

UC Berkeley

ISSI Fellows Working Papers

Title

Migrant Remittances and the Mexican State: An emergent transnational development model?

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/58k8g8zm>

Author

Lopez, Sarah Lynn

Publication Date

2009-07-20

ISSC WORKING PAPER SERIES 2008-2009.37

**Migrant Remittances and the Mexican State:
An emergent transnational development model?**

by **Sarah Lynn Lopez**

Department of Architecture
University of California, Berkeley
July 20, 2009



INSTITUTE FOR
THE STUDY OF
SOCIAL CHANGE

Sarah Lynn Lopez
Department of Architecture
University of California, Berkeley

sll@berkeley.edu

While economic migration from Mexico to the United States has a long history, the recent expansion of the remittance economy driven by migration is causing rapid transformation of both the built environment and society in rural Mexico. Many Hometown Associations (HTAs)—or clubs that represent a particular hometown in Mexico—collectively finance public buildings in small Mexican villages. Recognizing this major source of funding for development, the Mexican federal government created the Tres Por Uno (3x1) program in 2001. In this program, migrant remittances sent through clubs in the U.S. are multiplied by municipal, state, and federal Mexican funds for regional development. 3x1 and HTAs are strategically linked, as 3x1 both motivates migrant organization in the U.S. and incites the Mexican government to act on behalf of rural Mexico. On the surface, this relationship appears to be beneficial to both parties, as migrants receive support for building projects and the Mexican state can achieve development targets with minimal investment. However, I argue that this nascent model of development—what I term the *Remittance Development Model (RDM)*—challenges the role of the state in improving municipal spaces, and institutionalizes migrant ambivalence associated with *remitting as a way of life*. The RDM, investigated through ethnographic research, policy data, and site analysis, also produces complex, ambiguous results for migrants, their families and their home communities, who must balance new kinds of freedom and agency with familial fragmentation and changing social norms.

The Institute for the Study of Social Change (ISSC) is an Organized Research Unit of the University of California at Berkeley. The views expressed in working papers are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the ISSC or the Regents of the University of California.

Introduction

Today, the Mexican landscape is experiencing a building boom at multiple scales. For decades, Mexican migrants located in the U.S. have spent hard-earned dollars on building both private homes and public projects in their hometowns in Mexico. What was at one time an informal process of remitting directly to one's family and immediate community is now a process increasingly formalized by the Mexican state, corporations and migrants themselves with an impact on how remittances are used and the spaces they produce in rural localities.

In 2001, the Mexican government launched a pilot program known as "3x1 Para Migrantes" or 3x1.¹ In this program, migrant remittances sent through formal Hometown Associations (or HTAs) in the U.S. are multiplied by municipal, state, and federal Mexican funds for regional development. As the name implies, the program matches every dollar remitted for development projects with three dollars of government contributions. Since the inception of the program, there has been an ongoing exchange between, on the one hand, the actions of transnational migrants to improve their hometowns and, on the other, the Mexican state's development agenda.² Generally, informal remittance building and planning practices spearheaded by migrants have been formalized by the state. In turn, the formalization of the remittance economy by the state has redefined the context for remitting and created new incentives for migrants; since 2001 scores of new HTAs have formed in the U.S. The new HTAs are intimately involved in the development of their hometowns, defining their needs and shaping

¹ 3x1 formed out of a program located in Zacatecas known as 2x1. The Zacatecas program started in 1995.

² I use the term transnational with caution. Mexican migrants are involved in bi-national activities that are increasingly informed by transnational corporations and governmental institutions. See Fitzgerald and Waldinger 2004 for a discussion of the academic debates surrounding the use of this term in contemporary scholarly work.

their landscape, while the Mexican state is increasingly invested in the organizational structures and daily lives of its emigrants in the U.S.

This paper examines how the state-migrant relationship impacts remittance building by formalizing its production. The formalization of migrant organizations and their remitting practices by the state impacts what is built on the ground, which shapes daily life in rural Mexico and local subjectivities. I argue that the formalization of remittance building is linked with the Mexican state's social construction of a *migrant benevolence*: the sacrifices made by migrants in their united purpose to better the quality of life for people in their hometown. I argue that 3x1 institutionalizes the conflicts, ambivalence and ambiguity associated with remittance building. These conflicts are the result of migrants' expanding responsibilities as planners, activists, and community leaders coupled with their continual negotiation of "legality," the dispersal of migrant families spread across geography, and the relegation of migrants (some whom are undocumented) to an American underclass. Furthermore, disagreements over land ownership, cultural norms, and migrant involvement in community affairs between rural Mexicans who do not migrate and those who do create power struggles and divergent opinions about migrant benevolence. I examine relationships between individual and collective action, informal and formal processes, and grass roots activism and government programs. I view these relationships not as oppositional but as defining a continuum of strategies and effects in transnational development.

This paper builds on the notion of agency "from below"—a term used by Michael Peter Smith and Eduardo Guarnizo (1998) and Alejandro Portes (1999) to address non-elite migrants engaged in "grass-roots initiatives" who are seeking an alternative to "low-wage dead end jobs." For many migrants "from below," their limited social, cultural and economic capital does not

keep them from contributing to remittance building. For a select group of these migrants, their involvement with 3x1 has repositioned them as transnational activists and key players in community development, which increases their social and cultural capital but puts heavy demands on their time and earnings. These transnational activists can be most clearly defined as individuals who are on the Board of Directors of the Federations—or umbrella organizations that represent and unify various Mexican Hometown Associations—as well as Presidents and key participants in social clubs or HTAs across the country. They serve as brokers between migrants “from below” and state interests “from above.”³

Transnational actors from below, transnational activists, state officials and locals are embroiled in what I call the Remittance Development Model (RDM). The RDM is defined by a set of conditions linked to what I call *remitting as a way of life* for migrants from below, transnational activists and families in Mexico. Remitting as a way of life is defined by the social and spatial conditions that are a necessary part of migrants’ capacity to send money to their family and community from a distance. Although this emergent model extends beyond and predates 3x1, the state’s 3x1 program is attempting to harness migrant grassroots social action in their construction of a remittance-state model for transnational community development. Today, the RDM creates the potential for transnational activists to “better” their communities’ standard of living but at a cost: common conceptions and use of public space are destabilized, as well as the local structures and networks that produce and maintain them. As I will discuss, migrant civic participation and agency are problematized by the 3x1 policy which formalizes remitting as a way of life. The policy unifies migrants based on their common goals to better their

³ Michael Peter Smith (2008) refers to these individuals as “actors and institutions from the state and civil society from in between” (46).

hometowns but limits them through a series of regulatory measures that attempt to define how their money should be spent.

3x1 is a historic moment: for the first time migrants are partnering with the government and are being incorporated into the state's decision-making processes about local development. No other models of development in Mexico explicitly rely on migrant remittances. According to a Migration Policy Institute report conducted by Delgado-Wise and Guarnizo (2007), "Through such programs [like 3x1], the state co-opts migrants' efforts to support their communities. The migrants' contributions represent a sort of subsidy for public works, which is not required from better-off sectors of Mexican society" (5). The state is not only increasingly dependent on migrant remittances but also saddling migrants with a responsibility that is, and should be, the governments.

Several historic trends in Mexico and the U.S. have caused a shift in the balance of power from traditional authorities to emerging actors—creating a regional role for migrants 'based' in the U.S. Since the fall of the hacienda system in the 1920s, local power in rural Mexico has been sought, and shaped to varying degrees, by the church, government officials at the municipal level, and the *caciques*. *Caciques* are large-scale landowners who have controlled village life through the control of employment opportunities dating back to Spanish colonialism in the Americas. More recently, Mexico's shift from the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional's* (PRI) seventy year rule over Mexico to democratic elections, BIP and NAFTA, the rise of Mexico's drug cartels, and endemic migration to the U.S. have weakened the sovereignty of these three systems in rural Mexico.

