the other side. Insecurity, violence, and high costs have discouraged individuals who wish to emigrate to the north with many choosing to remain in Mexico.[108] The most affected regions have been those of recent migration, mainly from central and southern Mexico, where high rates of unauthorized migration predominate (in some communities reaching up to 90%) compounded by the lack of possibilities to regularize their

[104] Ruth Gomberg and Laura Nussbaum, "Is Immigration Policy Labor Policy? Immigration Enforcement, Undocumented Workers, and the State," *Human Organization* 70 (2011): 370.
[105] Jeffrey Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "Overall Numbers of U.S. Unauthorized Immigrants Holds Steady Since 2009", Pew Hispanic Center Hispanic Trends, September 20, 2016, accessed May 26, 2016, http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/09/20/overall-number-of-u-s-unauthorized-immigrants-holds-steady-since-2009/.
[106] Elizabeth Roberts, "Report: Mexico was second deadliest country in 2016" CNN News, May 11, 2017, accessed May 25, 2017, http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/09/americas/mexico-second-deadliest-conflict-2016/.
[107] Oscar Martínez, *Los migrantes que no importan: en el camino con los centroamericanos indocumentados en México* (Barcelona: Icaria, 2010), 34.

[108] Lee, "Crisis económica global," 126.

migratory status.[109] In 2011, it was estimated that about 92% of the individuals with migratory experience in the community of Zapotitlan did not have a regular migratory status in the United States.

The Tightening of the Border and the Postponement of Staying in the US

Migrants testimonies enable a research project like this to personify the numbers present in quantitative data. It allows for a deeper understanding by contextualizing the policy in the hardening of the border and the effects in the increased. As mentioned in the previous section, the decrease in the number of Mexicans traveling to the United States is due to: (a) the increase in border surveillance by US authorities with more severe punishment for "illegal" crossing, such as imprisonment; b) new anti-immigrant laws, and c) the increase of violence on the northern border of Mexico by organized crime. The impact in the community was such that during my fieldwork in 2011 only two successful crossings attempts to the US were reported compared to 16 in 2004. Given the situation at the border, migrants already established on the other side of the border have opted to postpone their stay in the United States to meet their economic goals.

During the 1980's and 1990's, most of the migrants interviewed from the community reported to have crossed to the United States mainly through the Sonora-Arizona desert. During these years, they mentioned that the averaged time to reach their destination in the United States was one week with quotas ranging from $800 to $900 US dollars. In the early 2000's, the tightening of the border made the crossing a more difficult action forcing the *coyotes*[110] to take

[109] Ibid,. 126.
[110] Colloquial name given to people smugglers in Mexico. It is normal to refer to them as *coyotes* as an analogy to the animal for its skills in arid climates, while migrants are referred as *pollos* (chickens).

more complex routes. These new routes demanded more from the physical condition of the migrants to avoid detection by border guards. During this time, it was reported that reaching their destination took up to two weeks with prices ranging from $1000 to $1300. Despite a considerable increase in the prices and the difficulties in reaching the north, migrants mentioned that the border crossing was 'relatively easy', not criminalized, and on most of the occasions, people managed to cross on their first or second attempt.

From 2007 until present, prices have increased exponentially reaching as much as $6,000. This involves longer and more extreme routes through the desert, sometimes taking up to a month from departure to arrival. This matches the macro level data. During my fieldwork in the community between 2011 and 2014, many returned migrants mentioned having stayed at the border for periods longer than a month without being able to cross and accruing debts for their failed attempts. These stories would eventually filter back to their home communities subsequently discouraging other's aspirations of migration.

Migrants have reported new dynamics in the border crossing attempts. Previously, the Zapotitecos contacted *coyotes* from local or nearby communities whom accompanied them from their places of origin to their destination on the other side of the border. However, since early 2000, it has been reported that organized crime took control of the people smuggling networks at the border. In recent years, *coyotes* "appear to be members of vast criminal organizations involved in drug, guns and people trafficking around Tucson in Arizona."[111] Between 2000 and 2006 some migrants reported being sold by *coyotes* to other criminal networks before reaching their destination in the United States. "They are no longer the same people, you start the journey with

[111] Lee, "Crisis económica global," 140.

one *coyote* and you end up being sold at the border. It is already a wider network, that's how it works."[112]

In interview, Beatriz mentioned that in her attempt to cross the border in 2003 she was sold in northern Mexico to another criminal network:

