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DEPARTURES AND RETURNS

Migration, Gender, and the Politics of Transnational Mexican Communities

By

Abigail Leslie Andrews

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Peter B. Evans, Co-Chair

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Professor Michael Burawoy

Professor Irene Bloemraad

Professor Gillian Hart

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Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Raka Ray and Professor Peter Evans, Co-Chairs

Over the past three decades, free-market policies have debilitated life in rural Mexico, driving migrants to seek work in the United States. Meanwhile, on the US side, Mexican migrants have faced increasing repression from US immigration control, shunting them into an economic and political “underclass” and reverberating in their sending communities across the border. On both sides, this interplay – the largest cross-border migration in the world – has sparked political struggles and transformed the relationships between women and men. Yet, the relationship between Mexico and the US varies across sending and receiving sites, taking dramatically different forms, in ways that existing research does little to explain.

Based on the historical pathways of two, contrasting Mexico-US migrant communities, this dissertation examines how local-level politics shape the interplay between development, migration, and gender. I focus on two transnational, indigenous villages from Oaxaca, Mexico, which I call “Retorno” and “La Partida.” While Retorno and La Partida appear comparable socioeconomically, the *articulation* of politics, migration, and gender – meaning both the *expression* of these processes and the *connections* between them – diverged across the two migration paths. In Retorno, the relationship between the village and its destination in North County San Diego revolved around *returns*: entering the United States as rural farm workers, its migrants felt they were treated “like slaves.” Mostly men, they set their sights on going back to their village. By contrast, the Mexico-US interplay in La Partida reflected *departures*, that is, both exits and divisions. Its migrants, particularly women, left the village to escape traditions and patriarchy; concentrating in urban Los Angeles, they felt “free.” In turn, these patterns sparked qualitatively distinct politics. While Retorno forged a transnational movement for resources and against exclusion, La Partida’s migrants embraced the United States, provoking those who remained in their hometown to re-entrench its communal political structure. Both struggles politicized women, bringing them into civic life for the first time. But they did so in different geographic areas and through distinct relationships to life in the United States.

To explain the differences, I propose the concept of a *community migration pathway*. I define a community migration pathway as a historical process that links particular

migrant hometowns to their destinations, producing different expressions of migration, development, gender, and politics on both sides of the border. I argue that while macroeconomic processes and national political structures create constraints and opportunities, the local-level political dynamics of each hometown and destination mediate these effects, crucially shaping the consequences for communities and individuals.

I use a relational, multi-sited, comparative ethnography of Retorno and La Partida to develop this theory. To explain their divergent migration patterns and gendered political struggles, I trace the historical emergence and ongoing dynamics of each hometown's relationship with a specific receiving site. In particular, I ask what political conditions led Retorno to forge a home-away relationship based on return, while La Partida built a different interplay, based on departure. I begin by examining the rise of these different migration pathways from the sending side, illustrating how the political history of each village *constructs* a particular pattern of movement. Then, I show how the treatment of immigrants in each US destination *re-constructs* each migrant community's relationships to the United States. Finally, I consider how members *respond* to these experiences, transforming gender relations and their communities as they fight to avoid "integration" into an undocumented underclass and defend their capacity to live dignified lives – that is, in their own words, their "freedom."

This theory is distinct from other research in three core ways. First, my approach is relational. Sociological studies often divide development, gender, and migration into different subfields, as if they are independent phenomena that can "impact" each other. Often, they focus either on the receiving or on the sending end, rather than examining how the relationships between them get made. By contrast, I emphasize the articulation of these processes and places, meaning both the interrelationships (or joints) between them, and the particular expressions they take under different local circumstances. The concept of articulation is particularly important for understanding how the meanings of gender, class, and race evolve in relation to each other during the process of migration. Gendered understandings are central to any community migration pathway, and they change over time. Gender also intertwines with ethnicity, and the concept of articulation highlights how their meanings emerge in particular locales. Second, I treat migration as a dynamic process: a history that changes over time. Rather than seeing immigration as an event, I trace the histories through which it arises. Then, I look at the ways sending and receiving sides get transformed by their members, as they interact across the Mexico-US border. Third, I highlight that migration pathways take multiple forms. While the intertwining of places like Mexico and the US is structured and constrained by macroeconomic and national-level political processes, it takes shape at the local level. Therefore, even villages as apparently similar as Retorno and La Partida can diverge in dramatic ways. Their differences illustrate how on-the-ground practices mediate the structural conditions of migration, its relationship to development, and the ongoing politics that result.

For Rocío

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Writing a dissertation, like raising a child, takes a village. This one - obstreperous and a bit unruly – took two. Two villages, that is, along with two destinations, three academic institutions; 12 fellowships; 16 research assistants; countless supporters and trusting strangers; and perhaps most importantly, extraordinary advisors and unwavering family and friends. You have sustained me, and you have given this project wings.

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Preface

When I meet Rosa Delgado, she's leaning against the faded threshold of her tortilla shop in Oaxaca, Mexico, brushing debris from her gingham apron and gazing out over the mountains that surround her village, a Mixtec indigenous¹ community I call "Retorno," or "return."² In the dust of the summer afternoon, Rosa's face is lined with the grit of a rural grandmother. She seems like she's been there forever, trapped in this hamlet that lies 5,000 feet up in Mexico's massive mountains and more than 50 miles from the nearest city, in an area long known for its exclusion of women. Yet Rosa's story – like that of her village as a whole – shatters my expectations. Retorno's recent history has been anything but "closed." On the contrary, two thirds of adults who now live in the village, including Rosa, have worked as migrants in Northern Mexico and/or the United States. Even more surprisingly, in the process, women have become political leaders, voting, running village committees, and representing themselves in public for the first time. Rosa, hair tied back in an unyielding silver bun, was one of the first.