In the U.S., fickle immigration policy has exacerbated the sense of displacement caused by an erosion of traditional authorities. Contestation amongst the municipal, state, and federal

levels of the U.S. government regarding immigration law produces an atmosphere of instability (Preston 2007). Mexican migrants are systematically positioned as outside of the political mainstream in the U.S. Racial segregation in American cities spatially sequesters migrant communities, which can lead to community-based activism. The migrant collective is evidence of migrants' efforts to capture their own political momentum and secure representation in Mexico and the U.S.

Recognizing the importance of migrant remittances, the Mexican government, through its U.S. consulates, is collaborating with immigrants on efforts designed to create powerful and effective migrant networks that can be utilized for future state agendas. These trends have primed the current moment: an opportunity to reinvent the state's and migrants' roles in the production of space and place in the countryside. Below I discuss how the 3x1 program interfaces with the spatial legacy of capital investment, migration and remitting in Mexico, arguing that 3x1 reveals and reproduces the conditions to which rural Mexicans are subject. To do so, I map the political geography of the 3x1/HTA alliance, investigate the discourses and representations surrounding the state construction of migrant benevolence, and analyze 3x1 projects in their regional context.

The Scope and Scale of Remittance Development

In 2006, 570 migrant social clubs were officially registered in the U.S., but it is estimated that between 600 and 2,000 HTAs exist.⁴ Since 2002, government spending on 3x1 has extended to 27 out of 32 Mexican states. By 2007, 3x1 had financed more than 6,000 projects with a federal budget of 20 million dollars. In 2008 that amount more than doubled to approximately 50

⁴ To visit the current directory of Mexican clubs go to: Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior at <http://www.ime.gob.mx/>.

million. All of these figures have led the president of the Inter-American Development Bank to declare 3x1 as a leading axis of economic and social development for rural communities in Mexico.

However, 3x1's impact is small when put in the larger context of remitting and migration. Remittances to Mexico were estimated at 28 *billion* dollars in 2007. Over one million households in Mexico benefit from remittances, and 92% of Mexican municipalities record emigration. The government's federal contribution toward migrant initiated development projects was thus equivalent to roughly 0.08% or less than a tenth of one percent of the total amount of migrant remittances sent in 2007.

The small proportion of federal contributions to 3x1 relative to overall remittances has caused observers to question the relevance of the program vis-a-vis the significant political discourse surrounding it. Dr. Salvador García Espinosa, a Mexican academic based in the state of Michoacan, argues that 3x1 is little more than a state strategy to win the migrant vote in the U.S.⁵ Indeed, many Mexican politicians have gained political leverage through the visibility of this program on both sides of the border. However, spending on a policy is only one way to measure its impact. This program is also about constructing a new *model* for building with remittances in which the state reacts to migrants' informal activities taking place on the ground and asserts itself in migrants' processes. Just as James Scott (1998) argues about European colonialism, the Mexican state is attempting to render migration and remittance flows legible so that the state can increase access and control over the migrant population. To do so, this model targets the building process itself, which is tied to local construction, trade, and the flooding of local markets with globalized products. New buildings erected through 3x1 create spaces and places that shape the lives of locals. Moreover, this model is being disseminated to other countries such as Haiti, El

⁵ A conversation with the author, Michoacan, Mexico, June 2008.

Salvador, and Guatemala. While the scale of the program is small, its impact on perception and ways of doing business in small towns is significant. Moreover, the miniscule percent of remittances captured by the 3x1 program speaks to the program's immense economic potential.

3x1 Federal is especially important in the state of Jalisco because in 2003, Jalisco created 3x1 Estatal (State) which is a state-based rather than federal-based program. The rationale behind setting up the state program is to fund migrant projects rejected at the federal level because the amount exceeds the federal program budget. The state program allows Jalisco statesmen to channel migrant remittances, which might otherwise be sent directly to migrant families, for public projects and infrastructure. In 2007, 3x1 Estatal spent more than the federal government on state projects; they completed 546 projects with 94,246,553 pesos or just under 100,000 dollars. Also, from 2003 to 2007 Jalisco captured the biggest percent of 3x1 federal money out of all the Mexican states participating in the program. The Secretaria de Desarrollo Humano (which runs the 3x1 state program) reports that since the inception of both 3x1's over 3,000 projects have been executed, benefiting over 4,153,633 inhabitants out of Jalisco's 7,000,000 (Gobierno de Jalisco 2007). They also note that the most important states in the U.S. that contribute to the program are California, Texas, and Illinois.

Transnational Scholarship

This project builds on several multi-sited ethnographies of migrants in the U.S. Aihwa Ong (1999) and Katharyne Mitchell (2004) address geo-political practices of Chinese entrepreneurs, linking institutions, the state, and capital flows, with the social innovations of transnational actors. However, they focus on Chinese entrepreneurs with extensive capital

resources, otherwise positioned as “from above” rather than “from below.”⁶ Robert Smith’s (2005) *Mexican New York: Transnational lives of new immigrants* is the first and most effective ethnographic work on multi-sited transnational migratory circuits from below in the context of Puebla, Mexico and New York City. Based on the fruits of twenty years of research, Smith addresses cyclical migration as it affects gender, generational and racial subjectivities. He also addresses transnational development in Mexico from the HTA’s perspective. More recently, Michael Peter Smith (2008, see also Smith and Guarnizo 1998) addresses the political consequences of 3x1 on citizenship and agency in Guanajuato, Zacatecas and California. Ong, Mitchell, Smith and Smith assert important directions for future research, however they do not approach the built landscape itself as a unit of analysis for understanding the impact of globalization, neoliberal ideologies and grass roots activism on social change.

Furthermore, studies that focus specifically on 3x1, HTAs, and remittances are overwhelmingly based on quantitative data.⁷ The Migration Policy Institute, PEW Hispanic Center, and Inter-American Development Bank address the logistics associated with HTAs, their remittances, and potential for community development. However, 3x1 and HTAs are not only about demographic change or the economy, they are also about a state-migrant model for remittance building that changes space and alters the Mexican landscape, creating a remittance landscape, sometimes in places that have witnessed slow material change until now.

⁶ See Ong 1999, 21.

⁷ Demographers and economists have studied migration using statistical information to understand the effects of migration on urban and rural environments. Many of these studies have occurred outside of academia by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which were both set up in Washington D.C. in 1945 to oversee global financing and international development. In 2001, the Migration Policy Institute and the PEW Hispanic Center were established in Washington D.C. to study migration worldwide, and to collect facts about Hispanic migration to the U.S. An assimilation model of migration (whereby migrants eventually adopt the culture of the country they move to) and the idea of migrants as “parasites” or “entrepreneurs” in their host country have been heavily used by these researchers, as well as by academics. This kind of analysis is rooted in the scholarship of the 50s, 60s and 70s. Some examples are Lewis 1955, Ranis and Fei 1961, and Harris and Todaro 1970.

Methods

My project relies on ethnographic inquiry, participant observation, place-specific site analysis, and analysis of buildings and the building industry to understand the impact that macro policies and economic flows have on the ground for the daily lives of migrants, their families, and villagers who do not migrate. I also use state literature and newspaper articles to address the state's framing of 3x1 and its public reception.