> [...] from Hermosillo to Agua Prieta the same coyote took us from here; From Agua Prieta to there, we were already sold to another. [In] Agua Prieta they put us in a room and they told us "today you are going to stay here and on Saturday you are going to jump the border. Then the coyote [that we hired] said the he was not going to come with us anymore, he said that he was going to stay there [in Agua Prieta], and if everyone jumps to the other side I will return. If someone is left behind I will reach you and stay with you until you cross. [Then in front of us, he told the other coyote], how much are u going to give me for each guy?
>
> Interviewer: he said that so openly in front of you?
>
> Beatriz: yes, and we said, we are making the deal with you, and [the coyote] said "I cannot take you there, the border patrol knows me already an if the caught me I will go to jail ..."[113]

Raul, the latest migrant in crossing to the United States in my sample mentioned that in 2015 he paid $5,500 US dollars being capture twice by border patrol agents and taking an approximate time of one month and one week to reach his destination in New York. On this occasion, Raul said:

> […] In 2005 I crossed to the US and it was easy. We arrived at the border, we contacted the *coyote*, and a week later we were in New York […] that time I paid around $900 dollars and only walked in the desert for a day for around three hours at night […] now that I crossed [in 2015], I thought I was going to die. We walked and walked in the desert for days [four days] and we were capture twice by the border patrol […] no matter where you hide, with the drones, the dogs, and the technology that they have in less than 30 minutes they find you. […] this time my

[112] Veronica, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 22, 2017.
[113] Beatriz, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. Zapotitlan, Mexico, June 2, 2011.

> body couldn't stand it anymore, you cannot imagine the dehydration and fatigue of walking for days on the desert without knowing when you will arrive.[114]

Another factor that has contributed to the decline of Mexicans migrating to the United States has been the increased surveillance of the southern border by US authorities. The launch of Operation Streamline in 2005 has increased the criminalization and persecution of the unauthorized border crossings. Previously, while being apprehended, Mexicans were punished by being deported to the Mexican side of the border; however, with the launch of the Operation Streamline, migrants may face criminal charges in case of being captured by the border patrol in several occasions.[115] During my fieldwork in 2011, 2 of the 29 returnees in the sample were imprisoned in maximum security jails for two months under this law.

One of these examples is the case of Luis, who in 2002 intended to cross the border several times being apprehended and deported in three occasions and reaching to the north only until his fourth attempt. In 2010, in a new attempt to cross the border, Luis, and the group he was traveling with were captured to later be imprisoned under Operation Streamline. "In there [the jail] you find everyone, *coyotes*, *burros* [known as those who carry the drugs], killers, rapist, and a lot of people imprisoned by one thing or another who violated the law."[116] After his sentence, Luis returned to the community with the warning that if he tried to reenter the US illegally in the next five years, he could face a sentence of more than six months. The criminalization of border crossing has discouraged millions of Mexicans from migrating north. After the outcome of the presidential

[114] Raul, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 8, 2017.
[115] Hailey Sheldon, "Operation Streamline: The Border Patrol Prosecutions Initiative," *The Public Purpose* 11 (2013) 91.

[116] Raul, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. Zapotitlán, Mexico, October 10, 2012.

elections in 2017, this scenario appears to become stricter and punish more severally the clandestine border crossing.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the border, not knowing whether they could return to the United States in the future, migrants already established have opted to postpone their stays to achieve their economic goals and ensure the well-being of their families and them. In the interviews conducted in 2017, all the migrants mentioned that returning to Mexico in the upcoming years was not within their plans. This means that the situation had changed in some of the cases regarding previous interviews. Difficulties and increased costs to cross the border, as well as the conditions of vulnerability and poverty in Mexico, which in the first instance forced them to leave their homeland, are most regularly cited among the main reasons for remaining in the United States.

> I would love to go back to Mexico, but on vacation. There is nothing there for me or my family, there are no jobs. […] if I return I will go there just to suffer. Here we work a lot and life is difficult, we have bills to pay, food and living in general is more expensive, but one way or another, we make it.[117]

> "It is a lonely life here, it is just work and work, many hours a day and when you go back home you only sleep and wake up to do the same thing every day, work and work. But when I was in Mexico I was complaining that I did not have a job […] I can't go back to Mexico now; my family depends on what I earn here and I try to send as much as I can so that they can cover the expenses in Mexico.[118]

In an interview with Beatriz in 2013, she mentioned that her plans were to return to Mexico in the next years, once she had saved enough money to start a business in the community that

[117] Mauricio, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 11, 2017.
[118] Pedro, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 11, 2017.

would allow her to maintain a stable job. However, in the most recent interview, conducted in 2017, Beatriz's plans changed choosing to stay in the United States. She mentioned that the main reasons for changing her decision were the difficulties in recent years surrounding the border, the wage gap between both countries, and the good integration of her children in the US, of which one has US citizenship.