Now 53, Rosa left Retorno for the first time when she was twelve years old. At the time, 1968, the village was increasingly controlled by political and economic elites, and her family worked as sharecroppers. By the time foremen arrived to recruit villagers to work in the vast agro-industries of Northern Mexico, Rosa's parents were destitute, facing mounting debts. So they packed up their seven children and traveled the 1300 miles north. For more than a decade, the family – along with most of the people of Retorno – endured the squalid, backbreaking work of picking tomatoes in the North. Yet each year the misery propelled them back home; they would work for six months on the farms and then return to Retorno to weather the off-season. By the 1980s, North American agro-industry propelled many of them onward into the United States, mostly to the rural, northern part of San Diego County, California. There, they worked to the bone picking strawberries and tomatoes, often with unstable lodging and little pay. More than 95% crossed the border unauthorized (Cornelius et al. 2009).

In San Diego County, the experience of being undocumented governed their lives. In the course of Retorno migrants' tenure in the United States – from the late 1980s through the present – the federal government would forge a regime of deportation and persecution that made undocumented migrants increasing targets of what some scholars have called "legal violence" (Menjívar and Abrego 2012). With doors closed to legalization after the US government amnesty in 1986, few had recourse to demand political rights. What's more, North County San Diego, known for its hostility to immigrants, would make the situation even worse, amplifying nation-wide efforts to control undocumented immigrants, target them with discriminatory local laws, and threaten them with deportation. While Retorno's migrants would eventually shift from farm work into service and industry, the political environment of their destination kept them terrorized, compelling the vast majority to remain focused on their hometown, long continuing to circulate back and forth. Women migrants, who faced the added burdens of

¹ Following the Mexican census, I define indigenous in terms of self-identification and state rights to political autonomy.

² Made up of about 1600 people (INEGI 2010), Retorno is a municipal seat.

family care and male domination in both Northern Mexico and California, were some of the first to go home. As they did, they helped forge Retorno's migration pathway not only around departures, but also around returns. Rosa, who speaks bitterly as she describes the suffering and misery of life in the United States, became one of the leaders among them.

It was when she returned, they tell me, that Rosa became Retorno's most ruthless "*dirigenta*," its leading "lady boss." Starting in the 1990s, Retorno's migrants responded to the corrosive effects of US persecution by demanding equity on both sides of the border, and women like Rosa played a key role in this fight. As villagers circulated between Retorno and North San Diego County, they linked the deprivation of indigenous villages in Mexico to the social, economic, and political marginality of undocumented, indigenous migrants in the United States. In the US, they demanded rights to consular services and police protection. In the village, they overthrew elites who had long controlled political power, and they blockaded highways to push for more state resources. Thus, they forged an unprecedented transnational movement, transforming gender relationships as they did. Even though Retorno had excluded women from voting or attending public meetings until the 1990s, Rosa and her sisters became central to this cross-border struggle, and in its course they became political leaders for the first time. In a rasping voice, Rosa explains that they could no longer stand the way, their *pueblo* – their people – streamed across the border into the United States, "only to suffer, only to die." Using their collective voice to insist on greater gender and class equity, they would make Retorno into an alternative home, a place where, in Rosa's words, they could "be free" (*tener libertad*).

Perhaps surprisingly, Rosa's story diverges dramatically from that of Maria Ramírez, another indigenous Oaxacan migrant whose story seems almost the same and who, within her own community, also became a formidable female boss. On one hand, Maria's pathway echoes Rosa's. Her village, which I call "La Partida"³ is located about 100 miles from Retorno over Oaxaca's steep sierras; its population, like Retorno's, is about 1500 people, and before migration began in the 1950s, it was just as patriarchal and poor. Although the indigenous people of La Partida are of a different ethnicity than those of Retorno (Zapotec), they faced parallel social exclusions.

Maria herself was also born in 1956, and she, too, left her hometown at the age of 12 to take her first job as a migrant within Mexico. Again, this step migration led Maria and her community to California in the 1980s and 1990s, almost all of them without legal authorization. Undocumented, Maria, too, remained trapped in grueling, manual jobs. And, as La Partida became un-stitched across space, Maria, too, fought to keep her *pueblo* alive. In the process, Maria, too, transformed from "third world woman" to "lady boss."

Nevertheless, when I sit down with Maria at her glossy dining table in South Los Angeles, the second home of nearly all US migrants from La Partida, the first thing she tells me is: "I will never go back [to Mexico]." She glances out the window over a chain-link fence and a couple of crew-cut teenagers blasting music. Brushing the wavy, dyed hair off her deep, 54-year-old eyes, she explains that for her, the United States is "a second homeland," the place where, especially as a woman, she feels "free."

³ La Partida has about 1200 people and is also a municipal seat (INEGI 2010).

Despite the apparent similarities between La Partida and Retorno, their migration patterns diverged. While Retorno's pathway revolved around return, La Partida's was defined by departure. In the 1960s and 70s, in contrast to Retorno, the community of La Partida redistributed resources, enabling them to refuse agro-industrial recruitment into farm work and instead seek schooling and service jobs in urban Mexico. From there, they built links into the service sector and garment industry of Los Angeles, opting *in* to the city's comparatively stable jobs as well as its known friendliness to migrants. Los Angeles, one of the first sanctuary cities in the United States,⁴ distinguished the "good immigrants," whom it hoped to encourage to stay from the "bad," "criminal aliens" increasingly targeted by the federal government. In the face of this binary, as long as migrants saw themselves as "good," they were willing to tolerate their undocumented status and embrace an ideology favoring "assimilation" into the United States. This was particularly true for women like Maria, who often saw LA as an escape from the longstanding patriarchal control they associated with their hometown.