This shift from quantitative data toward qualitative analysis of the spaces of migration requires multi-sited spatial research methods. This is because spaces of migration, whether they be the actual places migrants inhabit (where they live and work) or the perceived spaces of their lives (spaces of resistance, dreaming, networking, or negotiating), are informed by a continuous movement between, and knowledge of, multiple sites. Although much can be understood about migration through an investigation of one locale, the spaces of migration and the experience of migrancy cannot.

I conducted ethnographic research in Jalisco, Mexico—my primary research site—for nine months, repeatedly visiting three Mexican *pueblos* or villages in the south of the state, and sporadically visiting a total of 23 out of 124 municipalities in the state (each municipality is associated with several smaller localities). I interviewed locals, migrants, and politicians associated with 3x1 building projects. I also lived in Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco and second largest city in Mexico, to interview state participants in the RDM, and peruse local archives. In California—my secondary research site—I attended Federation and HTA meetings

in Los Angeles and Oakland, and conducted both oral and tape recorded interviews with migrants involved in, and presidents of, HTAs.⁸

By positioning individual interviews and analysis of place against the economic and political structures of the Federation and 3x1 I am able to discern a widening gap between migrants' intentions and goals and what is realized on the ground, as well as a gap between institutional representations of what rural populations want and need versus local wants and needs. I am also able to spatialize 3x1 and HTAs through my construction of the RDM, which allows me to address the cultural and social implications of this model, in addition to the economic and political ones.

As argued by anthropologist George Marcus (1998), multi-sited ethnography based on migration and place making must also extend the notion of "site" to incorporate "issues" or "groups of people." Research, he argues, should be designed to follow the person, follow the thing, follow the metaphor, follow the plot, story or allegory, follow the life or biography, and follow the conflict.⁹ This study follows the persons involved in the construction of the RDM, the trajectories through which they travel, and the ideas that they carry. This allows me to trace out the connections between seemingly unlikely events, processes, or relationships. I establish a "field"—a social arena in which people maneuver and struggle over particular resources—within which the RDM takes shape.¹⁰

I also historicize the RDM by addressing the history of material culture and the built landscape. Just as Walter Benjamin used the Paris arcades to define a crystallization of Persian

⁸ To protect the identities of study participants, all names of migrants, HTA presidents, local officials, and small pueblos cited in this paper are pseudonyms. Governors and other public statesmen are called by their real names.

⁹ See especially chapters three and four.

¹⁰ See Bourdieu 1990 [1980].

modernity, I identify how current remittance buildings are a crystallization of a rural Mexican society in flux.

This investigation destabilizes many categories that migration scholars have relied on. While it has been argued that assimilation is defined by migrants' adoption of the English language and permanent settlement in American cities through property ownership, Mexican migrants' transnational practices reveal that spending extended periods of time in the U.S. does not equate with the severing of ties to one's home town. Moreover, in areas that are heavily impacted by historical migration, migration is not a discrete process that can be separated from more general social, cultural or political processes in the region. The Mexican landscape—place—has been literally shaped by a century of U.S.-Mexico migration and now the landscape shapes the lives of those who do and do not migrate, teaching them about a kind of movement before they ever leave their hometown. Migration is not solely motivated by economic duress, it is also motivated by cultural habits and social norms based on migration as a way of life.

The Nascent RDM Spearheaded by Informal Migrant Social Clubs

The basic contours of the remittance landscape for Jaliscienses in the U.S. formed a century ago. Emigration from Jalisco to California dates back to before the turn of the 19th century, and by the 1910s railroads connected this Mexican state with the U.S. By 1920, according to a study conducted by Manuel Gamio (1971) who analyzed money orders forwarded to families by immigrant wage earners across the U.S., there is evidence that individual Mexicans were remitting money across the border to increase the quality of life for their families. Paul Taylor's (1930) study of migrants from Arandas, Jalisco notes that during the same time period, Mexican men were heading north not only to work but to remit to their families who

remained behind in Mexico. Although very little research has been conducted on the history of migrant clubs, Mexican political economist Basilia Valenzuela (2004) notes that by the 1920s, the development of migrant “social clubs” originated as a response by Mexican migrants to exclusionary practices in U.S. cities. Originally, clubs were not based on migrants’ places of origin but rather on the places where they settled in the U.S. The clubs revolved around providing basic services for other Mexican migrants or pooling money to bury the dead.

Some scholars argue that Mexico’s structural readjustment in the 1970s and 80s, which put many farmers out of work, as well as U.S. amnesty for migrants in 1986, not only increased migration to the U.S., but also resulted in the growth and maturation of social clubs (Delgado-Wise and Guarnizo 2007). Around this time, social clubs became civic, fraternal, informal or formal associations of volunteers based on their pueblo of origin as opposed to their current residence (Valenzuela 2004). Club members then and now practice Mexican culture, or hometown culture in the U.S., in their quest to both maintain ties to home and create space to express themselves in a foreign land (Gonzales 2004). Clubs also use cooperation and social networks to convert their economic surplus into a collective fund for public development in Mexico through collective remitting (Valenzuela 2004). A club can be loosely defined along a broad spectrum of formality. It can be three friends who call themselves a club, or 50 members who organize and fraternize. Clubs (and more formalized clubs known as HTAs) differ from one another in the extent of their organization, participation, size, and effectiveness in completing projects.

The informal remitting of these early informal clubs was often marked by uncertainty. In 1980, the Los Angeles San Gaspar Club informally sent remittances for the construction of a *curato*, or small parish building, adjacent to the town’s church. The club members collected cash

and sent it to Mexico with a member of their hometown. In San Gaspar, the priest of the town was responsible for allocating remittances and soliciting assistance from a local committee during construction. However, no written records exist documenting these cash flows, and oral histories reveal competing narratives about how the money was spent. Similarly, HTA president Miguel Salinas from Los Cerritos recalled, “For the last 20 years we have given what we could to the church, but nobody there has any idea of how much we spent.”¹¹ While the church is generally regarded as a trustworthy institution, churches have not historically been accountable to migrants. They did not track or verify the use of the remittances they were given, and this uncertainty led to the formalization of sending remittances.¹²

In 1986—the same year as U.S. amnesty—Zacatecan migrants were the first to address various risks embedded in informal remittance building practices through the creation of a Federation. The Federation, an umbrella non-profit organization, unifies all of the state’s registered HTAs to represent one Zacatecan migrant voice, strengthen social and community networks, and structure informal remittance building. The Federation now influences Mexican politics and American legislation, and works directly with the Mexican government.¹³

What is now a nation-wide federal program (3x1) originated in Zacatecas. In the 1980s and 1990s, clubs representing the state of Zacatecas financed the refurbishment of plazas, churches and cemeteries with American dollars. By 1993, state officials started contributing to Zacatecanos’ efforts, and in 1995 an official program called the “2x1 Citizen Initiative Program” was created in Zacatecas that required the state and municipal levels to create partnerships with migrants. In 2002, the federal government expanded the 3x1 program to all Mexican states.

¹¹ Interviewed by author, Jalisco, Mexico, September 2007.

¹² In a local publication for Los Guajes, *Taguinchi*, a veteran migrant wrote: “Last month I sent five dollars [to Los Guajes], but I sent it in cash and now I don’t know if it arrived, I need to be relieved of my doubts.” Migrants want to know if their money is spent as intended.

¹³ See Federación de Zacatecas website: <http://federacionzacatecana.org/index.php/>.