> You know how is the situation in Mexico, it is going from bad to worse and does not seem to change soon […] At the beginning Jorge did not want to come, he told me that he was going to leave his friends, he would never learn English, and he did not like the idea of leaving his grandparents behind. Now I ask him if he wants to go back and he says no, he likes to be here, he learned English and have new friends here already. […] My daughter, she wants to go back, but only for vacations. She spends a lot of time in the house by herself because she is to young and she can't go out.[119]

Another case is that of Jesus, who in 2013 claimed to have traveled to the United States for a period of no more than three years to pay a debt he had in Mexico. However, his wife, who lives in Mexico, has motivated him to stay in the United States for a longer time to pay for the household expenses and pay for the education of his children. "If it would for me, I would be in Mexico already, but I can't. My wife tells me that the money that I send her is barely enough, that if I return, it will be more difficult to pay for the expenses we have over there."[120]

From the stories of returned migrants in Mexico and active migrants in the US, we can contrast the micro and macro analysis contributing to the changes that have occurred since 2007 until present in the flow of Mexicans to the United States. Two important factors stand out from this analysis: the discourse of Mexican immigrants as illegal subjects and their criminalization, and the importance of the border as a symbolic and physical tool that perpetuates the exclusion

[119] Beatriz, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 7, 2017.
[120] Jesus, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 14, 2017.

and illegality of immigrants in the US. Although these discourses are not recent, in the current Trump administration, they have taken greater force becoming fundamental for the justification of the measures of his current mandate conflicting with the principles of capital in the era of globalization.

Illegality and the Border: The Never-Ending Story

"Undocumented immigrants are at once welcome and unwelcomed: they are woven into the economic fabric of the nation, but as labor that is cheap and disposable."[121] In the Unites States as in many other countries, exclusion and inclusion policies have been fundamental tools to produce "illegal subjects"; it is precisely this condition that allows governments to turn human beings into illegals once they enter a country without authorization.[122] Since the first significant flows of Mexicans to the United States in the 1920's right up until today, Mexicans has been portrayed as an "illegal" population with no place in the structure of the US Nation-State, other than a temporal, cheap and disposable workforce. Therefore, the law produces the notion of 'illegality' without the intention of excluding this labor force from some sectors of the labor market.[123] This notion represents in the daily life of Mexicans their vulnerability, their situation as disposable and undesirable subjects, and their potential deportability at any time.[124]

For its part, the border between Mexico and the Unites States can be understood for its "boundaries as legal spatial delimitations of nations, *viz*. boundary lines, as opposed to the

[121] Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: University Press, 2004), 2.
[122] Green, "The Nobodies", 370.
[123] Nicholas De Genova, *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 27.

[124] Ibid., 27-28.

'borders' of nations which are geographic and cultural zones or spaces."[125] The border, its militarization and the millions of dollars invested in it, represents a physical and symbolic barrier between Mexico and the United States that has been essential for the construction and substance of the narrative of the "illegal".[126] "It is precisely the border that provides the exemplary theater for staging the spectacle of "the illegal alien" that the law produces."[127]

It is precisely these migrants who are inserted into the lower social strata of the US labor hierarchy. They complement the complex economic and political dynamics of global cities linked to remote places as is the case of Zapotitlan. These migrants as well as other big migrant groups in the US are indispensable elements in the emerging industry of services as cheap and disposal labor but excluded from many social practices of the Nation. By creating fear among migrants based on their illegality and giving such importance to the border and anti-immigrant policies, Mexican migrants have become even a more 'perfect workforce' willing to be exploited for low wages, in deplorable conditions, and diminishing their social interaction due to the current conditions.

After the Great Recession

Between 2010 and 2014, academics, governments of both countries, and civil society predicted that at the end of the Great Recession, the flow of Mexican migrants would stabilize and grow at the same pace as in the past three decades. However, despite the economic recovery in the

[125] Kearney, Michael, "Borders and Boundaries of State and Self at the End of Empire," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4 (1991): 45.
[126] Gregory Feldman, "If Ethnography is more than Participant-observation, then Relations are more than Connections: The Case for Nonlocal Ethnography in a World of Apparatuses," *Anthropological Theory* 11 (2011): 378.
[127] De Genova, *Working the Boundaries, 242.*

US since 2014 the conditions to migrants have not changed positively. The conditions of violence in Mexico, the increase in border surveillance by US authorities and the prevalence of increasingly strict anti-immigrant laws, have all precipitated uncertainty among undocumented migrants living in the north. With the triumph of Donald Trump in the US elections in 2016, these measures are expected to be intensified, with an even greater impact on the migratory circuit Mexico-United States.