The politics of migration in La Partida were different as well. Although this village also fought the ravages of undocumented migration and hometown decline, and although women were also central to these struggles, the battles took a different form. In contrast to Rosa, who intended to go home, Maria and her fellow migrants from La Partida built a hometown association in Los Angeles. From there, they sent not only money but also the ideas of "progress" they associated with the United States and hoped to use to "improve" the village they had left "behind." Meanwhile, instead of collaborating across borders, those remaining in the village accused emigrants of abandoning them, selfishly and for the sake of personal gain. In answer, the villagers reinforced the traditions of public service and mutual aid that had long helped it withstand state and corporate incursion. As they did, they made their own "departure," refusing the migrants' path heading north. Retorno, La Partida, and their destinations appear on Map 1 below.

⁴ Sanctuary city is not a legal designation but a popular concept used by US cities in the 2000s to designate their support for and refusal to persecute undocumented immigrants. It came into circulation starting in the 1980s as cities such as Los Angeles sought to shelter refugees from civil wars in El Salvador, Guatemala, and other parts of Central America. Since then, it has come into widespread use among US cities opposed to federal-level mandates to police and deport undocumented migrants (Tramonte 2011).

Map 1: Sending and Receiving Sites of Retorno (Red) and La Partida (Blue)



Map data copyright ©2014 Google, INEGI.

Retorno and La Partida typify a widespread divergence in migration from Oaxaca, Mexico to California. On one hand, communities in Retorno's region of the state, the Mixteca, have tended to migrate circularly, primarily to farm work, while those in the Sierra Norte⁵ like La Partida have gone linearly to LA, taking urban service and industry jobs (Lopez and Runsten 2004; Stephen 2007). The patterns have had longstanding implications for each group's wellbeing, with migrants from the Mixteca entrenched in socioeconomic marginality while those from the Sierra Norte have enjoyed comparative upward mobility (Lopez and Runsten 2004). Yet, the contrasts seem hard to explain. The two regions share nearly all of the economic, political, and social characteristics that scholars have previously used to account for contrasting patterns of migration (Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Massey, Goldring and Durand 1994). Even though the two are ethnically distinct – with the Mixteca being ethnically Mixtec and the Sierra Norte being ethnically Zapotec – in other cases the paths have been reversed, with Mixtecs moving to cities and Zapotecs to farms (Cohen 2004; Smith 2006; Mines, Nichols and Runsten 2010). From a socioeconomic perspective, they are nearly indistinguishable.

On the Mexican side, Oaxaca's Mixtecs and Zapotecs were both historically excluded from the broader society, both economically and politically. Located in rugged, mountainous terrain, both regions lacked roads until the late 1950s (around the time

⁵ Among Oaxaca's 16 extant indigenous groups, Zapotecs are the largest, at 32% of the indigenous population and Mixtecs the second, at 21%. While ethnic Mixtecs concentrate in one region of Oaxaca (the Mixteca), ethnic Zapotecs are more numerous and live in multiple regions, across which their social, political, and migration histories vary. This dissertation focuses specifically on Zapotecs from the Northern Sierra Region (Sierra Norte) of Oaxaca, who concentrated particularly densely in LA even though other Zapotec groups have shown more variation (Rivera-Salgado 1999).

migration picked up), so individual villages were not only isolated from each other but also from the nearest towns, which lay more than 50 miles – two days hike – away. As of Mexico’s 1950 census, neither area had electricity or running water. Living in one-room adobe or palm huts, more than 80% of villagers made a living through subsistence corn farming, and most went barefoot (INEGI 1950).

Politically, as long as Mixtec and Zapotec villages delivered votes to the party that ruled Mexico from 1929 to 2000, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), they were allowed de facto autonomy to run their internal affairs. Most villages, including Retorno and La Partida, held collective titles to their land, granted by the Spanish crown during the colonial era. In conjunction, although indigenous self-governance would not be formally recognized by the state of Oaxaca until 1995, most villages sustained participatory political practices in which they ran their own local governments, made decisions in direct democratic assemblies, and required all adult men to contribute labor to public works and serve in civic posts on a rotating basis, without pay.⁶

Meanwhile, both groups also faced entrenched patriarchy. As late as the 1990s, women were represented by their husbands in all public affairs and were not allowed to leave the house without male permission, let alone vote, hold property, or have custody over children. While statistics on the rate of domestic violence are scarce, qualitative accounts suggest that spousal abuse was nearly universal. Given their poverty, political isolation and patriarchy, both Retorno and La Partida seemed vulnerable to the political economic restructuring the second half of the 20th century would bring, diminishing the value of corn farming in Mexico’s rural South and demanding a workforce for industrialized agriculture, manufacturing, and services in both Northern Mexico and the United States.