The 3x1 program reflects changing attitudes about migrants. Previously, policies such as the Bracero program (1942-1964) and the Border Industrialization Program (1965) encouraged rural migration.¹⁴ These earlier policies coincided with the fragmented and sporadic development of rural Mexico and the popular construction of the emigrant as “traitor,” willing to abandon his or her land to work in and strengthen the United States (Durand, Massey, and Malone 2002). The increasing financial power of HTAs has caused a shift in the Mexican government towards working directly with those who President Vicente Fox described as “heroes” in 2001.¹⁵

3x1 is structured to promote a democratic and transparent process, which echoes Mexico’s larger goals as an emerging democratic nation. The three levels of government (federal, state and municipal) are required to pay equal amounts. A managing committee composed of 12 representatives makes final decisions regarding the disbursement of funds. The committee consists of three members representing the federal government, three for the state, three for the municipality, and three specifically for the migrants. Each municipal representative is from one of Mexico’s three political parties, the PAN, PRI, and PRD. They convene twice a year to revise project applications and allocate funding. Officially, an equal amount of funding is allocated to each of Jalisco’s 124 municipalities, however if the money is not used it will be redistributed. This is intended to instate a policy of fairness after a legacy of favoritism, corruption and clientalism (Preston and Dillon 2004).

¹⁴ Here I refer to the Bracero program, from 1946-1962, during which Mexican officials sent over an estimated 5,000,000 agricultural workers to American fields, as well as the Border Industrialization Program better known as the Maquiladora Program of 1965.

¹⁵ For argument about migration as produced by the Mexican and American state see Beacon 2008.

The State Transnationalizes Strategies for Community Development

The state works with migrant Federations, such as the Federación de Jaliscienses, to organize meetings throughout the U.S. that serve as a platform for broadcasting their development agenda. In these meetings migrants are informed of the potential of 3x1 to transform rural Mexico through the implementation of social programs and basic infrastructure, and their potential role in this transformation.

At a 2008 Federación de Jalisciense meeting in Oakland, California, attended by migrants who were not part of a club, club members and state officials demonstrated state strategies. After Lic. Gilberto Juárez González, the director of the Office for the Attention of Migrants in the Exterior, explained 3x1, the floor was opened for questions. A man in his late 50s asked, “I want to put a truck farm in Mexico, like there are here. It is what I have worked with for over 20 years. Will you help me with that? I have the experience but not the land, will the government help me buy the land?” The director remarked, “We are interested in social projects, if the project will help 10 families, we are interested, but if it will only help yours then we are not. The idea is to spread the resources we have to as many people as possible.”¹⁶ Through this face-to-face encounter, the migrant learns that the “social projects” sanctioned by the state must help communities and not individuals. More importantly, they learn that the state is now expecting them to help not just their families, but also their communities. In Jalisco, in places lived in by people of a higher socio-economic status, social and physical infrastructure is the state’s responsibility.

Analysis of government documents outlining 3x1 regulations, and observation of several Federation meetings, reveal tactics used by the government to reframe the migrant’s role as

¹⁶ Observed by author at a Federation meeting, California, February 2009.

critical to the future development of rural Mexican society. Specifically, the migrant's role is reframed as *independent benefactor*, *family (wo)man*, and *Mexican*.

The *migrant as independent benefactor* of the community is somebody capable of enacting public good and seizing a golden opportunity:

The Program has an important socio-political dimension to represent a continuing scheme that permits [migrant] civil society to change the conditions of their communities . . . without depending completely on the government . . . Mexico has big business partners in the exterior: its migrants, who allow collective remittances to better the country, having this grand opportunity with much potential.¹⁷

The state announces that through 3x1 “civil society” is “permitted” to “change the conditions of their communities.” Migrants are repositioned as business partners, taking advantage of a “grand opportunity” to transform their pueblos and effectively distribute wealth to those in need. The state recognizes that it is due to the sacrifices that migrants make that migrants are able to partner with the state. As one government official explains, “It is their personal money, we are aware that they don't have to do this and that their lives are hard in the U.S.”¹⁸ It is precisely because of the voluntary nature of migrant participation in the 3x1 program that statesmen cast their participation as taking advantage of an opportunity. The state frames 3x1 as an opportunity to convince migrants to hand their “personal” money over to the state, even though research has shown that private remittances increase dependencies between rural communities and their migrating members (Cohen and Rodriguez 2004). Currently, the impacts of this emergent migrant-state public remittance partnership on rural localities are unknown.

The migrant's role is also recast as a *family (wo)man*, one who creates connections between migrant dollars and their children's future. At the same federation meeting in Oakland, a man asked about how to manage a rift between his club's members and the mayor of his

¹⁷ Sedesol, 3x1 Programa Para Migrantes, Cuarto Informe Trimestral 2008, published on the Sedesol website, p. 4. <http://www.sedesol.gob.mx/index/index.php>. Translation by author.

¹⁸ Interview with author, Jalisco, Mexico, July 2008.

hometown. Lic. Gilberto Juárez González responded, “The relationship between the municipality and club is like a marriage. What happens, happens, but in the end it’s for your children.”¹⁹ The question of what should be the relationship between the municipality and the club stems from very real concerns migrants have when they go home and try to implement 3x1 projects. The statesman uses humor to say that the burden of dealing with recalcitrant or corrupt mayors is on the migrant. It is a necessary sacrifice that the migrant makes for his or her children; there is no state or federal recourse available. In most cases, the sacrifice is for the people of the migrants’ hometown, who might or might not be family, but are here positioned as “children.” However, this comment is also playing off of migrants’ dreams of one day returning with their children to a thriving pueblo, their dream of creating a hometown that their children will cherish and want to visit, and their sense of familial responsibility towards those they left behind.

The third reframing is *migrant as Mexican*—an individual who maintains loyalty to his or her motherland. In a 2007 magazine designed to commemorate an annual U.S. event held by the government and the Federación de Jaliscienses called *Semana Jalisco*, the Governor of Jalisco, Señor Manuel Acuña, wrote:

[Semana Jalisco] allows us to unite as Jaliscienses to promote the strength of our culture and support united families. We invite you to preserve, amongst the new generations of Jalisciense in California, love of our land, Jalisco and our motherland Mexico... This event has given us the opportunity to realize that we are not alone, that together we can achieve actions that allow us to develop as a community and as Mexicans in land far from our own. It is because of that, that I wish to reiterate my promise as an attentive and transparent Governor, conscious of the importance of constructing one sole community, one sole Jalisco; it is not important which side of the border we find ourselves on.²⁰

Here, individual family and community devotion is expanded into devotion for state and country.

Migrants who have strong allegiance to their pueblo or their state, not the Mexican nation, are

¹⁹ Observed by author at a Federation meeting, California, February 2009.

²⁰ Governor Manuela Acuña, quoted in Federación de Clubes Jaliscienses 2004, p. 2.

told: “Jalisco is Mexico.”²¹ This belief is practiced at the beginning of each Federation meeting when participants sing Mexico’s national anthem. Furthermore, the Governor’s construction of one sole community of Jaliscienses attempts to discursively collapse the geographic distance between Jalisco and the U.S. These three strategies are used to convince migrants to give their money to the Mexican government for social projects and basic infrastructure.²²

However, 3x1 must interface with the spatial legacy of capital investment, migration and remitting in Mexico. Social and political relationships that are spatially situated in the Mexican landscape impact the state’s effectiveness and ability to achieve its goals.

