

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT? THE GENDERED COSTS OF MIGRATION ON MEXICO'S RURAL "LEFT BEHIND"*

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ABSTRACT. Governments, civil society, and policymakers assert the potential of international migration to foster development and alleviate poverty. Often such claims are rooted in macroscale geopolitical analyses of migration and development, which mask the localized, uneven, and embodied ways family members "left behind" bear the costs and subsidize the U.S./Mexico (inter)national integration project. Informed by feminist geopolitics, this article demonstrates how the left behind disproportionately bear the hidden costs of neoliberal restructuring and migration. We draw upon Mexican Migration Project (MMP) ethnosurvey data to frame the narratives of migrant family members left behind. Narratives were constructed through in-depth interviews conducted in rural Veracruz. We conclude that in the absence of geographically specific examinations of the hidden costs associated with neoliberal development and migration it is possible that "migration for development" programs and policies may exacerbate inequities that will perpetuate migration and further weaken Mexican origin communities. *Keywords:* *gender, left behind, Mexico, migration, neoliberal.*

Governments, civil society, and policymakers optimistically affirm the potential of international migration to foster development and alleviate poverty through remittances, and income and skill transfers (Hernandez and Coutin 2006; Faist 2008; Geiger and Pécoud 2013). Such assertions are rooted in macroscale geopolitical analyses, which mask the localized, uneven, and embodied ways family members who remain are disproportionately affected by migration. Despite the "left behind"¹ being a much larger group than the migrants themselves, Mika Toyota and colleagues argue, "[...] in the limelight are still the migrants, while the left behind remain in partial shadow" (2007, 158). Through a place-specific, microscale approach, we argue that the hidden costs of migration, embodied and borne by the families left behind challenge macroscale public policy schemes oriented at migration for development. These policy measures are largely based on neoliberal discourses touting their ability to

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stem migration through increased marketization of developing economies. However, in Mexico, it is well documented that neoliberal restructuring, especially in the rural sphere, has indeed led to the growth of emigration in new sending areas—creating a new geography of migration (Riosmena and Massey 2012). Within this system, Mexican migrant labor subsidizes key sectors of the U.S. economy, while also providing a social safety net for family members left behind. We contend that the left behind—and not only the migrants—shoulder the costs of this integration project through their labor, bodies, social reproduction, mobility, consumption, and extended family networks.

Migration places added demands on women, especially those who become *de facto* heads of household through migration and must bear responsibility for social reproduction and maintenance of the labor force; outside wage and income-earning activities; farming/gardening; community work; managing remittances; and caring for children, elderly, disabled, sick, and injured (often return migrants). There is growing recognition of the social and economic value of the unpaid care work invested by women (Dyck 2005). It enables reproduction of migrant labor, which forms the foundation for a global neoliberal economy that is contingent on a constant supply of flexible, mobile, and cheap workers. A consequence of this is the increasing number of single mothers and female-headed households, revealing the vulnerability of the “left behind,” and their dependency upon remittances for survival. Long-term separation, due to constrained mobility—a function of tightening border enforcement, which makes crossing riskier and more costly—potentially leads to weakened family ties and a reduction or total loss of remittance income over time, poverty, marginalization, and social and bodily suffering.

This article demonstrates how the left behind (particularly women, children, elderly, sick, and disabled), often in *de facto* female-headed households, disproportionately bear the burden of “externalities” or hidden costs of neoliberal restructuring and transnational migration. To achieve this, we employ a gender analysis, informed by feminist geopolitics, to emphasize the different ways household members experience migration in their everyday lives. Feminist geopolitics seeks to disentangle how global political processes are experienced in localized, everyday, and informal practices (Dowler and Sharp 2001). Our research draws upon combined analyses of a Mexican Migration Project (MMP) ethnosurvey, and in-depth interviews with community leaders, migrants, and families remaining in rural Veracruz. Narratives shed light on the consequences and impacts of migration through the often ignored voices and perspectives of the left behind (Toyota and others 2007), and in particular those nonmigrant women partners and caregivers who are equally affected by migration but receive far less attention in the literature (Frank and Wildsmith 2005; McEvoy and others 2012).

The primary objective of this article is not to negate the development potential and benefits migration can, and often does, bring to sending commu-

nities. Rather, it is to make a case for the importance of recognizing the locally specific, distinctive, and uneven nature of unintended negative outcomes for different groups and individuals; and thus to join the call for a more critical analysis of migration and development (Delgado Wise and others 2013; Geiger and Pécout 2013)—beyond remittances, income, and other economic indicators. In doing so, we also broaden knowledge of the everyday, taken-for-granted embodied and corporal costs of migration as experienced by the left behind themselves.

NEOLIBERALISM, MIGRATION, AND DEVELOPMENT

Neoliberal globalization, manifest in economic liberalization, privatization, deregulation, and structural adjustment, is increasingly implicated as both the impetus and the corollary for intensifying global migration. Geographers have joined the mounting criticism of neoliberal globalization, which in the case of Mexico, has served to deepen internal disparities at multiple scales, and thrust undercapitalized small farmers into direct competition with both heavily subsidized U.S. growers and large-scale, “modern,” and well-capitalized domestic producers (Martin 2005). This has contributed to more permanent settlement in new U.S. destinations, such as the rural south by migrants from nontraditional sending states, such as Veracruz, Chiapas, and Oaxaca (Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). Thus, while not the only cause of Mexican emigration, research has linked neoliberal rural restructuring with destabilizing agricultural livelihoods and the onset of new patterns of migration as a livelihood strategy, in particular in emerging sending areas in south or central Mexico, like Veracruz (Riosmena and Massey 2012; Carte and others 2010).