Proof of this has been the beginning of 2017 when the 50 Mexican consulates in the United States reported one of the most active years after the promises of Trump's administration to act against unauthorized migration in the country. In uncertainty, despair, and paranoia about the situation, hundreds of Mexicans filled the waiting rooms of the consulates mainly in the cities of Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and New York, where most Mexicans live, to update their expired passports, apply for the *matrículas consulares* (consular ID's)[128], seek legal counseling about their migratory status, and processing the Mexican citizenship of their children born in the United States.[129]

A statement presented by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in February 2017 suggests that among the new measures taken by the new administration are: "to publicize crimes by undocumented immigrants; strip such immigrants of privacy protections; enlist local police officers as enforcers; erect new detention facilities; discourage asylum seekers; and, ultimately,

[128] Monica Varsanyi, "Interrogating "Urban Citizenship" vis-à-vis Undocumented Migration" *Citizenship Studies* 10 (2006): 230. *Matrículas consulares* are ID's issued by the Mexican government through its consular offices to migrants abroad. This document has been issued for 120 years but it has not been until after the attacks of 9/11 that a greater number of cities, agencies and businesses accept this document as an official ID.
[129] Jennifer Medina, "Mexican Consulates Flooded with Fearful Immigrants," *New York Times*, February 17, 2017, accessed May 23, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/us/mexican-consulates-flooded-with-fearful-immigrants.html?mcubz=0.

speed up deportations."[130] In addition, his administration will employ 10,000 additional immigration officers and 5,000 new border patrol agents with the purpose of doing these measures effectively.[131] Recent months have been characterized by the uncertainty and bewilderment of migrants and their families based on the uncertainty of the coming years and how these new measures will affect their stay in the United States. Due to the growing fear about the situation, migrants have taken certain precautions mainly in the legal arena regarding their migratory status and reducing as much as possible their movements within the cities to avoid any confrontation with the US authorities.

This section, through the experience of Zapotiteco migrants, focuses on the changes that have taken place in recent months with the beginning of Trump's administration. It centers mainly on how after three months of mandate, the measures taken by his administration have affected the daily lives of these migrants, mainly referring to their social networks and their mobility within the city. Also, two sections are presented on programs, on legal counseling and financial assistance implemented by the Mexican government through consulates for several years, that in the awakening of the current situation have become key programs for consulates and migrants. It is important to emphasize that it is too early to know how these new measures may affect migrants in the US in the long term; however, the stories of migrants in recent months can give us an idea of the anomalies that have significantly affected the daily lives of migrants and their families.

[130] Michael Shear and Ron Nixon, "New Trump Deportation Rules Allow Fa More Expulsions," *New York Times,* February 21, 2017, accessed May 22, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/21/us/politics/dhs-immigration-trump.html?action=Click&contentCollection=BreakingNews&contentID=64943695&pgtype=article&_r=0&ref=nyt-es&mcid=nyt-es&subid=article.
[131] Ibid,.

Limitations of Mobility and Migrant Social Networks

Understanding the migratory phenomenon nowadays requires the recognition that cultures and networks have lost their connection to a geographical space.[132] (Ferguson & Gupta 1992; 23). International migration has allowed new flows and reconfigurations of capital, populations, space, culture, and identities that are shaped in different time and space. That is, that there is no geographical anchor of these factors and processes to a specific place, what is known as transnationalism.[133] Through networks, "migrants and their descendants remain strongly influenced by their continuing ties to their home country or by social networks that stretch across national borders"[134] which can range from kinship relations, or daily social interaction to institutional levels such as state and federal institutions.[135]. Nowadays, reconfigurations in both, the community, and the small niches of migrants in multiple cities worldwide, are molded in parallel having a more significant impact on the community rather than the destination due to the population density.[136]

Social Networks among migrants are fundamental in explaining the development of migratory circuits and the daily experience and interaction of migrants in the places of origin and destination. "The network is based on primordial relationships or appeals to the common local identity, providing information on available jobs, recommendations for working in the same restaurant, obtaining housing and, perhaps, receiving a loan while the new migrant receives his/her

[132] James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, "Beyond Culture: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference," *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1992): 2.
[133] Glick-Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity," 1010.
[134] Ibid., 1010.
[135] Portes, "Conclusion," 879.
[136] Ibid,.