Spatial Legacy of State Investment, Migration, and Remitting in Jalisco

Mexico’s spatial legacy is the history of the material manifestation of the social and political structures that organize Mexican society. The spaces produced by Mexico’s distribution of resources and capital help solidify systems of patronage, racial inequality, patriarchy, and an aristocratic class structure. Remittance development “from below” comes into contact with, and is limited by, the spatial legacy of these systems. These systems are orchestrated by actors “from above”—persons in positions of power—and are spatially constituted. Due to the inertia of space, existing social and political systems that are etched into the landscape cannot be changed over night. Through 3x1, and the ancillary institutions established by the government to execute it, the state is encouraging migrants to transform their environments. However, since Mexico’s spatial legacy is based on clientelism and an uneven distribution of resources, the question becomes, does 3x1 challenge these logics and create a new democratic system for distributing wealth or does it reproduce these logics, albeit in a new guise? What are the implications of 3x1

²¹ Raul Moreno, quoted in Federación de Clubes Jaliscienses 2007.

²² Conflicts between the Catholic Church and the secular Mexican state culminated in the *Cristero War* (1930s) during which many Jaliscienses lost family members and land. For many rural families, initial migration to the U.S. dates to this time period.

for the future of the Mexican landscape and how people are going to live in it? Is the state's involvement in the formalization of remittance building liberating the potential of the poor to transform their environments? A spatial analysis of 3x1 is necessary to answer these questions. Relationships of patronage between Mexican towns and the municipality's *cabecera*, or capital, the spatialization of racial inequality, the dominance of men's role in shaping the built environment, and the impacts of migration patterns on historically constructed notions of poverty complicate 3x1's goal to democratically address the poor and marginalized populations of Mexico.²³

The distribution of remittance funds under 3x1 follows a spatial logic established by the size of, relative proximity to, and cultural relationships between towns. With the exception of Jalisco's largest city and capital, Guadalajara, Jalisco is comprised of a series of *cabeceras* or head municipalities that serve as control nodes in regional networks of towns or pueblos. These pueblos are then connected to even smaller *rancherías* which are, historically, communities made up of extended families. Generally, the geographically remote towns and *rancherías* are the most neglected by the state. The *cabecera* is the only location that gets money directly from the state and federal government. It then allocates those funds to its dependent localities. Migrants that do not come from a *cabecera* often complain that the mayor (or *Presidente Municipal*) has not taken care of their extended dependents, leaving *rancherías* and pueblos to fend for themselves. Proximity to Guadalajara also greatly aids a community's capacity to receive promised funding. Remittances challenge this because migrants directly send money to families no matter where they are located. However, once migrants in the U.S. join the Federation to work on a 3x1 project, their money is funneled through the *cabeceras*, creating

²³ I explore the dominant role men play in impacting the built environment through the RDM more fully in another article (forthcoming).

opportunity for disputes between migrants, mayors and state officials and increasing state control over transnational development projects at a regional level.

Regional development has been impacted by Mexico's political system, which creates instability within the *cabaceras*. Every six years Mexicans elect a new Governor of Jalisco and President of Mexico, and these newly elected leaders make changes to social programs. Furthermore, corruption has plagued the government and caused many social activists to expose politicians who pocket state money, or give it to family businesses and their towns. Mayors have been blamed by people in their extended *ranchos* for using federal money that was intended for the surrounding localities. Mexico's weak institutions have not effectively developed parallel agendas that challenge the new administration's goals, budgets, or corrupt practices. Although 3x1 is an exception to this legacy, continuing on beyond one administration, the mayors involved in 3x1 are still being blamed for using 3x1 money on the *cabacera* as opposed to its intended rancho.²⁴

Mexico's longstanding practice of discontinuous development programs and corruption has not only impacted municipal mayors' practices but also the material development of places, crippling remote localities. Disenfranchised *rancherías* must deal with a fragmented and very localized history of the development of roads, water, electricity, and postal services. Disjointed development efforts and the effects of corruption are illustrated by the construction history of most roads in rural Jalisco. In Magdalena, three different government programs over a four-year period were used to pave six kilometers of rural road. In Lagunillas, the state built approximately half of the main road connecting the town with a nearby highway in 1997. It took local *ejidatarios* five years to save money and three years to build the remaining half. In 2004

²⁴ Migrants involved in HTA activities argue that if a governor tried to cut the program, protest from U.S. migrants would threaten their political standing. Interview with author, Jalisco, Mexico, March 2008.

residents of Lagunillas could finally boast that a paved road connected their rancho with the highway. These localities are located outside of the *cabecera*, meaning they fight to secure government funds for infrastructure.²⁵ In these remote places, locals have responded to state neglect with grass-roots action; rural citizens of all ages, usually organized by local men, have built roads, wells, churches, community centers, and put in electrical wiring.

3x1's mission is to address Mexico's poor and marginalized rural population—or those most geographically remote from centers of commerce and transit—based on “migrant initiative.” However, migration patterns and remittance patterns make it difficult for the state to map rural demographics and poverty. Historically, bad land, drought, and remoteness from cities or towns pushed people to emigrate. This helps to explain why Los Altos, a dry region in the north of Jalisco, has the longest and most profound migration history in the state. Also, the railroad and major roads constructed in the first half of the twentieth century allowed the people in pueblos along such routes easier access to the north. However, the history of remittances and migrant organization resulting from continuous historical migration is slowly changing the characteristics of these once impoverished places.

Unequal migration patterns and migration history create unequal distribution of remittances. Some high migration zones are much better off than their neighbors.²⁶ For example, San Miguel de Hidalgo located in a “high-migration” zone in Jalisco, boasts several large houses built with remittances and is outfitted with a new rodeo that seats 4,000 people even though the town's population is only 400. Even within high migration zones, some neighbors are much better off than each other. In San Miguel, many of those who still farm, and who the state

²⁵ This can be contrasted with select aspects of U.S. infrastructural history. In 1896, the U.S. Postal system deemed it their national duty to service even the most remote homes with “rural free delivery.” In 1916, the U.S. Federal government passed the Federal Highway Act, which nationalized road building and supported local road development. Although there are inequities in U.S. infrastructure, especially within Native populations, the inequities in Mexico are far more pervasive.

²⁶ The Mexican Census and Bank of Mexico have not effectively documented remittances, thus increases in local inequality and in the complexity of personal and familial income are not well understood.

considers poor, are also subsidized by remittances, while neighboring farmers are living hand to mouth.

Places in Jalisco with a long history of migration tend to have strong networks in the U.S. Transnational activists rely on these networks to foment interest in transnational community development and raise money to remit collectively. Thus, strong HTAs tend to come from places with longer migration histories.

Transnational activists are also supported by the Federation, which creates insider networks that give transnational activists more access to government representatives and state funds. The hometowns of several individuals who sit on the *Federación de Jaliscienses'* Board of Directors have received more 3x1 state and federal money than those towns represented by presidents of clubs who are not on the Board of Directors, or towns that are not represented by the *Federación de Jaliscienses*.²⁷ Despite the 3x1 mandate that each municipality shall receive equal funds, the distribution of projects is highly uneven and clientelistic approaches to distributing money prevail. Unequal migration patterns create unequal distribution of 3x1 funds.

The state's goal to reach "marginalized" people with 3x1 refers, in part, to Mexico's indigenous population. The migration history of many indigenous peoples is distinct from, and shorter than, *mestizos*. In Jalisco, indigenous communities are pushed deep into the countryside on some of the state's driest and poorest lands. Throughout the nation, the larger indigenous populations of Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca, to name a few, are predominantly settled in arid land. Poor *mestizo* farmers also tend to be pushed into remote localities, beyond the reach of private interests, and many live without electricity, running water, sanitation, or basic infrastructure. However, the truly impoverished are often not able to make the journey to the

²⁷ This conclusion is based on SEDESOL state documents cataloguing 3x1 projects' budgets, location in Mexico and club affiliation in the U.S.