Nor can their differences be attributed to timing; both Retorno and La Partida left at parallel times and volumes. During the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, they went to other parts of Mexico. In contrast to mestizo (mixed race) sending communities in Western Mexico, most Oaxacan migrants went to the US step-wise, beginning as internal migrants within Mexico because they were too poor and lacked the social networks to go directly to the United States. As internal migrants, both built connections that would link them to California in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In particular, when earlier waves of migrants got legal authorization through the US Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986, California’s farm, garment, and domestic employers sought a new, undocumented workforce to fill the bottom rungs of the labor market. Communities like Retorno and La Partida filled in. By 1990, the Mexican government ranked both communities “high expulsion” (CONAPO 2000), and as of 2011 about half of those born in these villages lived in the United States.

On the US side, migrants from the Mixteca and the Sierra Norte both arrived at a moment of increasing exclusion. According to my surveys, approximately 95% of migrants from Retorno and La Partida arrived in California without legal authorization,

⁶ Today, indigenous political autonomy is legally recognized under what the state of Oaxaca calls “*Usos y Costumbres*,” or Ways and Customs.

and about 70% remained undocumented as of 2011. As a result, even though they concentrated in the long-time gateway area of Southern California,⁷ both groups were politically disenfranchised and subject to the dramatic expansion of US immigration control. Both also faced widespread economic exploitation, working in manual jobs that were flexible, grueling, and underpaid.

Nevertheless, Retorno and La Partida diverged in ways that reverberate across their regions more broadly.⁸ As Rosa and Maria's stories suggest, not only did their patterns of movement differ, but so, too, did their experiences of class, gender, and ethnicity. Migrants from Retorno – along with other communities in the Mixteca – entered the US through farm work (Zabin et al. 1993). Living in rural areas, they faced more labor abuses, lower wages, and greater public hostility than those from the Sierra Norte, and, in a racially-tiered agricultural hierarchy, they were often discriminated against by mixed-race migrants. In turn, they went back to Mexico more frequently, circulating between their village and the United States. Even as of my fieldwork in 2010, nearly four decades after Retorno's pioneer migrants had arrived in California and even after several had moved into other kinds of jobs, less than 45% had settled in the US, and 89% planned to one return home. What's more, many *still* divided their families across borders, men migrating while their wives and children remained in Retorno. While some women followed their husbands in the 1990s and 2000s, they were never more than a third of its migrants to the US.

By contrast, migrants from La Partida and other communities in the Sierra Norte, led by women, moved more permanently to LA, taking jobs as housekeepers, garment sewers, and janitors (Hulshof 1991; Lopez and Runsten 2004; Kresge 2007).⁹ Although they, too, had been recruited into agricultural labor, Sierra Zapotecs rejected the backbreaking, isolated life of the farm (Stephen 2007; Mines, Nichols and Runsten 2010). In LA, they faced less isolation, more options, better working conditions, and more incentives to stay (Dinerman 1982; Massey et al. 1987; Goldring 1990). Nearly 50% of their US migrants – including key pioneers – were women, and families almost never separated across borders (Gijon Cruz and Reyes Morales 2003; Worthen 2012). Over time, some even began to think of themselves as “coconuts” – brown on the outside but

⁷ Los Angeles County and San Diego County are both among the top 10 receiving counties in the United States by absolute number of immigrants.

⁸ These distinct patterns have been widely described by scholars of Oaxacan migration, in studies such as Nagengast and Kearney (1990), Krissman (1994), Kearney (1998), Besserer (2002), Ibarra Templos (2003), Martínez (2005), Aquino (2009), Aquino Moreschi (2010), and Worthen (2012). Indicators from more than 100 migrant-sending Mixtec and Sierra Zapotec municipalities (INEGI 2005) also confirm qualitative reports. In 2009, I used INEGI (2005) data to pinpoint communities that were paradigmatic of the contrasting patterns. After visiting about 15 villages that had followed similar paths, I selected Retorno and La Partida as points of focus. They are not “representative” of other communities in a statistical sense, especially given the wide community-by-community variation in Oaxacan migration (Mines, Nichols and Runsten 2010). Nevertheless, the differences between them illustrate key relationships and help to build hypotheses about the kinds of conditions that matter for building divergent paths. Prior studies such as those cited above help illustrate the importance of similar conditions across a wide array of other villages.

⁹ Female-led migration has been extremely unusual from Mexico to the US, but it is common from other migrant-sending areas like the Philippines (Parreñas 2001) and the state of Kerala, India (George 2005).

white on the inside. Undocumented status notwithstanding, 90% of La Partida's migrants hoped to stay in LA.

The divergence between Rosa and Maria, Retorno and La Partida, highlight unexplained differences in the pathways and prospects of migrant communities as a whole. Comparing their historical processes of migration lays the groundwork to better understand how such contrasts develop – and to consider the implications of these differences for migrant communities' struggles to lead dignified lives.

Introduction

The largest cross-border migration in the world ties Mexico to the United States. As of 2010, 96% of Mexican communities had sent members across the Rio Grande. Meanwhile, the United States was home to 11.4 million Mexican migrants, more than 10 million of whom lacked citizenship rights, 54% of them undocumented and another 34% living as legal permanent residents (OECD 2006; Gonzalez-Barrera et al. 2013). Over the 2000s, as the US government dramatically increased the policing and deportation of non-citizen, they were shunted into a politically, economically and socially excluded “underclass,” which threatened to become, in the words of scholars Douglas Massey and Karen Pren (2012), “permanently divorced from American society and disenfranchised from its resources, with little hope of upward mobility” (15).