first salary."[137] These networks have influenced the destination, the occupational sectors in which migrants insert, and the composition of the migrant's household. The notion of network emphasizes the distance between the place of origin and the destination, the knowledge of each other, the kin relationships, friendships, which all together simulate spatial communities even thousands of miles away.[138] Social networks are based on trust, solidarity, and reciprocity that can be institutionalized in migrant clubs, sport teams, participation in religious practices, or the restructuring of kinship as new extended families, and can take place across borders, in the community and places of destination.[139]

Through networks migrants from the community of Zapotitlan have settled in the metropolitan areas of New York and New Jersey mainly in the Bronx and Yonkers where some of their acquaintances, friends or relatives were already established. Likewise, through these contacts Zapotitecos have inserted mainly in growing service sector that in 2010 employed 86.2% of the EAP in the United States.[140] Restaurants, supermarkets, cleaning companies, laundries, among others top the places where these migrants have found labor shelter. Given the constant demand for labor in the service sector and the strong networks of solidarity in the place of destination, migrants are confident that in case of losing their job, they can rely on these networks.

In 2017, of the 11 migrants interviewed, 9 reported having found their first job through the help of acquaintances, friends, or relatives. As the migrants adapted to the place of residence, new networks were created which allowed them to considerably increase their labor options and

[137] Liliana Rivera, "Transformaciones comunitarias y remesas socioculturales de los migrantes mixtecos poblanos," *Migración y Desarrollo* 2 (2004): 68.
[138] Ibid., 70.
[139] Ibid., 72-73.
[140] Levine and Lebaron, "Immigration Policy," 42.

social circles. Migrants reported that it was common to hear that some friends or relatives found some work in restaurants or supermarkets with better salaries or in some more favorable locations attracting other members of the community or friends by being recommended to work in these places. "It was normal to go to a restaurant and find three or four people of the community working there, and everything because one started working there, then this person recommended another friend and so on and on; that's how the chain goes."[141]

These networks are not only limited to the workplace but they can extend to social activities such as sporting events, social gatherings, religious activities, among others that later can be used with purposes such as asking for work recommendations, loans and so on. These activities have allowed the extension of networks not only among members of the same community, but also with other members of neighboring communities, same nationality, or same language. Veronica mentioned that through her church group, she met other migrants from Mexico and other Hispanic countries like Colombia and Venezuela. Through these contacts, Veronica has been able to find legal advice regarding her legal status, information for US federal programs and even favors such as money lending or taking care of her kids while she is working. Likewise, Jesus mentioned that through contacts and friends that he met while playing soccer at the weekends in the park, he has found work in restaurants and supermarkets when recommended by these members with their employers.

A vital element for the development of these networks has been the mobility that these migrants have within the city. Spaces such as churches or sports facilities are not always close to the migrant's homes which sometimes requires them to travel across the city to reach them. During

[141] Mauricio, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 11, 2017.

my fieldwork in 2014 in the city of New York, migrants reported moving less within the city unless it was a matter of work fearing to be captured and deported. Upon my return in 2017, this situation increased dramatically with migrants reducing their mobility to only a few streets away from their homes, by finding jobs as close as possible to their houses, by stopping their church attendance or abstaining from parties or social gathering that require them to move outside their neighborhood, just to mention a few limitations.

New York, like many other cities is consider having one of the most relaxed migrant policies in the United States gaining the recognition as one of the "sanctuary cities". Even those migrants with irregular status can enjoy services usually reserved for regular citizens and residents like access to health care or education. However, since 2017, there has been a challenge to this system following President Trump's threats to cut federal budgets to these cities if they fail to comply with the measures implemented by his administration. In January of 2017, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and smaller cities such as New Heaven and Austin showed their support for unauthorized migrants by claiming that these cities would remain as sanctuaries for migrants.[142] Despite this, uncertainty among immigrants continues, reflected in the testimonies of migrants and their daily lives.

In 2014, Beatriz worked in a restaurant 20 minutes away from her house by subway and in a laundry located 5 blocks away from her house. In 2016, Beatriz reported having changed her job to a restaurant within a 10-minute walk from her home and kept her job in the laundry as she felt insecure taking the subway every day to get to work. Likewise, she mentioned having limited her

[142] Liz Robbins, "Sanctuary City' Mayors Vow to Defy Trump's Immigration Order," *New York Times*, January 25, 2017, accessed May 16, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/25/nyregion/outraged-mayors-vow-to-defy-trumps-immigration-order.html?ref=nyt-es&mcid=nyt-es&subid=article

interaction with friends who live far away from her, and having stopped attending basketball courts fearing her capture and deportation by US authorities.