U.S. or have only been able to do so more recently which results in weaker migrant networks. For example, Oaxaca's continuous-migration history dates back roughly twenty years while Jalisco's dates to the mid-20th century.²⁸ Places that have been historically in need—but perhaps not truly impoverished—tend to have longer histories of remitting which give them more opportunities for involvement with 3x1.²⁹ In Jalisco, the indigenous population is only 0.32% of Mexico's total indigenous population. Even so, nation-wide Jalisco has received the most 3x1 Federal support. 3x1 attempts to make up for some of the inequality of migration history but relies on migrants' initiatives to do so. Thus, 3x1 has exacerbated inequality in rural localities.

On the receiving end, 3x1's impact is linked to the size of a town's population. It has also been argued that the smaller the community, the greater the impact. In towns with populations of less than 1,000, which account for 30% of communities receiving 3x1 funding, donations represent around seven dollars per person, which is seven times the average government investment in public works.³⁰ In Jalisco, most 3x1 projects are built in towns of less than 1,000 people. However, it is the small towns that have strong existing grass roots networks that tend to distrust the state and have historically contentious relationships with mayors because they fear that mayors are abusing their position as the gatekeepers of federal and migrant money allocated for rural development.

The nested geographic relationships of towns, migration, and remitting complicate the state's purported mission to funnel migrant remittances to poor and marginalized communities. Mapping rural Mexico's spatial legacy is critical to our understanding of who is impacted by

²⁸ Although Oaxaca's migration is rooted in the mid-20th century, international or circulation migration is a much more recent phenomenon. See Cohen 2005.

²⁹ It is very difficult to make these claims because the definitions of "truly impoverished" and "in need" are relative to specific localities. Here, I am referring to largely indigenous groups without basic services, clean water, or substantial food as "truly impoverished," while those who can meet their basic needs but have no insurance or safety net to ensure that they will be able to do so in the future are "in need."

³⁰ See Orozco and Rouse 2007 and Orozco 2005.

3x1, and how it is distributed. However, there is another issue with 3x1 as a structuring component of the RDM—3x1 is based on remitting as a way of life, which requires migrants to maintain distance from their communities and families in Mexico. This distance has social and psychological impacts on migrants, and affects their perspective on transnational community development.

From the Perspective of Transnational Activists

By formalizing remittance flows, the Mexican government's 3x1 program also institutionalizes migrants' personal sacrifices, hardships and uncertain status. This has occurred without analysis of the social and spatial conditions reproduced by the system—migrants' lives exist in the shadow of policies that the state manages largely as demographic, statistical and financial information. Migrants who work with 3x1, participate in the implementation of 3x1 projects, and witness locals' reception of them, express ambivalence about their role in transnational development.

The presidents of migrant clubs are intimately involved in their communities of origin. A spectrum of "closeness" with the communities and places of origin is shaped by how often one returns, for how long and with what purpose. For example, the President of Club Los Cerritos, travels to his hometown up to once a month. Mariana Perez, who is a member of this club, notes, "I hadn't been to the pueblo in many years. . . Here in the club there are many people who haven't been back in years, we don't know what the club needs, we just give Miguel [the club president] the money. He goes all the time."³¹ This woman's lack of connection with the pueblo

³¹ Interview with author, California, USA, May 2008.

creates a dependency on those migrants—transnational activists—such as her club president, who do maintain close ties with their pueblo of origin.

These transnational activists express pride in their role as contributors to their hometown's transformation, and as mediators between migrants in the U.S. and locals in Mexico. Carlos Mendoza, the President of San Nicolás, explains, "I think we gave the pueblo something they want, to generate money to better the pueblo, it looks cleaner and more organized." This same man is proud of his work with the Federation and the government through 3x1: "We work with the government to do something good for the pueblo, that's a reality."³²

Maintaining ties to home allows club presidents to "keep in touch" with local community needs. Yet, for those migrants who do maintain ties to home through continuous travel there is a growing ambivalence about where to spend one's time. The President of San Nicolás reflects,

I left 33 years ago with the illusion of all the youth. I listened to stories about money, came for a time [to the U.S.], one year, but saw the future here and compared it to there and saw that it was better. After two years I married, had kids and there were ropes holding me, and then came the day that I was neither here or there. This is not good—it is better to stay in your country [*patria*] but the options are limited. We could stay poor but we wouldn't have ambition. At least in this country we have rights. We will have a pension. In Mexico, only government officials have this, in Mexico we need security for the people. ... What can I do? Live with the illusion or reality? My illusion is to live in Mexico but here is reality.

The President of Club Los Cerritos agrees: "If it was up to me, I would live in Los Cerritos, but if I lived there I wouldn't be able to help as much." Both presidents frequently travel to Mexico, but neither will move back permanently.

Very quickly after people leave rural Mexico they feel that their absence is vital to their family's wellbeing. Justo Lindo from San Gaspar notes, "One gets lonely [in the U.S.]. In Mexico you have everything and then you go to the U.S. and you have to learn to cook, iron. I didn't go back because my family in San Gaspar became dependent on me, if I went back we

³² Interview with author, California, USA, April 2008.

would all be in the same position, not eating meat.”³³ Migrants’ absence is vital to their families’ wellbeing just as migrant organization and collective remitting is becoming vital to the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

This ambivalence is produced by distance, a necessary prerequisite for migrants to remit to their pueblos of origin. Distance produces a series of disparate conditions. Spatial distance is a geographic fact that is negotiated through travel and requires money and/or documentation. Distant or disjunctive perspectives, perceptions, and experiences are produced by geographic distance because of peoples’ experiences in disparate places. Pedro Ramirez, a twenty-five year old local of San Gaspar who has not left the pueblo and assists migrants with 3x1 projects, argues,

The people [in San Gaspar], some are mad. They don’t understand why [the Casa de Cultura] has to be so big. What for? Here there is everything, they don’t look for more. The fruit is free, we have tomatoes, watermelon, people don’t pay rent, for two hours of work you have enough money to eat and so that’s all they want to work. Those who go to the U.S., it changes their mentality. They have to pay rent, they are a part of a larger system.³⁴

Mexican historian Dr. Jose Refugio de la Torre Curiel concurs,

In Mexico there is a saying: “If you plan for tomorrow, God will damn you,” meaning, live in the moment because God will take care of the future. The migrants, in essence, have adopted the protestant ethic, work hard, competition, they go to the U.S. and if they don’t do the job well somebody else will take their place. In Mexico, you get hired and do the job the way you do it. You are taken care of.³⁵

Here, the experiences of migrancy transform rural Mexicans’ work ethic. Once perceived to be taking life day by day, rural people who migrate are now perceived by Mexicans as hard workers, competitive and driven.

This transformation has resulted in a social and cultural disconnect between transnational activists and local community members in rural Mexico. The president of Club Las Palmas de

³³ Interview with the author, Jalisco, Mexico, March 2007.

³⁴ Interview with author, Jalisco, Mexico, October 2007.

³⁵ Interview with author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.