Mexico’s transition from a statist to a neoliberal economic development model draws heavily on the premise of migration as a vehicle for development (Delgado Wise and Márquez Covarrubias 2008; Delgado Wise and others 2013): an approach increasingly embraced by governments (for example OECD nation states, European Council), policymakers, multilateral agencies (for example, the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund [IMF]), civil society, demographers, and economists (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008; Faist 2008; Bailey 2010; UNCSD 2012; Geiger and Pécout 2013; Kabbanji 2013; Pina-Delgado 2013). Indeed, with remittances reaching over \$22.7 billion dollars in Mexico during 2011 (Fundación BBVA Bancomer 2012), migration provides a critical social safety net for countless rural households through its direct support for basic food, housing, education, healthcare, and infrastructure needs. This “new development mantra” places heavy emphasis on remittances (Taylor 1999; Binford 2003; Faist 2008; Skeldon 2008); matching programs such as “*tres por uno*” (Faist 2008); hometown associations (Ellerman 2003); “productive” investments in hometowns (Jones 1995); and more recently, social capital and networks (Massey and Aysa 2005; Rahman 2009); social remittances (Hadi 2001; Levitt and Nyberg-Sørensen 2004), and skills transfers (UNCSD 2012). In

the migration and development-policy discourse, development is conceptualized in narrow Western or Northern macroeconomic terms based on gross poverty metrics with limited in-depth consideration of issues addressed in critical development studies, such as divergent conceptions of “development” (Dannecker 2009; Geiger and Pécoud 2013), “North/South” power asymmetries, dependency, sustainability, place-specific contextualization, psychosocial and bodily costs, differential impacts, and inequality. In response, there is increasing recognition of the complicated and problematic relationship between migration and development, and a growing critical discussion on the topic (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008; Faist 2008; Dannecker 2009; Raghuram 2009; Delgado Wise and others 2013; Geiger and Pécoud 2013). Furthermore, Petra Dannecker points out that while there is considerable research on gender in various dimensions of migration studies, gender has not been brought in as a constituent element of mainstream migration and development debates (2009).

Both international migration and development policy fall squarely in the realm of geopolitics, and pertinent to both processes are issues related to international power flows, politics, and space.² Conventional geopolitical analysis of migration and development has focused primarily on “public” realm macro-scale issues such as borders, labor markets, economic impacts, social service provision, and strategies of migration regulation. Such a perspective conceals the diverse, unequal, place-specific, and bodily ways migrants and the left behind assume the costs of, and subsidize, both the U.S. and Mexican economies through their mobility and labor. This places migration strictly in the geopolitical and economic (inter)national public realm, separate from the private, personal, and “intimate” spheres of families and embodied individuals (Mountz and Hyndman 2006; Pratt and Rosner 2012). Within this discourse, the left behind are often glossed over as passive recipients of remittances, with the emergence of “villages of women,” a curious and somewhat unfortunate byproduct (Toyota and others 2007). The artificial public/private binary releases beneficiary governments, consumers, and the private sector from accountability and responsibility not only to immigrant workers, but to their families as well. For example, increasing reports of hospital deportations (Sparke 2009) and injured immigrant workers being denied workers’ compensation, underscore the notion of the “disposable” migrant body—discarded once rendered uneconomical (Wright 2006). Migrants are often unable to gain access to healthcare for illnesses and injuries, despite their key participation in various productive sectors of the economy (Holmes 2013). Injured and sick immigrants often must return home, resulting not only in a loss of household income, but also placing new care burdens on family members—especially women (Kofman and Raghuram 2009).

Therefore, while migration has brought benefits to many families, most notably in the form of remittance income for household consumption, health-care, and education, it has also exacted a high cost on migrants, their families,

and sending communities (Hadi 2001; Zentgraf and Stoltz Chinchilla 2012; Bennett and others 2013). Rodolfo de la Garza contends that conventional analysis focusing on economic factors to the exclusion of other dimensions overestimates the gains and underestimates the costs of migration to the left behind (2010). These costs may include family separation (McGuire and Martin 2007; Yeoh and Lam 2007); increased union dissolution (Frank and Wildsmith 2005); emotional/psychological problems (Dreby 2007; Toyota and others 2007); increased health problems (Nguyen and others 2006); growing numbers of female-headed households (Hadi 2001; Biao 2007); surveillance and policing of remaining female partners (McEvoy and others 2012); and children remaining under the care of one parent, grandparents, or relatives (Moran-Taylor 2008; Yeoh and Lam 2007). The left-behind children, among the most silent in migration studies, may attain material gains, but studies report several negative impacts, including increased juvenile delinquency, drug use, emotional problems, stress, educational deficiencies, high dropout rates, and migration (Kandel and Kao 2001; Kandel and Massey 2002; Suárez-Orozco and Qin 2006; UNICEF 2007; Yeoh and Lam 2007; UNICEF 2008; Castañeda and Buck 2011; Mazzucato and Schans 2011; Bennett and others 2013). Similarly, research on the health of left-behind children, adults, and the elderly indicates uneven outcomes. While children may benefit from improved nutrition—and therefore better health—due to migration, anxiety, loneliness, and stress associated with separation also produce negative effects (de la Garza 2010). The elderly in Mexico whose adult children have migrated have manifested poor health outcomes ranging from mental health issues to increased incidence of heart attack or stroke (Antman 2010).

Yet, the public-policy debates surrounding undocumented immigration (McGuire and Martin 2007), as well as conventional discourse on migration and development, tend to gloss over these very real costs. Our examination of these costs does not purport to negate the benefits or the development potential of migration, nor the agency of those who remain in origin communities. Rather, an emphasis on embodied costs as experienced by the left behind at the microscale seeks to explore a dimension that has received less attention, and by doing so unsettle overly optimistic macroscale assumptions concerning the migration and development nexus.