> From home to work and from work to home. We don't go out unless we must, to the supermarket or occasionally to buy ice-cream or a coffee but in the neighborhood […] I was feeling very insecure on my way to work, you listen to a lot of stories that you imagine that anything can happen to you; imagine that they deport me, what would happen to my children?[143]

Another case is that of Jaime, who despite not having changed his work, the situation has made him reconsider this alternative. Jaime works in a restaurant six days a week taking him an estimate of one hour journey to move from his house in the Bronx to his work in Manhattan. Since January 2017, Veronica, his wife, has tried to convince him to change his work to a closer location.

> Well we talked and talked about it and she [Veronica] is always telling me to change my job. Now where I work, I'm doing fine, my boss likes me. […] Everyone hers rumors of raids and that they [immigration authorities] are waiting for you outside the subway station, so of course you are afraid of that something may happen to you, you don't know any more if it's fiction or not. […] [However] work is work and we have a rent to pay and bills every month, it's not that easy.[144]

One member of the community affairs office at the Mexican consulate mentioned that one of the strategies for approaching migrant communities has been through sporting events and religious festivities organized mainly by the same communities. Providing them with services and sometimes sponsorship, the office has used social networks already established to motivate migrants to form clubs and have a greater participation in institutional activities through the

[143] Beatriz, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 7, 2017.
[144] Jaime, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 18, 2017.

consulate and the programs offer by the Mexican government. Since the beginning of 2009, the representative mentioned that the participation of migrants in sporting and social events has decreased considerably. As an example, he said that during the fall of 2016, 67 teams participated in a tournament organized by community members in the Bronx. In the winter of 2017, only 42 teams registered, being the lowest number since 2009.

It is this fear and uncertainty about the situation that has contributed to an already present trend recorded as early as 2008 at the beginning of the Great Recession. Rumors of raids, people being apprehended on their way to work, and cases of deportation of individuals with criminal record circulate among unauthorized migrants who have taken precautions regarding this. "Those stories have always been around, you always heard that police apprehended someone in the metro or in the street or even at work, but they were just stories […] since Trump that changed; it seems like it's not a joke anymore."[145]

Legal Counseling

The uncertain situation has led to increased search for legal counseling of undocumented migrants in relation to their migration status. Since the end of 2016, Mexican consulates across the US have expanded their hours of service and the ability of their offices and phone lines to receive migrants seeking for these services. In the case of New York, the demand has been so high that the Mexican consulate has not been able to deal with high demand of these services and the very limited schedules of the migrants due to their jobs. In an interview with a consular agent, it was mentioned

[145] Beatriz, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 7, 2017.

that one of the main problems has been that, given the vulnerable and desperate situation of the migrants, many have been subjects to fraud or excessive charges for these services.

Of the migrants interviewed during my fieldwork in 2017, all the adults with irregular status mentioned having had at least one appointment with a lawyer between November 2016 to April 2017. None of these services were provided through the Mexican consulate. Instead, these services were contacted through recommendations of friend or acquaintances who had prior experience with these counselors. In none of the interviews, migrants mentioned to have been object of fraud of excessive charges; however, in most of the cases, it was stated that little could be done regarding their situation.

> I went twice with an immigration lawyer to review my case, but from the first time I went, I was told that my case was very complicated because I was captured twice in the border when I was crossing [in 2003]. [The lawyer] told me that even if I could apply for a permit or citizenship, I would have to leave the country for at least 10 years to obtain the pardon and start with the migratory process. Just imagine, to start the process! To this add the years that [this] can take.[146]

> I visited a lawyer once after the elections [in November 2016], because everyone was afraid of what could happen. I was aware that little could be done with my case. I don't have a way to regularize my status, but I still went to know what can be done […] after going there I felt a bit calmer and have more certainty but it was bad that I missed one day at work.[147]

> Before, repeatedly I went to the consulate to process my consular ID, the one of my husband and my daughter and to get the passport and birth certificates or all those papers. But after Trump, the lines have been too long and it has become almost impossible to make an appointment. You had to arrive early and wait for at least two hours [to have and appointment], It was the same with the phone but at least

[146] Beatriz, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 7, 2017.
[147] Raul, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. Zapotitlán, Mexico, October 10, 2012.

> you didn't have to be waiting. […] my husband's brother recommended us a lawyer with whom we are taking our case now.[148]

Conscious of the long distances that migrants must travel to reach the consulate offices, the Mexican Embassy has expanded the services of mobile consulate, which consists of taking the main services offered by the consulate to the places with the highest concentration of migrants outside the area of Manhattan. Typically, these campaigns take place every two to three months, reaching neighborhoods primarily in Bronx, Yonkers, Queen and even Westchester counties in New York and Passaic in New Jersey where most of the Mexicans reside. Only four of the Zapotitecos interviewed in 2017 mentioned having visited a mobile consulate when it was close to their neighborhood. For them, the services provided continue to be limited and not compatible with their jobs schedules.