Elote bemoaned, “Instead of going forward we are going backward, the people [of the pueblo] do not look to the future. They don’t want to do anything to help the pueblo, just themselves. If it wasn’t for my sons helping me I wouldn’t continue [as president of the club].”³⁶ Miguel Gutierrez, a norteño from Vista Bonita explain, “They [locals] just don’t understand, they see us as ‘those norteños’ but we are investing in Vista as a gift to the town. We want the things we build to be classy so that the town has a future . . .”³⁷ The activities of transnational activists are not always well received by local populations as these activities are informed by experiences—being and living in the U.S.—that locals cannot share. The experience, conversely, of being and living in the pueblo, becomes equally foreign to migrants.³⁸

Social norms from the U.S. also get carried in migrants’ minds and practices back to their communities of origin. The president of San Gaspar’s club, when visiting the pueblo, went up to a group of local kids and told them not to spit their fruit pits on the floor. He then turned to me and explained, “They lack education, they need to change their style of living. Nobody tells them what is right and wrong. I can tell them but I am not always here.”³⁹ Alberto León, who lives in the nearby town of El Grullo, remarked, “The mayor built the bridge over the main road so people don’t cross and get killed but they lack culture. They don’t use it.”⁴⁰ The mayor is a migrant who is full of ideas for how to bring El Grullo into the 21st century. But, many locals are not following his signals either because they do not understand them or they do not agree with them.⁴¹

³⁶ Interview with author, Jalisco, Mexico, November 2007.

³⁷ Interview with author, Jalisco, Mexico, August 2007.

³⁸ I explore the perspective of locals in another article.

³⁹ Interview with author, Jalisco, Mexico, December 2007.

⁴⁰ Interview with author, Jalisco, Mexico, February 2008.

⁴¹ The process by which a migrant brings ideas learned in the United States to their hometown is theorized by Peggy Levitt as “social remittances.” However, Levitt uses the term to describe social practices that are remitted like gang violence or gang culture. She does not use this term to refer to spatial practices or built environment policy. See Levitt 1998.

Yet, transnational activists often want to preserve the pueblo of their youth. Hugo Galindo, the President of Club San Gaspar, who lives in Los Angeles, notes, “Before I came to the U.S. I did not know the words ‘stress’ or ‘routine,’ I come here [to San Gaspar] to relax.” Carlos Mendez, another resident who never left San Gaspar, told me, “Many people left 30 years ago and haven’t come back. When they return, they want the pueblo they remember.” Carlos wants to return to the stress-free pueblo of his youth, but he is aware of the ravages of time: “I miss my pueblo. I yearn for it. But when I go back, the people are changing, the kids are drinking and doing drugs, and all these things we used to do as a community are lost—I feel bad because I was of the first generation to leave so it is partially my fault that it is not like it used to be.”⁴² Furthermore, Carlos is the most active migrant involved in implementing 3x1 projects from Los Angeles for San Gaspar, which are changing the landscape of San Gaspar more rapidly than locals can ever remember witnessing.

As noted by Ernesto Valdez, a priest in a small rural town undergoing dramatic change due to migration, “People feel the frontera, the distance between their families, some return from the north and cry to me in private because they now have better resources, they finally have cars, but they miss their family, their father and mother.”⁴³ The experience of migrancy is a complex mixture of longing, success, failure, and hardship, and it is often linked to a critical paradox: Migrants want to preserve the pueblo of their childhood *and* improve it so that it reflects where they have been and who they have become.

⁴² Interview with author, Jalisco, Mexico, December 2007.

⁴³ Interview with author, Michoacan, Mexico, July 2008.

3x1 Impacts the Built Environment of Rural Mexico

The personal ambivalence migrants feel about remitting as a way of life is further exacerbated by migrant-state conflicts of interest over what remittances should be spent on. The state of Jalisco wants 3x1 to focus on basic infrastructure. Rural Jalisco is plagued by hundreds of miles of unpaved roads, approximately 15% of the population does not have running water or electricity. Although these percentages are low compared to other Mexican states (in Oaxaca, approximately half of the residents do not have running water or electricity), Jalisco is striving to equip all of its localities with basic infrastructure. Yet, many migrants are interested in building sports arenas, churches, or ornamental landscape elements that signify their devotion to their pueblo.

State officials and rural Mexicans in El Limon express anger over two large-scale migrant projects, a cultural center and Mexican rodeo, in localities that have roads waiting to be paved and houses without running water. According to El Naranja's mayor, Señor Jaime Hernandez, "The vision that they have of development at the municipal level and that we have doesn't coincide. They want a lot, that you see, that looks good. In the *Presidencia* municipal we are interested in works that sometimes you don't see but have social importance, like drainage..."⁴⁴ However, migrants feel that they should be able to spend their money on projects that are important to them. Just after 3x1 was implemented across Mexico, migrants in Los Angeles voiced their frustration with the direction of the program in *La Opinion*, LA's leading bilingual newspaper, "[W]e are not able to realize a computer center, give scholarships, collaborate in the construction of churches, in a Mexican rodeo or purchase machinery for the development of farms" (Amador 2002).

⁴⁴ Interview with author, Jalisco, Mexico, February 2008.

The state addresses these tensions through the logic of negotiation. A government employee at the Federal level explains,

When the *paisanos* come home for festivals here, it is very important that their sons that were born there continue to have affection for their communities of origin, they want the garden and plaza to be good so their children maintain affection. The ornamental work is very important to *paisanos*, more than drainage. So, the Mayor says we will help with your plaza if you help us with the potable water.⁴⁵

In essence, the state barter— we will give you money for your plaza if you give us money for drainage— thus subsidizing state projects with migrant remittances. Jaime Garibay, who is in charge of 3x1 Estatal, notes,

My function is to tell them why we need certain projects. For example, the municipio of Mesquitic is the poorest, the people from that town who live in Chicago said ‘we want to invest two or three hundred-thousand [pesos] in the church,’ but I know the church is fine. They want to make it beautiful. So I tell them that I don’t agree, that we should build water plants for four different communities, two health clinics, and electric networks. Think of the people who have no drainage, no electricity. Invest some money in bettering the church but put most in improving basic resources. I convinced them that that was what they had to do.⁴⁶

However, building projects are not necessarily about logistical needs. Migrants negotiate distance and the impacts of migrancy on social and cultural traditions through built space. Father Ernesto Valdez notes, “The unique marker of identification in the pueblo is the church. People think, ‘How am I going to identify with a road or potable water? That doesn’t say anything to me, but look at what a nice church they have.’”⁴⁷ The symbolic value associated with remittance building is not expressed through the construction of infrastructure.

The state’s agenda is being implemented through 3x1. Government records of all 3x1 Federal projects built in Jalisco between 2002 and 2007 document an increase in the number of works dedicated to basic infrastructure. In 2002 17% were infrastructure projects, whereas in 2007 the number of projects dedicated to potable water, sewer systems, electrification,

⁴⁵ Ing. Cecilia Acero Reyes, SEDESOL, interview with the author, Jalisco, Mexico, April 2008.

⁴⁶ Jaime Almaraz Garibay, Director de Fortalecimiento y Desarrollo Social, Secretaria de Desarrollo Humano, interview with author, Jalisco, Mexico, January 2008.

⁴⁷ Interview with the author, Michoacan, Mexico, July 2008.

residential developments and road paving rose to 61%.⁴⁸ Before 3x1, the club members went directly to the townspeople and implemented whatever project they desired. Now, complex layers of bureaucracy mediate migrants' desires. The migrants' precious "plaza de toros" or bull fighting ring is not supported by 3x1. Similarly, when 3x1 started, migrant clubs were excited about building town arches to mark its entrance and exit. Some arches, such as Juchitlan's, are even marked by a state plaque that lists 3x1's participants. Since 2004, the program has not subsidized arches.⁴⁹ For migrants who work menial labor jobs in the U.S., and live well below the poverty line, the symbolic importance of remittance building is a meaningful part of their daily lives.