A FEMINIST APPROACH TO GENDERED IMPACTS OF MIGRATION

In contrast to macrolevel approaches that exclude lived, on-the-ground experience from their analyses, this study employs a feminist geopolitical approach to unpack how neoliberalism and transnational migration are articulated and experienced on the ground level. According to Jennifer Hyndman, “critical geopolitics” that seeks to challenge taken for granted notions of power and space embedded in traditional geopolitics, is productive but still fails to address the “gendered landscape of dominant geopolitical debates” (2001, 213). In order to overcome this deficit, it is necessary to construct a feminist geopolitical

approach that employs scales both “finer and coarser” than nation states and global economies, applies critical feminist analysis of the public/private dichotomy to the transnational scale, and utilizes mobility as an analytical construct to understand geopolitical power and accountability (Hyndman 2001, 210). Employing a feminist geopolitical analytic, we bring to light the often hidden and embodied costs suffered by the left behind at the individual scale (often relegated to the private realm), thus leveling a critique of the taken-for-granted notions of migration and development at the transnational scale. Additionally, we destabilize the assumption upon which many migration and development initiatives are predicated: that migration does not necessarily result in remittances sufficient to raise migrants and their families from poverty.

Through this approach, the impacts of often abstract and intertwined processes are considered as constituted in the everyday lives, practices, desires, hopes, fears, imaginaries, and subjectivities of migrants and their families. Lorraine Dowler and Joanne Sharp contend: “...it is necessary to think more clearly of the grounding of geopolitical discourse in practice (and in place) to link international representation to the geographies of everyday life; to understand the ways in which the nation and the international are reproduced in the mundane practices we take for granted” (2001, 171). A lens of “the everyday” enables a “fleshing out” and grounding of broader political processes associated with migration, such as neoliberalism, transnationalism, and globalization to better grasp the experience of being a migrant or person left behind (Dyck 2005; Lynn-Ee Ho and Hatfield 2011). Feminist geopolitics opens the analytical potential to connect the global and the intimate in ways that elucidate how global political forces create suffering that is embodied in individual experience (Farmer 1996; Kleinman and others 1997; Mountz and Hyndman 2006; Pratt and Rosner 2012).

Feminist geographers have affirmed the power of migrant narratives that reveal the contradictions, inequities, and unintended consequences of neoliberal policies and modernity in the lives of migrants (Lawson 2000; Silvey 2004). Grounded stories, situated in the everyday “taken for granted,” can uncover deeper understandings of less tangible dimensions of transnational migration such as subjectivity, identity, emotion, power relations, exclusion, and belonging (Halfacree and Boyle 1993; Findlay and Li 1997; Torres and Wicks-Asbun 2014). This study emphasizes narratives constructed through in-depth qualitative interviews, with a total of sixty-six individuals carried out in seventeen different communities of the Totonac region of north-central Veracruz during 2007 and 2009. We decided to carry out interviews in multiple communities in order to obtain a regional understanding of migration. While they shared many similarities, there were some distinctions in terms of size, ethnic composition, community collective ethos, social dynamics, economic base, and migration patterns (domestic versus international, gender composition, and the like). The authors conducted a total of sixty-three semistructured interviews, undertaken

with a wide range of informants including community leaders, migrants and family members left behind (especially spouses/partners, grandparents, and youths), ranged between one and three hours, and focused particularly on the distinct ways in which different embodied individuals experienced migration in their everyday lives.

To select interview participants, we employed a purposeful sampling method common in qualitative studies in which the investigators target information rich informants based on the research questions (Patton 2002). In our study, we initially approached formal and informal community leaders who had an intimate understanding of migration and the impacts on families in their respective communities. These included municipal agents, *ejidatario*³ and religious leaders and school administrators, among others. We then used the widely accepted “snow ball sampling” approach in which participants recommend other potential subjects. This proved particularly useful in securing interviews with families left behind and female-headed households associated with migration. We interviewed participants until we reached saturation levels where new interviews offered little new information.

The sample narratives of the left behind presented in this article are framed by selected socioeconomic data from a MMP ethnosurvey⁴ of 150 households sampled randomly in one of the principal study communities in 2007 (Tierra Azul⁵) (see Tables 1 and 2). Tierra Azul was chosen for the survey due to its importance as a regional center for migration, as well as for logistical practicalities such as author contacts in the community. While sharing many similarities with the other study communities where qualitative interviews were conducted, Tierra Azul is larger and is more mestizo than some of the indigenous communities. With the exception of one, women were over-represented among the left behind in all of the communities. Most female-headed households were attributable to migration in some fashion. The brief analysis of survey data contrasting female- and male-headed households in this article provides insights into the gendered impacts and costs of migration on the left behind. Among other limitations (Frank and Wildsmith 2005; Coon 2007), the MMP protocol instructs surveyors to designate all households as male-headed, unless the man is incapable of responding (for example if he has Alzheimer’s) or if in his absence his wife/partner does not have sufficient information on his life to respond to certain questions (Durand and others 2005). While complexities of defining household heads are well documented (Buvinić and Rao Gupta 1997), we feel the MMP approach is too narrow to enable gendered analysis of migration impacts based on the survey alone. In our study region, as in many parts of the world, when men migrate, women left behind serve as *de facto* household heads with multiple responsibilities beyond their traditional reproductive and caretaker roles. The survey was applied using the MMP standard logic in defining household heads; however, in conducting the data analysis this study took a broader approach to defining female-headed households to include those

where the husband/partner was not present due to migration, as well as when he was so ill or disabled that he was rendered unable to work and the female was the primary income provider. Female-headed households in this sample are often women whose partners are or were migrants; all female-headed households, regardless of family migration history, face similar circumstances. Thus, while results are not limited to only households of women left behind, an analysis of female-headed versus male-headed households provides an indicator of issues faced by female-headed households in general—a group often consisting of many women left behind. The results of this gender-based survey analysis were consistent with the stories that emerged through qualitative interviews. Together they reveal the distinctive, localized, and embodied ways migrants and family left behind, particularly women and children, experience neoliberal restructuring and migration, and thus challenge narrow notions of migration and development.