At the same time, these migrants also mobilized massive protests to demand political and social rights (Voss and Bloemraad 2011). In particular, a group of young migrants dubbed the “DREAMers”¹⁰ fought for clemency for those who had arrived as children and for access to the opportunities enjoyed by citizens of the United States (Abrego and Gonzales 2010). Meanwhile, one could no longer understand life in rural Mexico, as I had discovered in my conversation with Rosa Delgado Retorno, without examining the implications of US migration. Indeed, the Mexican government and political parties increasingly recognized that the nation’s future hinged on migrants, turning to migration as a vehicle for development (Fitzgerald 2009).

Existing scholarship has largely understood this relationship between Mexico and the United States – as well as global migration more broadly – in terms of *immigration*, that is, in common parlance, the act of coming to live permanently in a foreign country. As a result, two questions dominate the research: 1) Why do people leave? and 2) How (or how much) do they integrate into their destinations? The separation of these two questions, however, imposes an analytical divide between sending and receiving ends. By studying *either* “home” *or* “away,” scholars have divided the evolution of sending sites, often marked “development,” from migrants’ experiences in the US, which tend to be considered in terms of “incorporation.” In turn, each process gets treated as independent from the other, such that migration can “impact” development and vice versa. What’s more, this framing implies that in the course of migration hometowns get left “behind” – both spatially and in historical time – while presupposing that economic, social, and political incorporation is the ultimate goal. Thus, migration appears linear, coinciding, in the most pernicious formulations, with a notion of “progress.”

This modernization-style narrative is especially prevalent in theories of migration and gender, many of which revolve around the question of whether and how migration

¹⁰ The young people named themselves “DREAMers” after the so-called DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act, proposed in 2001 and reintroduced in 2009, which would have offered a path to citizenship for undocumented migrants under age 30 who had been brought to the United States as children and agreed to attend college or serve in the military. The act repeatedly failed to pass in Congress; however, in 2012 President Barack Obama recognized the DREAMers by taking a legislative action called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), granting some protection from deportation to this sub-group.

“empowers” women. Typically, scholars have answered that migrant women gain leverage from the gender-egalitarian US social context and/or the income they earn when they arrive (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Parrado and Flippen 2005). Yet this framing credits the United States with “liberating” women, obscuring the oppressive conditions that characterize low-wage jobs and the ways migrants’ values may be subverted by US norms. Once again, by analytically separating migration from gender relations and converting each into a “variable” that can “impact” the other, the question misleads us, failing to consider how the very meanings of femininity and masculinity get made in relation to ethnicity and class, in the interplay between migration and development. Studies of “intersectionality” (Crenshaw 1991) have provided some corrective to these assumptions about progress and highlighted how gender intertwines with legal status, race, and class. Nevertheless, they, too, tend to treat these multiple forms of difference as external to the process of migration itself.

Two alternate approaches to migration have helped to break down the “impact model” and the home-away divide: 1) the political economy of migration and 2) migrant “transnationalism.” First, analyses of the political economy of migration challenge the push-pull separation that characterizes most literature on *immigration*. Instead, they argue that migration reflects the historical production of inequality between underdeveloped sending countries and industrialized receiving ends (Kearney 1995; Zolberg 1999). Rather than being a collection of individual “events,” these scholars suggest, migration is organized by the unfair policies of receiving states, whose goal is not migrant incorporation, but instead to build a class of low-wage laborers (Burawoy 1976; Sassen 1990; De Genova 2010). Second, theories of migrant “transnationalism” have called attention to the ways migrants sustain cross-border ties (Portes 1997; Levitt 2001). Yet, political economic theories remain oriented to the macro level, doing little to explain differences in the ways communities make meaning of migration in particular local contexts. Meanwhile, transnationalism research defines home-away relationship primarily in terms of *activities* and *flows*, particularly of remittances (Waldinger 2007; Castells 2003). This orientation to flows neglects the profound, politically-charged ways that communities on one side of the border define the very *meaning* of wellbeing – as well as masculinity and femininity – in terms of their experiences in and relationships to the other side (Massey 1994; Hart 2002). Retorno and La Partida both exhibit such deep interrelationships, illustrating how local politics, migration, and gender get *made* in conversation with each other. Here, migration entails not only departures but also “returns,” in the broadest sense of the word.

The stories of Retorno and La Partida also show how these interrelationships may take dramatically different forms, in ways that existing research does little to explain. Despite the apparently comparable socioeconomic status of Retorno and La Partida, the *articulation* of politics, migration, and gender – meaning both the *expression* of these processes and the *connections* between them – diverged across the two communities. In Retorno, the relationship between the village and its destination in North County San Diego revolved around *returns*: entering the United States as rural farm workers, its migrants felt they were treated “like slaves.” Thus, they separated from their families and set their sights on going back to their village. By contrast, the Mexico-US interplay in La Partida reflected *departures*, that is, both exits and divisions. Its migrants, particularly

women, left the village to escape poverty, traditions, and patriarchy; concentrating in urban Los Angeles, they felt “free.” These patterns, finally, sparked qualitatively distinct politics. While Retorno forged a transnational movement for resources and against exclusion, La Partida’s migrants embraced the United States, provoking those who remained in their hometown to re-entrench its communalism. While both struggles politicized women, they did so in different geographic areas and through distinct relationships to life in the United States.