Migrant ambivalence and migrant-state negotiations are etched into the Mexican landscape with major implications for the built environment. 3x1 buildings and infrastructure projects are often not completed, or they are completed but non-functional, because state and migrant money runs out. Migrants want technologically sophisticated buildings but there is often not the local expertise to execute such visions. 3x1 buildings are out of scale with the local vernacular architecture of the region. And, once completed these new buildings can create an enormous burden for both the migrant and local community that must then maintain them.

From August of 2007 to August of 2008 I visited many 3x1 projects that were under construction or complete but non-functional. One such project, an old age home in Los Cerritos, was the largest, most expensive building in town. Locals call the old age home the "white elephant" because after it was completed it stood empty for three years, a reminder that 3x1's promise to realize migrant ambitions can build problems rather than solutions. In fact, all five old age homes that I visited during this year were non-functional, waiting for more money to come

⁴⁸ See Migration Policy Institute for published information regarding 3x1 projects. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/>.

⁴⁹ Although arches might have been built with 3x1 money, such activity is not recorded in official state documentation of 3x1 projects in recent years.

in, even while there are many elderly who have been abandoned by families for the north and are in desperate need of assistance. I also visited Mexican rodeos and cultural centers that were impressive structures but at the center of local disputes over ownership, use and maintenance, and I visited construction sites where disputes between builders and engineers revolved around the form, material and spaces of the building itself.

Conclusion

3x1 is only one part of a larger set of conditions that constitute the RDM. These conditions are based on not only the government's policy, but also the social, material and spatial conditions tied to remitting as a way of life. Two questions remain: Is the RDM a viable development model? And, is the state's increasing involvement in it restricting the potential of the poor to transform their environments in valuable ways?

At the moment, there are a series of questions that warrant further investigation pertaining to the spaces of remitting and migrancy, the informal networks that assist remittance building and impact local construction markets in Mexico, and how locals experience the remittance landscape. These questions need to be explored before the state further institutionalizes a transnational development model.

In its current form, 3x1 limits the RDM, and is defined by disconnects, inequalities, and institutionalized ambivalence highlighted by migrant experiences of migration, remitting, and remittance building. If 3x1 continues to grow in importance, it will further formalize and institutionalize HTAs in the U.S., and intensify rural Mexico's dependency on them. Furthermore, the creation of 3x1 through the state institutionalizes a practice that is dependent on

structural inequalities between Mexico and the U.S. as well as a practice that legitimates the Mexican government's neglect of its rural constituents.

What is at stake here is the missed opportunity for migrant-state relations to be reconstituted in both the U.S. and Mexico because of migrants' role in the development of Mexico's countryside as well as the landscape itself. Hundreds of thousands of hard-earned dollars could be spent on failed buildings that do not serve either the local community or the migrant community, or they could be spent on basic infrastructure for communities whose social and cultural fabric is falling apart due to out-migration. Much more institutional support for migrants, their families, and locals will be necessary to address the current problems associated with the RDM. Furthermore, a revision of U.S. policy toward migrants is an integral component of the model's sustainability.

While some migrants feel ownership over the development process others are excluded because they are not willing to, or could not, take the necessary risks that got migrants in the position they are in. Essentially, the RDM is a system that rewards risk taking and personal connections over the democratic process, partially resulting from Mexico's weak institutions. In its current form, 3x1 is ensuring that the RDM will continue to strengthen Mexico's spatial legacy of an unequal distribution of resources, rather than reshaping it.

References

- Amador, Lucero. 2002. "Mexicanos de Los Angeles critican el programa Tres Por Uno." *La Opinion*, 13 June.
- Beacon, David. 2008. *Illegal People: How globalization creates migration and criminalizes immigrants*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990 [1980]. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Cohen, Jeffrey H. 2005. "The Oaxaca-US Connection and Remittances." *Migration Policy Institute*, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=280>.
- Cohen, Jeffrey H. and Leila Rodriguez. 2004. "Remittance Outcomes in Rural Oaxaca, Mexico: Challenges, Options, and Opportunities for Migrant Households." *Working Paper, Center for Comparative Immigration Studies*. San Diego: University of California.
- Delgado-Wise, Raul and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo. 2007. "Migration and Development: Lessons from the Mexican Experience." *Migration Policy Institute*, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=581>.
- Durand, Jorge, Douglas S. Massey and Nolan J. Malone. 2002. *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Federación de Jaliscienses. 2007. *Estatutos de la Federación de Clubes Jaliscienses de California*, Primary source material of the Federación de Jaliscienses, Los Angeles.
- Federación de Jaliscienses. 2004. *Semana Jalisco*. Primary source material of the Federación de Jaliscienses, Los Angeles.
- Fitzgerald, David and Roger Waldinger. 2004. "Transnationalism in Question." *American Journal of Sociology* 109 (5): 1177-95.
- Gamio, Manuel. 1971 [1931]. *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*. Dover: New York.
- Gobierno de Jalisco 2007. Primary source material of the Secretaria de Desarrollo Humano, Jalisco, Mexico.
- Gonzales, Gilbert G. 2004. *The Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico and the Mexican Immigrants 1880-1930*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Harris, J. R. and M.P. Todaro. 1970. "Migration, Unemployment and Development: A Two-Sector Analysis." *American Economic Review* 60: 126-142.

- Levitt, Peggy. 1998. "Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion." *International Migration Review* 32 (4): 926-948.
- Lewis, Arthur. 1955. *The Theory of Economic Growth*. Homewood: Richard D. Urwin Publishers.
- Marcus, George. 1998. *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Mitchell, Don. 2000. *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Blackwell Publishers.
- Mitchell, Katharyne. 2004. *Crossing the Neoliberal Line: Pacific Rim Migration and the Metropolis*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Ong, Aihwa. 1999. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Orozco, Manuel. 2005. "Hometown Associations and Development: Ownership, Correspondence, Sustainability and Replicability." In *New Patterns for Mexico: Observations on Remittances, Philanthropic Giving, and Equitable Development*. Edited by Barbara J. Merz. Global Equity Initiative. Cambridge: Harvard University.
- Orozco, Manuel and Rebecca Rouse. 2007. "Migrant Hometown Associations and Opportunities for Development: A Global Perspective." *Migration Policy Institute*, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=579>
- Portes, Alejandro. 1999. "Conclusion: Towards a New World—the origins and effects of transnational activities." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (2): 463-477.
- Preston, Julia. 2007. "States Take Up Immigration Issue," *The New York Times*, National Edition, 30 November.
- Preston, Julia and Samuel Dillon. 2004. *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Mexican Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Ranis, Gustav and John C. Fei. 1961. "A Theory of Economic Development." *American Economic Review* 51: 533-565.
- Scott, James. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Smith, Michael Peter. 2008. *Citizenship Across Borders: The Political Transnationalism of El Migrante*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Smith, Michael Peter and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, Eds. 1998. *Transnationalism From Below*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Smith, Robert C. 2006. *Mexican New York: transnational lives of new immigrants*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Taylor, Paul. 1930. *Mexican Labor in the United States: Migration Statistics. Vol. 1*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Valenzuela, Basilia M. 2004. "Los Clubes de migrantes oriundos jaliscienses en los Estados Unidos." *Carta Economica Regional*, 16 (87) (January-March): 3-17.



**INSTITUTE FOR
THE STUDY OF
SOCIAL CHANGE**

2420 Bowditch Street #5670
Berkeley, CA 94720-5670

tel: 510-642-0813
fax: 510-642-8674

email: ISSC@berkeley.edu
web: <http://issc.berkeley.edu>