GENDERED COSTS OF MIGRATION TO THE LEFT BEHIND IN RURAL VERACRUZ

After providing relevant background information on the community, we turn to a presentation of results related to the gendered impacts of migration on the left behind. In particular, we focus on themes of remittances, selected household socioeconomic indicators, and embodied costs. The data and later the narratives, provide examples of more grounded, embodied accounts of unequal costs and benefits of migration, and dispute disembodied macroscale notions of migration and development.

Veracruz provides an ideal context to examine the costs of migration-related neoliberal restructuring given its status as a new sending region that has had growth in migration since the 1990's (Anguiano-Téllez 2005). This emigration is related to the decline of smallholder agriculture associated with neoliberal reforms.⁶ The Veracruz agrarian economy has, over the years, experienced the rise and fall of several diverse crops, including vanilla, tobacco, corn, sugar, coffee, citrus, and other fruits (Torres and Carte 2013). The Totonacapan study region (see map Figure 1), with rain-fed semisubsistence, and mixed-commercial smallholder farming as its predominant economic base, has languished under this agrarian decline (Popke and Torres 2013).

The ethnosurvey community, Tierra Azul, is a mestizo town of over 5,000 residents in the Papantla municipality. It serves as a regional center for surrounding mestizo and indigenous villages. Like in the other study communities, migration to the U.S. is high and remittances go primarily to household consumption and for building homes. While several large U.S.-style homes have been constructed, many are empty and surrounded by poor infrastructure, including unpaved roads. The community has been plagued by internal conflict and social disorganization based on deep fissures along land tenure status (*ejidatarios* versus landless residents), class, ethnic, and religious lines. It is relatively common to find single mothers whose partners have migrated, and in

some cases established other families in the U.S., resulting in reduction or loss of remittances. There are a number of elderly who care for grandchildren in the absence of parents who have emigrated. Locals express concerns over increased alcoholism, drug abuse, gangs, crime, and juvenile delinquency they associate with the absence of parents or return migrants who bring back bad habits.

Data suggest that female-headed households are economically more vulnerable given their limited job opportunities, high dependence on remittances and the informal economy, and lower scores on most development and poverty indicators. Female-headed households, regardless of migrant spouses, earn a combined salary income of less than half that of male-headed households (Table 1). With respect to other measures of material wealth, including vehicles, number of rooms, construction type of homes, animals, and access to land resources, among others, female-headed households fared worse. Those who do not receive sufficient remittances must, however, take low-paid jobs and in some cases must leave young children alone or under the care of less trustworthy relatives or neighbors.

Often children and youth enter the labor market prematurely and informally, which partially explains the disparities in education levels between young adults in male- and female-headed households (Table 1). According to our interviews in the community, as well as observations during fieldwork, a large number of teenagers drop out of school to migrate or leave immediately upon graduation. In part, this reflects a strong culture of migration; in the case of poorer female-headed households, it is also due to the inability to fund studies and the need for youths to work to contribute to the household bottom line.

Migration to the U.S. from this community is highly gendered, with men eighteen times more likely to migrate than women. It is clearly implicated in the creation of female-headed households, 80 percent of which have had at least one member with a history of migration, mostly partners/spouses. Female-headed households are more dependent upon remittances, and perceive them to be a substantial part of their income relative to their other earnings, despite not receiving more than their male counterparts (Table 1). Several interviewees recounted remittances dwindling or ceasing over time given limited employment and new family obligations in the U.S. Furthermore, restricted mobility due to border militarization and drug-related violence, and undocumented status—90 percent of migrants in this survey—has weakened family bonds, thus disrupting family governance that reinforces regular remitting behavior (Buvinić and Rao Gupta 1997). In the reduction or absence of remittances, women must not only care for children and elderly on their own, but they are also forced to seek outside income.

In the case of *Tierra Azul*, remittances are relatively low across the board, and overwhelmingly used for food (two-thirds of households) and other household expenses (approximately half). Less than a fifth of households used

TABLE 1—SELECT MMP SURVEY RESULTS: COMPARISON BETWEEN FEMALE AND MALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN TIERRA AZUL

SURVEY FACTORS	HOUSEHOLD CATEGORY		STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE
	FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS (<i>N</i> = 26)	MALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS (<i>N</i> = 124)	
MIGRATION FACTORS			
Households with migration experience	80.8% (21)	50.0% (62)	χ^2 ($p < 0.01$)
Households with members currently in U.S.	65.4% (17)	33.1% (41)	χ^2 ($p < 0.01$)
Households receiving remittances from U.S.	65.4% (17)	23.4% (29)	χ^2 ($p < 0.01$)
Households receiving “substantial” remittances from U.S. ^a	70.6% (12) ($n = 17$)	27.6% (8) ($n = 29$)	χ^2 ($p < 0.05$)
Average monthly remittance received ^{a, b}	Mx\$ 355.00 ($n = 10$; s.d. 298.56)	Mx\$ 445.00 ($n = 22$; s.d. 436.14)	t -test not sig.
ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL FACTORS			
Head of household employed ^c	29.2% (7)	98.4% (122)	χ^2 ($p < 0.001$)
Spouse employed ^c	75.0% (9)	9.3% (11)	χ^2 ($p < 0.001$)
Combined salary income head and spouse ^b	Mx\$ 16,611 (s.d. 14,043)	Mx\$ 38,522 (s.d. 35,187)	t -test ($p < 0.01$)
Household owns or has access to agricultural land	26.9% (7)	35.5% (44)	χ^2 not sig.
Average landholding size (ha)	4.0 ($n = 7$; s.d. 2.6)	6.3 ($n = 44$; s.d. 5.8)	t -test not sig.
EDUCATION FACTOR			
18–30 year-olds years of education	5.19 ($n = 31$; s.d. 1.99)	9.0 ($n = 86$; s.d. 3.51)	t -test ($p < 0.05$)

^aRemittance data were collected from a subset of households reporting receipt of remittances: 10 of 17 female-headed households and 22 of 29 male-headed households.