Remittances

The sending of remittances has been one of the most studied topics in the field of migration in the last three decades due to the strong economic, political, and social implication in the sending and receiving countries. In the 80's Josua Reichert, Rymond Weist and Richard Mines suggested that migration was linked to further ways of dependency between the capitalist north, and the underdeveloped south (also capitalist) under the world system approach.[149] These scholars suggested that "large influxes of US-generated dollars distorted rather than developed rural economies, exacerbating social conflict, economic differentiation and price inflation, and

[148] Veronica, Interviewed by author. Voice recording. New York City, April 22, 2017.
[149] Leigh Binford, "Migrant Remittances and (Under)development in Mexico," *Critique of Anthropology* 23 (2003): 306.

contributing to a vicious cycle in which migration begot more migration."[150] Likewise, it was proposed that migration through remittances provided a standard of living that has only been achieved and maintained through recurrent migration, which has been referred as "the migrant syndrome" where migration engender more migration.[151]

In later years, Douglas Massey, Jorge Durand, Jeffrey Cohen, Dennis Conway, and Richard Jones positioned migration as a development process for migrant-sending communities in Mexico.[152] For these scholars, migration has allowed many Mexican households to cover housing expenses, build a patrimony and sometimes start a small business, something that they would not aspire to with local salaries in their origin communities. In turn, they criticized the position of migration as a cause of dependence in the absence of a functionalist solution to the migratory phenomenon.[153] For practical purposes, this last position has been adopted mainly by the Mexican government, private institutions and NGOs who have focused on the economic advantages and solutions rather than on the structural implications of the migratory phenomenon.

Remittances in Mexico are so important that in 2016 it was reported as the second source of foreign income in the country only behind manufacturing exports and followed by oil exports and the increasing tourism industry.[154] Working on average between 50 to 60 hours a week, millions of Mexicans send money to their homes in Mexico to keep the household afloat. In 2010, it was estimated that 1,350,000 households (4.7%) received remittances in Mexico, of which about

[150] Ibid., 305.
[151] Josua Reichert, "The Migrant Syndrome: Seasonal U.S. Wage Labor and Rural Development in Central Mexico," *Human Organization* 40 (1981): 58.
[152] Binford, "Migrant Remittances," 307.
[153] Jeffrey Cohen, Richard Jones, and Dennis Conway, "Why Remittances Shouldn't be Blamed for Rural Underdevelopment in Mexico: A Collective Response to Leigh Binford." *Critique of Anthropology* 25 (2005): 90.
[154] Jens Krogstad, Jeffrey Passel, and D'Vera Cohn, "5 Facts about Illegal Immigration in the U.S." *Pew Research Center*, April 27, 2017, accessed May 21, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/27/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/.

90% were designated for consumption and basic household expenses.[155] In average, Mexican Migrants send around $300 dollars, 14 times a year mainly through electronic transfers companies such as MoneyGram and Western Union, with commissions up to 7%.[156]

Like the migratory flow, since 2007 remittances sent to Mexico have declined considerably to recover only in the year 2016. In 2006, remittances from the United States into Mexico reached 31.8 billion dollars; the highest in the history since the beginning of Mexican migration influx to the US. In 2013, this figure fell to $22 billion, representing a decrease of 29%.[157] These changes have been attributed to the financial crisis that severely affected the US economy and the uncertainty of migrants as they did not know how anti-immigrant policies would affect them in the upcoming years. With the end of the crisis in 2014, remittances have recovered partially by reaching 22.5 billion dollars in 2015 and 22.7 billion in 2016.[158] Nevertheless, ambiguities about future figures persist given the threats of current Trump's administration to block money transfers of undocumented migrants.

While current US administrations aims to curb and control the influx of money by unauthorized migrants, financial institutions seek to streamline and provide new and easily accessible tools for the sending of remittances. Financial management of the household and first account programs have been fostered by private institutions, mainly banks, who have sought to channel a growing market. With the support of some governments, non-governmental organization and NGOs, these private institutions have made use of the networks reached by these sectors to

[155] Salvador Cobo, "¿Cómo entender la movilidad ocupacional de los migrantes de retorno? Una propuesta de marco explicativo para el caso mexicano." *Estudios Demográficos Y Urbanos* 23 (2008): 162.
[156] Manuel Orozco, "Remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean in 2016," *The Dialogue Leadership for the Americas (2017):3.*
[157] Krogstad et al., "5 Facts about Illegal Immigration,".
[158] Orozco, "Remittances to Latin America," 5.

gain access to migrant communities. This has promoted the "neoliberal subjectivities among migrants, for them to become economic actors making full use of banks and financial services to foster the development of their country of origin"[159]

In 2014, the Mexican consulate in partnership with financial institutions and nonprofit organizations such as Ariva,[160] Qualitas,[161] Citibank,[162] and Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund,[163] launched a financial advisor window for Mexican migrants in the US. This program has as main objectives to advise migrants on savings strategies, credit procedures and the opening of first accounts. This initiative aims to capture migrants' incomes and enter in a growing industry such as the sending of remittances with low commissions rates that are attractive to migrants.