To better understand the prospects for migrant communities, this dissertation examines the local-level politics of migration. I use Retorno and La Partida as exemplars to help develop this theory. To explain their divergent migration patterns and gendered political struggles, I trace the historical emergence and ongoing dynamics of each hometown’s relationship with a specific receiving site. In particular, I ask what political conditions led Retorno to forge a home-away relationship based on return, while La Partida built a different interplay, based on departure. I begin by examining the rise of these different migration pathways from the sending side, illustrating how the political history of each village *constructs* a particular migration pattern. Then, I show how the treatment of immigrants in each US destination *re-constructs* each migrant community’s relationships to the United States. Finally, I consider how members *respond* to these experiences, transforming gender relations and their communities as they fight to avoid “integration” into an undocumented underclass and defend their capacity to live dignified lives – that is, in their own words, their “freedom.”¹¹

Community Migration Pathways

To explain how these processes get intertwined, this dissertation proposes the concept of a *community migration pathway*. I define a community migration pathway as a historical process that links particular migrant-sending communities to particular destinations, producing different expressions of migration, development, gender, and politics on both sides of the border. Macroeconomic processes and national political structures create constraints and opportunities for such villages. However, the local-level political dynamics of each hometown and destination mediate these effects, crucially shaping the consequences for communities and individuals.

I argue that each community migration pathway has three central moments: the *construction* on the sending side, its *re-construction* on the receiving end, and members’ *responses*, which go both ways. The *construction* of a community migration pathway is the process by which a rural village navigates the pressure to migrate and builds ties to a

¹¹ I use the word “freedom” out of fidelity to respondents’ own framing, in which they re-appropriate a multivalent concept to express the feeling of release from patriarchy and communal political traditions – but also from exploitative labor conditions and repressive laws in the US. However, I keep the word in quotation marks to highlight its complex and often perverse use in war-making efforts and propaganda by the US government, as well as in nativist groups’ assumption that migrants come to the United States “for freedom.”

particular destination site.¹² This process has two stages. First, village-level political practices, forged in the process of long-term rural development, shape members' responses to political economic changes and their reasons to migrate. For instance, members may begin to leave because their local political history has driven them into debt, or because it has encouraged their aspirations for social mobility. These interpretations select for different groups of migrants based on age, gender, and social class, and they shape whether the first migrants go to rural or urban areas.

Second, step-wise migration expands or limits migrants' choices among destinations and job sectors in the United States. While working as internal migrants, members build the job skills and external social networks that will determine their choices of jobs in the United States. Rural and urban experiences within Mexico also present distinct, gendered opportunities and hardships for women and men. As migrants react to these experiences, they reshape whether people view migration as feminine or masculine. In conjunction with the masculinization and feminization of farm and domestic work "from above," migrants' reactions to these experiences help shape whether early US pioneers are women or men. Thus, step-wise migration experiences have important implications for community-level patterns of migration to the United States.

In the second moment of a community migration pathway, *reconstruction*, migrants' experiences in their destinations configure their views of the United States, as well as their ongoing relationships with their hometowns. While scholars typically study immigration at the national level,¹³ in practice, US cities take dramatically different stances toward undocumented immigrants and interpret federal immigration policies in divergent ways. I argue that these local immigration control practices produce different mechanisms of political exclusion and control. Some receiving sites amplify the federal-level persecution of undocumented migrants, passing exclusive laws at the local level and using pretenses to pursue and deport migrants, leaving them terrified. However, in a less well-understood form of influence, other sites – often seen as "tolerant," "sanctuary" cities – also exercise control over undocumented migrants by differentiating between "good," deserving and "bad," criminal immigrants. The binary, I show, helps encourage complicity among those who try to be "good." In each case, the local-level logic of migration control shapes the ways migrant communities experience gender, class, ethnicity, and belonging. Thus, it reconstructs both the interplay between sending and receiving sites and members' ongoing patterns of departure and return.

In the third moment of a community migration pathway, each US-side logic fosters a *response*. Often, scholars assume that migrant communities' primary goal is to advance their material wellbeing. I, however, argue that members' central concern is to defend what Rosa and Maria both called their "freedom." While the term has problematic resonance with US government and nativist language, in Rosa and Maria's

¹² As is common with migrant communities, people from each village concentrated in particular destinations. Because most people migrate through social networks, migrants from a given village tend to have similar demographic characteristics (such as age, sex, civil status, etc.) and travel to similar places on similar schedules to do similar jobs (Massey et al. 1993; Kandel and Massey 2002; Massey, Durand and Malone 2002; Cohen 2004).

¹³ In the United States, immigration policy is federal jurisdiction.

usage, it refers to the feeling of autonomy, and to members’ capacity to shape their own lives (Sen 2001).¹⁴ As the long-time livelihoods of Mexican villages deteriorate and members “integrate” into a class of undocumented, flexible workers in the United States, people on both sides of the border begin to actively defend their wellbeing. I argue that it is not economic or cultural integration into the United States but instead *these* active, political struggles that transform gender relationships. They also transform sending communities, often using the hometowns as alternatives to the degradations they experience – or see friends experience – in the United States. Nevertheless, as the Preface suggests, each community’s vision of “alternative globalization” takes a distinct form, in relation to the local practices of power at home and away. In sum, as illustrated in the diagram below, a community migration pathway is a historical and geographical “feedback loop,” moving, over time, through construction, reconstruction, and response.

Diagram 1: The Community Migration Pathway



Map data copyright ©2014 Google, INEGI.

¹⁴ Most respondents used the word “*libertad*” (freedom), which has played a conflicted role in US policy and ideology. Out of fidelity, I keep their language, though I note that for some observers this goal may correspond more to the language of “dignity,” which has played prominent role in Mexican migrants’ movements for political rights.

Return and Departure

The histories of Retorno and La Partida manifest this process in analytically distinct forms, with one pathway structured around return and the other around departure – the first more circular and temporary, the second more linear and permanent. The logic of each pathway’s construction, reconstruction, and response revolves around this core character.