^bMexican pesos have averaged an exchange rate of approximately 10 to the U.S.\$ between 2000 and 2010.

^cReaders are reminded that heads of female-headed households are women and spouses in female-headed households are men, and vice versa

Source: Household survey carried out in collaboration with MMP Project

funds for home construction, repair, or purchase. With the exception of one household, no others reported using remittances for potentially “productive” investments, such as purchasing land, starting a business, education, or savings. Interestingly, not a single household reported using remittances for healthcare. MMP data and the narratives suggest remittances are often absent, insufficient, and used primarily as a stopgap for bottom-line survival in this community.

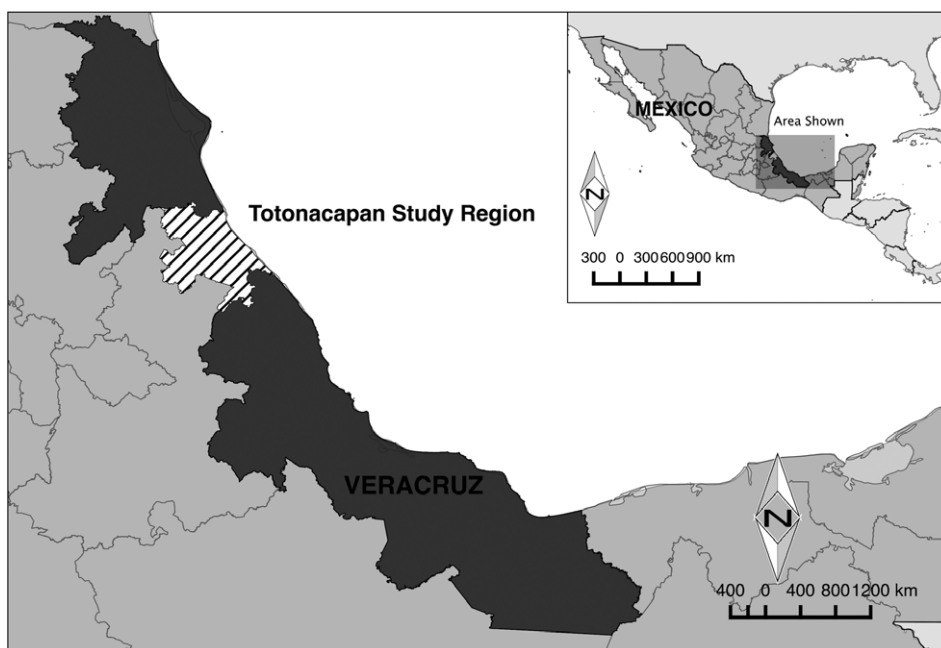


FIG. 1—Study region in north-central Veracruz, Mexico.

Even if remittances were abundant, there are few opportunities for investments, and agriculture generally is no longer profitable in the region. Furthermore, remittances heavily oriented at household consumption for bottom-line subsistence have a limited multiplier effect to stimulate macroeconomic growth (Delgado Wise and others 2013). Nevertheless, this is not to minimize the importance of remittances oriented at consumption, especially for those poorest households, and the role that even modest receipts may play in maintaining human capital (Housen and others 2012).

According to interviewees, there are no matching programs, nor remittance-driven community development projects in Tierra Azul given insufficient funds, a deep distrust of authorities, local conflicts, a lack of collective ethos, and a preference to give directly to private households (Torres and Carte 2013). Community members are quick to point out the large number of vacant and at times ostentatious U.S.-style homes built by migrants, in stark contrast to the community's streets, most of which remain unpaved and in poor condition. Yet, while some fault migrants for being selfish and not "giving back" to the community, many others in Tierra Azul do not believe migrants have responsibility to the collective given the individual sacrifice, hardship, and risk they undertake. Indeed, there is a strong construction of neoliberal economic subjectivity in much of the region rooted in notions of individual responsibility, self-reliance, and free market enterprise, which has been heavily promoted by the Mexican state over the last couple of decades in the rural sector (Popke and

Torres 2013). This is accompanied by strong tropes of the “good,” successful migrant whose hard work and self-discipline are evidenced by home constructions and familial support, in contrast to those “bad” migrants who go in vain “to do nothing over there [in the U.S.],” and “drink away” or frivolously squander their earnings. However, in contrast to Faist’s (2008) “transnational development agents,” Rodriguez and Schwenken’s (2013) “ideal migrant” subjects or Delgado Wise and others’s (2013) “good” migrant, Tierra Azul’s localized subjectivization of “good” migrants is more tied to notions of individual responsibility, work ethic, and self-discipline as opposed to a moral responsibility to collective advancement, modernization, or development at the community, regional, or national scales as noted in other contexts (Raghuram 2009; Kabbanji 2013; Rodriguez and Schenken 2013).