In a way, these programs have allowed some degree of security to the migrants' income, and, at the same time, they have increased their possibilities of consumption through credits with financial institutions. New living standards achieved through remittances and access to credit have allowed migrants and their families to forge new consumer expectations. However, it should be mentioned that these new standards can only be maintained through recurrent migration or prolonged stays in the United States.[164]

During my fieldwork in the community between 2011 and 2013, access to credit and financial institutions was very limited. At that time, migrants and their families made use of

[159] Antoine Pecoud, "Introduction," In Disciplining the Transnational Mobility of People, ed. M. Gaiger and A. Pecoud, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2013): 17.
[160] https://ariva.org/
[161] http://qualitasoflife.org/
[162] http://www.citigroup.com/citi/citizen/community/
[163] http://cfefund.org/
[164] Miguel Corona and Michele Corona, "La migración, las remesas y el desarrollo desde el ámbito local: el caso de Puebla," Iniciativa Ciudadana AC (2014): 6.

informal money-lending systems organized by members of the community. However, in recent years, there has been a great interest from formal financial institutions to capture the flow of remittances and integrate migrants into the dynamics of the financial economy. During my visit in 2017, none of the migrants interviewed had a bank account or use any of the services provided by the Mexican consulate and only four of them were knew about the financial service window program. These four migrants mentioned to be interested in the remittance services; however, they did not made use of them fearing to generate some record that in the future would allow the authorities to trace them.

Conclusion

The year 2007 represents the beginning of a new phase in the Mexico-United States migratory circuit. This year coincided with the economic crisis in the United States and the beginning of the war against drug trafficking in Mexico. The result has been the tightening of the border by the US authorities, new and more severe anti-immigrant laws, and an increase in the presence of organized crime on the northern border of Mexico. It has become increasingly difficult to cross the border with costs that can reach up to $ 6000 dollars without ensuring the arrival to the destination. Likewise, Trump's new administration promises to take tougher measures against unauthorized immigration, meaning that under these circumstances, more than 6 million Mexicans could be subject to deportation.

Day by day, even in sanctuary cities like New York, migrants move along to their work places without knowing if the day of tomorrow they will be captured and deported back to Mexico. Despite these, returning home does not seem the most viable option. More than thirty years of neoliberalism have left in a situation of vulnerability and precariousness to many Mexicans who for many years have relied in international migration to “be someone” and “do something”. Millions of households depend on remittances from relatives across the border, who in turn live in nostalgia and longing to return home.

As circular migration has been threatened, migrants already established in the US have opted to postpone their stay to meet their economic goals. However, daily they face hostile conditions of overexploitation, without social security, discrimination and the constant fear and uncertainty that the category of undocumented immigrants entails. It is precisely the production and reproduction of the category of “illegality” that migrants experience in their daily lives that

the ethnographic record offers as a contribution to the field in this research. Due to this fear and uncertainty, since 2000, and more rapidly at the beginning of 2017, migrants reduced their mobility within the city affecting their interaction outside their work places such as sporting events, church meetings or social gatherings, which are practices that strongly contribute to development of social networks. These networks of trust and solidarity have been fundamental to the migratory circuit, since it is through these that the migrants have settled in specific cities and in diverse labor sectors, that for years have allowed their sustenance.

Also, this work has captured the interaction of other agents such as the Mexican consulate and private institutions such as banks and non-profit organizations that in one way or another seek to exploit the social networks of the migrants for mutual benefits. Remittances have been the intersection between these agents who through programs seek a greater impact on the migrant community.

This research is limited by the timing and uncertainty about possible scenarios that the Trump administration can take. As for government institutions, municipalities and specially migrants, the scenario continues with too many gray shades that only time can reveal. Nevertheless, this work gives an approximation to the tendencies that have taken place from previous administrations that under Trump's mandate have been made explicit. Future work in this area should focus on future anti-immigrants policies and how the discourse of illegality is shaped, internalized and reproduced among migrants affecting their daily lives.

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