In Retorno, as I suggested in the Preface, the community migration pathway hinged around return. Its *construction* began in the sending village, where elites dispossessed the indigenous majority of land and resources, driving them into debt. Migrants began to leave as a stopgap measure, a fix for this debt. Within Mexico, their desperation made them susceptible to recruitment into farm work, which, thanks to the grueling conditions, pushed them to keep returning to the village. This was particularly true of women, who faced the added burden of gender abuse and household labor in the fields, dissuading them from further migration. In addition, the history of farm work constrained migrants’ networks and skills, so when they got to the United States, they remained trapped in farm work. Then, North County San Diego *reconstructed* the pattern. Its police practices, local policies, and employers took a criminalizing logic, making respondents feel powerless, excluded, and alienated from the United States. The experience entrenched Retorno’s social and economic marginality in the United States and its pattern of returning home. However, the core logic of this pathway – of exclusion and return – also set the conditions for Retorno’s *response*, enabling migrants to link their struggles with those of the home village, as both strove to avoid migrating and remake Retorno into a place where they could have better lives. Together, they waged a transnational movement to overthrow longstanding elites, redistribute resources, and demand support from the Mexican state. As they did, they drew women into politics.

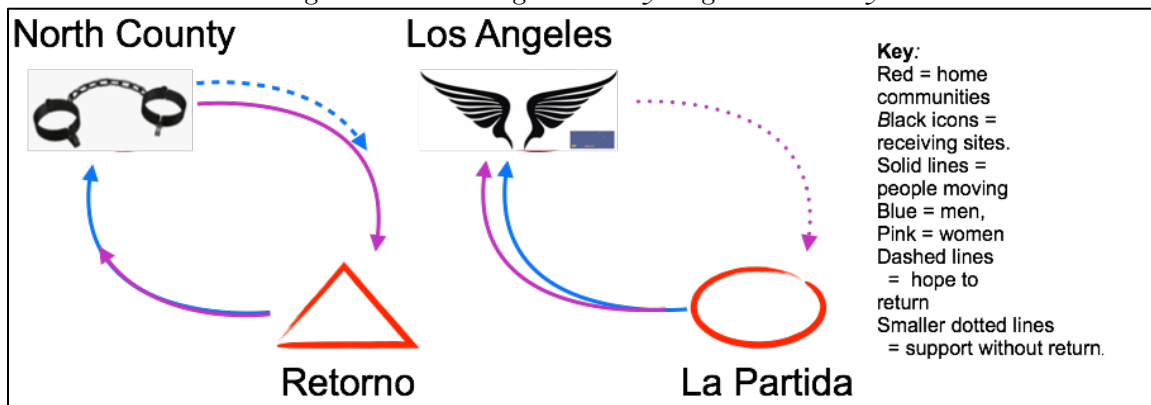
By contrast, La Partida’s community migration pathway was defined by departure, and by the distinction between migrants and their home village. On the eve of migration, La Partida practiced communitarianism,¹⁵ redistributing land and rotating members into local civic posts. In the moment of *construction*, the village’s egalitarian structure enabled them to reject farm jobs, while the need to serve political posts made them want more education, leading them to migrate to Oaxaca City and Mexico City. In turn, once migrants from La Partida began going to urban areas, they introduced consumerism and the possibility of escape from village patriarchy, sparking the aspirations of further migrants, particularly women. In urban Mexico and Oaxaca, members built diverse networks that gave them choices among destinations in the United States, particularly to move to Los Angeles. There, in the second moment, police, government institutions and employers *reconstructed* La Partida’s linear pattern by fostering a moralizing logic of immigration control. Migrants in LA felt judged as “good immigrants” or “bad immigrants” and believed that as long as they behaved well, they would be treated well. This gave them a sense of control over their fates and a feeling of belonging in the United States. Nevertheless, more perversely, it also fostered an *ideology* of assimilation, in which they not only appreciate the United States but also accepted its existing inequities. Here,

¹⁵ Typical of Oaxaca, as detailed in Chapter 1.

assimilation was not a goal *a priori* but instead became important in a particular receiving context, obscuring migrants’ ongoing political marginality.

This linear pathway sparked two, conflicting *responses*. Migrants, particularly women, felt a sense of “progress” in the US and wanted to use their newfound insights – as well as the income they had earned in LA – to “improve” (or modernize) the village. By contrast, those remaining in the hometown rejected the individualism they associated with the United States and worried that emigration threatened to undermine their longstanding values of communal equity, participation, and mutual aid. In answer, they waged a struggle to reinforce communal practices and remain aloof from outside intervention such as Mexican state and corporate “development.” The diagram below summarizes these two, contrasting pathways.¹⁶

Diagram 2: Contrasting Community Migration Pathways



Methods

To reconstruct these distinct, historical processes of migration and see the relationships both within and across communities, I undertook a relational, multi-sited, comparative ethnography. My data come from four field sites: the two home villages of Retorno and La Partida, and their primary destinations of North County San Diego and Los Angeles¹⁷; they combine two years of ethnographic observation, 104 in-depth interviews, surveys, and archival research. Qualitative methods highlight the relationships within communities as well as their interactions with US side institutions. Therefore, they were the best tools to understand how migrant communities make meaning of the erosion of rural life and their social and political exclusion in the United States. In contrast to survey-based studies, which are often confined to pre-defined categories and variables, qualitative research highlights logics that are understood by migrant communities but maybe not intuitive to researchers (Mahler and Pessar 2006).