In addition providing evidence to counter dominant development discourse on remittances, analysis of the survey data also suggests that migration has important consequences on the body and mind. While not originally the primary focus of this study, health issues were common and among participants’ principal concerns. As with education, the literature on migration and health is divided, with studies suggesting improved health outcomes for migrants and the left behind while others indicate negative impacts (Walter and others 2004; Yeoh and Lam 2007; de la Garza 2010). In Tierra Azul, ethnosurvey results suggest that migration takes a health toll on migrant bodies with 3 percent reporting “poor” or “regular” health prior to their trip in contrast to 26 percent afterwards. Interviews revealed several cases where migrant workers sustained job-related injuries in the U.S. and were unable to avail themselves of either medical treatment or workers’ compensation, and so returned to be cared for by family members. In some cases, injuries were so severe they resulted in permanent disability. In other instances, ill migrants, lacking insurance, became heavily indebted or returned to Mexico seeking medical treatment, as in the case of Josefina’s story, featured below.

With respect to the left behind, female household heads reported significantly poorer health than male heads despite lower levels of drinking, smoking, and similar rates of obesity and diabetes (Table 2). They also indicated significantly higher levels of diseases such as hypertension and cardiovascular problems. Notably, over half of female heads reported that they suffered from emotional, nervous, or psychiatric problems in contrast to only 16 percent of male household heads. This cannot be attributed simply to gender differences in health reporting, as a comparison of males and females across the sample did not reveal significant differences. Additionally, when compared to female spouses/partners in male-headed households, female heads report significantly poorer health (Table 2) and higher incidence of all diseases, with the exception of diabetes. With respect to males, spouse/partners of female-household heads report significantly poorer health than male household heads (Table 2). While reported gender health disparities are complex and beyond the scope of this study, these data, combined with interviews, suggest one likely contributing

TABLE 2—SELECT MMP SURVEY HEALTH FACTOR RESULTS: COMPARISONS WITHIN GENDERS BY HOUSEHOLD ROLES (HEAD VS. SPOUSE) IN TIERRA AZUL

HEALTH FACTORS ^{a,b,c,d}	TOTAL FEMALES (N = 144)		TOTAL MALES (N = 136)	
	HEADS (N = 26)	SPOUSES (N = 118)	HEADS (N = 124)	SPOUSES (N = 12)
“Poor” or “regular” health	61.5% (16)	33.1% (39)	33.1% (41)	83.3% (10)
Hypertension	50.0% (13)	21.2% (25)	13.7% (17)	33.3% (4)
Cardiovascular disease	23.1% (6)	5.9% (7)	4.8% (6)	33.3% (4)
Emotional, nervous, or psychiatric problems	53.8% (14)	16.1% (19)	8.9% (11)	50.0% (6)

^aThe “poor” and “regular” answers on a 4-point scale of “poor, regular, good, excellent,” were combined and are shown here as representing the unhealthy end of the health spectrum. Other health factors were reported either “yes” or “no.”

^bChi Square (χ^2) tests comparing differences between female heads to female spouses were all statistically significant (with the exception of diabetes) at the following levels: “poor” or “regular” health ($p < 0.001$); hypertension ($p < 0.01$); cardiovascular disease ($p < 0.05$); and emotional, nervous, or psychiatric problems ($p < 0.001$).

^cChi Square (χ^2) tests comparing differences between male heads to male spouses were all statistically significant (with the exception of diabetes and hypertension) at the following levels: “poor” or “regular” health ($p < 0.001$); cardiovascular disease ($p < 0.01$); and emotional, nervous, or psychiatric problems ($p < 0.001$).

^dChi Square (χ^2) tests comparing differences between female heads to male heads were all statistically significant (with the exception of diabetes) at the following levels: “poor” or “regular” health ($p < 0.001$); hypertension ($p < 0.001$); cardiovascular disease ($p < 0.01$); and emotional, nervous, or psychiatric problems ($p < 0.001$).

Source: Household survey carried out in collaboration with MMP Project

factor is increased physical and emotional stress endured by migration-dependent households. As noted earlier, de facto female-heads struggle to balance multiple reproductive and productive burdens, especially when remittances are limited or non-existent. Additionally, female-headed households’ lower socioeconomic status also imposes barriers to accessing healthcare.

NARRATIVES OF THE LEFT BEHIND

Throughout this research we were struck by the pervasive and visceral narratives of suffering and hardship of families left behind, not only recounted by the individuals themselves but also by neighbors, family members, community leaders, teachers, local officials, and even school children. They painted a picture of a growing number of female-headed households living in economically precarious conditions, enduring tremendous stress and misery due to family separation and disintegration related to transnational migration. Survey data was consistent with and supported much of what we learned through the various qualitative interviews and life narratives. Given space constraints, excerpts from only two women’s stories based on in-depth interviews and the author’s observations are presented as examples of how global neoliberal and migration processes engender costs to migrants and the left behind, experienced in everyday, unequal, and embodied ways. While their stories are not intended to be generalized or representative, neither can they be discounted as exceptional or uncommon. They are

only two narratives, selected as examples of the sixty-three interviews, of the many stories recounted to us that implicitly challenge assumptions inherent in geopolitical migration and development discourse rooted in neoliberalism. These stories also demonstrate how the most vulnerable left behind not only experience often hidden and embodied costs, but in some instances, also subsidize migration, which benefits both Mexico and the U.S.

JOSEFINA: WORKING THROUGH POVERTY, INJURY, AND ABUSE

Under the sweltering August sun, in the middle of a dusty gravel road on the outskirts of town, twelve-year-old Felipe works filling potholes for tips from passing cars. With the thirty to forty pesos he earns in a day, he barely makes enough to buy beans, and never meat. He has worked since he was six years old. On his hand he wears a bandage where he lost the tip of his finger in an accident while working in a plant packing limes for export to the U.S. He was fired so the owner would not “have problems.” Although Felipe would like to continue studying, he has been unable to enroll in middle school because of the expense and the need to work. According to his mother Josefina (thirty years old), Felipe has been the “man of the house” since his father first left for the U.S. eight years ago. His three sisters—Victoria (sixteen), Maria Guadalupe (nine), and Carmen (six)—also help out by traveling to nearby towns to sell fritters Josefina makes at home: “As a mother I feel terrible sending them off to work.” Josefina’s husband left to work in McAllen, Texas, and New York, and she found herself raising their four children alone as the remittances slowed and eventually stopped. Josefina learned that her husband was living with another woman in the U.S.

Josefina is landless and lives with her children in a humble two-room, cement-block, half-constructed house lent to them by her brother who is in the U.S. She dreams of one day buying a small plot of land to “build my house so that my children have a place to run and play,” and for Victoria, who aspires to be an astronaut, to finish high school. These are lofty goals considering the daily poverty they face living on the 500 pesos Josefina earns working twelve to thirteen hours a day, six days a week in the lime packing plant.

Without remittances, and a family support network—both her parents are dead and all her siblings live in the U.S.—Josefina has often had to leave her children to care for themselves. Daughters Maria Guadalupe and Victoria were only three and nine years old when they were struck by a truck and gravely injured while walking back from the store to buy eggs. After months of hospitalization and rehabilitation, they were both left with debilitating permanent injuries, such as Guadalupe’s hearing loss. During this time, she was able to survive by applying to charity programs in different towns. She remembers, “I was going crazy trying to find money so I could buy the medications they needed.”

During her husband’s absence, Josefina rarely received financial support, but she came to enjoy her independence. “I’m happy with my children, and up

to now I've made it on my own with them. Here we manage whether we have enough to eat well or not." Recently, Josefina's husband returned to Mexico and moved back in with the family after being laid off following a serious construction injury. According to Josefina, since his return things have become even more difficult because of his drinking, abusive behavior, and minimal contribution to household income. Josefina was clearly disgusted with the unfairness of the situation: "They say he has kidney failure... so he's come here so *we* can take care of him when he's dying!"

Josefina discourages her children from migrating to the U.S. to find work, trying to convince them instead to remain in Mexico to study. Nevertheless, she has been tempted by family members in the U.S. who encourage her to join them to work. "I feel like going... but I'm afraid to leave my children. I need to be here so that they can continue to study, continue working hard." She explains that it is not the same for children to be raised by others and she has witnessed several cases of abuse by caretakers in the absence of parents. Despite financial struggles, she responds to the urgings of her family in the U.S., "... you don't have children. I do and it isn't so easy."

SOLEDAD: CARING FOR GRANDCHILDREN WHILE STRUGGLING WITH DEPRESSION

Soledad works in the corner *tienda* from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., seven days a week, while caring for her two granddaughters whose parents left for the U.S. ten years ago. She raised her two children as a single mother, after her truck driver husband abandoned the family. Now, both her adult children live and work in the U.S. After losing a finger grinding *chile* for the *mole* the family sold, she recalls how her then twenty-year-old son told her, "*Mami*, I don't want to see you have to work grinding *chile* like this for us. You've worked enough. I'm going to work [in the U.S.] and I don't want you doing this any longer." He and his wife left their two daughters, five-year-old Daniela and Lupita, only a few months old, with Soledad. On the journey they were abandoned by the *coyote* they paid to help them cross the border. Once they arrived in Dallas, they found it difficult to send money on a regular basis given their low-paid construction and restaurant jobs, and the high cost of living. Soledad's son explained, "*Mami*, it's a lot tougher here than I thought it would be." To make matters worse, her son had his appendix removed and her daughter-in-law had emergency gallbladder surgery, leaving them with staggering hospital bills they struggle to pay. Now there are no *envíos* (remittances). When Soledad's twenty-eight-year-old daughter Maribel, who cleans houses and works in a pizzeria in Dallas, left with her husband eight years ago, she told her mother, "*Mami*, the people who have land can farm, but those of us who don't need to go to the U.S. to make a living." Now they have a three-year-old daughter born in the U.S. whom Soledad has never met. She describes talking to her granddaughter, "I tell her, 'You need to come here to the *rancho*.' She says 'I'm not going to the *rancho*. I was born here... I'm from here!'"

Soledad describes in detail the emotional turmoil and depression the children, Daniela and Lupita (now fifteen and ten years old), faced growing up without their parents. She recounts, "The one who was really affected was the eldest. She got depressed. She didn't feel like going to school. She locked herself in the room where she used to stay with her mother and she'd cry and cry." Soledad traveled weekly to the nearby town to take Daniela to therapy appointments with the Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF) (National System for Integral Family Development) to help the child cope with her depression. Now that the girls are older, "They think their parents abandoned them because they don't love them. They call themselves '*abandonadas*.' I think they are very resentful. The little one is full of resentment against them." Soledad explained that the other children at school taunted the girls telling them, "You don't have a mother, you only have a grandmother. Your mother doesn't love you. She abandoned you."

The long hours, the stress, and the loneliness have taken a toll on Soledad, who suffers from anxiety and depression for which she has been prescribed medication that she cannot afford. "I've gotten sick a lot, from my nerves mostly... In my body, I feel something terrible... first I feel flush, like my blood rushes to my head. Then I start to have shortness of breath; I'm all tensed up. Oh no! I feel like crying. I'm anguished." She continues, "It's like, I don't know... like I want to isolate myself. No one talk to me, no one bother me... I want to be alone." Soledad feels at times as if she can no longer go on: "I pray to God—help me God—I can't go on any longer with my responsibility. God let me live until my children return so can I turn them [grandchildren] over, even if I die the next day."

CONCLUSIONS

In contrast to the optimistic predictions by migration and development proponents, remittances in Tierra Azul are neither generating jobs nor stimulating the local economy in ways that might curb future migration or eradicate poverty. As in the case of Josefina, absent income or remittances from a partner, the children are forced to sacrifice education to work. This not only limits future opportunities for the children and their families, but also reduces human capital in the community. There are many reasons why remittances are low and may dwindle over time. Among the most salient examples from a feminist geopolitical perspective, and hinted at in the narratives, are the precarious labor regimes immigrant workers face in the U.S., including low pay, insecurity, seasonality, discrimination, limited benefits, wage theft, and dangerous conditions, among others. This is particularly true of immigrants from new sending regions such as Veracruz, where nearly all are undocumented (in the U.S.) and social networks are less established, and thus possess limited power for making rights claims. Immigrant workers fuel the U.S. economy through cheap labor, but given their undocumented status, employers are able to avoid providing health

insurance, workers' compensation, social security, and other benefits. On the other hand, migrant workers provide a crucial stopgap for poor households back home, thus relieving pressure on the Mexican state to implement meaningful rural development strategies in marginalized regions.

These data reveal both the concrete and intangible bodily costs to migrants and their families that often are lost in migration and development accounting. As both women's stories demonstrate, immigrant workers in the U.S. perform among the most dangerous jobs, notably construction and agriculture, while rarely receiving health benefits or workers' compensation. When they are injured or become ill, they are no longer able to send remittances (Soledad's children) or, as in Josefina's story, their return to Mexico results in additional care burdens. Migrants are, in effect, reduced to disposable bodies: a byproduct of a political and economic system that extracts value for profit without granting rights as "legal" workers. These bodies are discarded once damaged or used up, with families left to pick up the pieces and shoulder the unpaid care duties.

As evidenced in both narratives, typically women or the elderly endure heavy workloads as they attempt to balance caring for children alone, while working outside the home. Children suffer when overextended caregivers are not able to provide supervision, emotional support, and material needs. Both the MMP and these narratives highlight the intense stress—psychological and emotional costs—which go beyond simply being sad stories; they undermine the health, viability, and productivity of migrants, families, and communities. This can be particularly taxing for the elderly, often left to care for grandchildren, and who remain among the most absent in studies of the left behind (Biao 2007; Knodel and Saengtienchai 2007).

Before migration can be put forth as a means to drive development and poverty alleviation, several questions require in-depth examination: What is development, by whom and for whom? Who are the winners and losers? What are the costs, and to whom? In order to critically analyze the development potential of migration, beyond the economic accounting of remittances and income levels of migrant communities, it is crucial to obtain a grounded understanding of how migration and neoliberal restructuring currently affect the everyday lives of different individuals in diverse, place-specific contexts. We apply a feminist geopolitical lens to achieve this understanding of the intimate ways the perpetuation of international development discourses and policies impact the left behind. The migrant narratives and household survey data analyzed not only grasp the material geographies of migration such as remittances, but also less tangible and more intimate dimensions such as emotion, subjectivity, desire, hope, fear, and social and bodily suffering. This grounded approach situated in everyday experience exposes the disproportionate costs born by the left behind—in this case, women and children, the elderly, sick, and disabled.

In this region of Veracruz, migration has been relatively recent and accelerated in response to neoliberal rural restructuring. In several communities, such

as Tierra Azul, migration has resulted in significant increases in single mothers, and female-headed households who find themselves carrying the entire burden of reproductive and productive responsibilities. Under these circumstances, the fallout can include poverty, stress, depression, poor physical health, child labor, abuse, lack of child/youth supervision, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse (particularly among youths), early withdrawal from education, and perpetuation of migration. This place-specific, microscale examination of the hidden costs suggests migration can threaten future viability of migrant families and origin communities, as well as posing challenges to macroscale public-policy schemes oriented at migration for development.

Without geographically specific examinations of the often hidden costs or externalities associated with migration, it is possible that migration-for-development programs and policies could serve to exacerbate inequities, create a new underclass of the left behind, and further perpetuate migration. Understanding the connections and interrelationships between neoliberalism, immigration policy, and the plight of migrants and their families left behind, underscores immigration as a process deeply embedded in larger U.S. and Mexican political and economic interests. The U.S. economy and consumers benefit through cheap migrant labor, while the Mexican state uses remittances as a pressure release and safety net—all on the backs of migrants and families left behind. Only by acknowledging injustices and limitations can there be a shift to a position of responsibility that opens a space for progressive policy, decision making, and activism to reduce the real costs of migration, and unlock the potential for improved well-being among migrants and their families. Greater emphasis should be placed on a constructive critique of current neoliberal international relations and development policy, as well as to foster the creation of innovative alternatives for addressing poverty in Mexico.

NOTES

1 As the author (2015) has noted prior, the term “left behind” is problematic as it overgeneralizes weak agency among those who remain by implying that they have no choice or decision-making power. It also connotes a “leaving” or “abandoning” on the part of migrants, which can seem to pass moral judgment or ascribe blame. While acknowledging these shortcomings, we employ the term in this article, as it is commonly understood amongst scholars and policy makers working with this topic.

2 For further discussion of migration, mobility, and geopolitics, see Hyndman 2012.

3 This refers to a member of an *ejido*—a communal, agricultural land-owning structure in Mexico.

4 The Mexican Migration Project (MMP), based out of Princeton and headed by Douglas Massey and Jorge Durand, has employed a household ethnosurvey to collect migration information in Mexican sending communities since 1982. As is common practice, we funded MMP specialists to administer the ethnosurvey in our study community (Tierra Azul) according to their established protocols. This data has entered the public MMP database without identifiers for use by other researchers. For methodological details see the MMP web site: <http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu/databases/studydesign-en.aspx>

5 We use pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the community and study participants.

6 For more detailed discussion of Mexican neoliberal rural restructuring during this period, which included withdrawal of state support, NAFTA, and privatization, see Martin (2005) and Groenewald and Van Den Berg (2012).

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