¹⁶ In the diagram, pink represents women and blue represents men. Solid lines are for movement; dashed lines for the desire to move, and dotted lines for money sent back. In Retorno, the red triangle reflects hierarchy and the shackles the feeling of “slavery,” while in La Partida the oval represents equity and the wings “freedom.”

¹⁷ While small numbers of migrants in each case went to other parts of California and the United States – particularly among migrants from Retorno, some of whom moved seasonally among farm jobs – I focus on the destination where the majority of migrants from each village were concentrated.

To understand the politics of migration and development in each community, I conducted 21 months of participant observation and in-depth interviews from 2009 to 2011, across the four sites. I lived in each village and destination for five months, and while there I participated in everything from mundane errands to meals to festivals. In the process, I conducted hundreds of informal conversations, as well as 104 in-depth interviews, 28 in Retorno, 23 in San Diego County, 28 in La Partida, and 25 in Los Angeles. Because I am concerned about communities as a whole, I did not sample respondents as independent representatives of their communities; rather, after learning about each community's history, I selected key informants – men and women, migrants and non-migrants – who would bring in distinct perspectives and help me build an account of the history of each community as a whole, including its internal tensions. Of these respondents, 68% had ever migrated to the United States and 57% were women.¹⁸ Although I occasionally mention the percent of respondents who share a particular viewpoint; in fact, I do not see the members of these communities as individual, equivalent “units” that can be aggregated, but instead as distinct actors in a common process.

I also used survey data and prior studies to complement my qualitative findings. The statistics I mention come from representative surveys conducted in 2011 in each hometown, and from snowball surveys in each destination. In the case of Retorno, I used data collected by the Mexican Migration Field Research Program of the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at the University of California, San Diego. In 2011, this program conducted a census of all adult residents of Retorno (N = 717, including 190 returned migrants) and a snowball survey¹⁹ of its migrants in North County San Diego, California (N = 121), gathering information through family members on 1,924 additional members.²⁰ I then conducted a second survey in La Partida using the same questions, in a randomly selected sample of 121 households and a snowball sample of 51 households in the United States, also gathering family information on 686 additional individuals including 317 past or present migrants. Meanwhile, secondary sources and historical archives helped me triangulate respondents' historical accounts with concrete dates and figures. In this, I drew on a wealth of anthropological and historical studies of these and

¹⁸ Respondents ranged in age from 20 to 70, average 46; 57% were women; and 62% were married. Though they averaged 6-7 years of education in each case, less than half had completed primary school. Respondents in California had been there an average of 17 years, 95% crossing the border undocumented and 70% remaining so as of 2011.

¹⁹ The MMFRP and I both constructed the US-side snowball samples using contact information provided during these surveys. While snowball samples may tend to produce skewed groups of respondents, they offer one of the only means to survey undocumented migrants, given their precarious positions (Cornelius 1982; Massey 1987).

²⁰ I cross-registered at UC San Diego from 2010 to 2011, enabling me to participate in conducting this survey and have access to the data produced.

nearby villages.²¹ I also conducted archival research at the National Agrarian Registry (RAN) and the National Institute for Statistics and Geography (INEGI) as well as in the municipal-level archives of each village. These data made it possible to extend my analysis across both history and geographic space.

The Articulation of Development, Gender, and Migration

The analysis of “community migration pathways” is distinct from other research in three core ways, each of which is both theoretical and methodological. First, my approach is *relational*. Sociological studies often divide development, gender, and migration into different subfields, as if they are independent phenomena that can “impact” each other. For instance, scholars examine how migration impacts development, or how gender shapes migration, but not how development, gender, and migration mutually constitute each other in particular geographic sites, in varying ways. Often, such “impact models” (as critiqued by Hart 2002) focus either on the receiving end or on the sending end, rather than examining how relationships between them get made. By contrast, I emphasize the *articulation* of these processes, meaning both the interrelationships (or joints) between them, and the particular expressions they take on under different local circumstances (Hart 2007).

The concept of articulation is particularly important for understanding how the meanings of gender, class, and race evolve in relation to each other during the process of migration (Massey 1994; McClintock 1995). Following Joan Scott (1988), I define gender not as the *differences* between men and women but as the masculine and feminine ways people *understand* practices, not only in the household but also in politics. These gendered understandings are central to any community migration pathway, and as Scott suggests, they change over time. Gender also intertwines with ethnicity. While one might be tempted to ask whether Retorno and La Partida diverged because of inherent “cultural” differences between Mixtecs and Zapotecs, I suggest that the divergence between the two says more about the process of racialization, that is, the ways migrants come to *feel* a sense of belonging and/or exclusion in particular places (*cf.* Jiménez 2008). In this, it is useful to refer to Stuart Hall (1980), who notes that race is a *specific* set of political and ideological practices, intertwined with class in locally-situated, rather than top-down ways. Yet, Joan Scott said little about race, and Stuart Hall little about gender. Theories of “intersectionality” (Crenshaw 1991) have attempted to remedy the isolation of such lines of difference, highlighting the overlapping nature of gender, class, and race. Yet, they tend to portray these lines of difference as external to local history and additive with each other. By contrast, the concept of articulation draws attention to how the meanings of gender, race, and class emerge in particular locales, in relation to each other.

²¹ In Retorno, in particular, in depth studies by Laura Velasco Ortiz (2002; 2005; 2005b) and Charlyne Curiel (2011) were invaluable, along with work on Mixtec migrant communities in Mexico and the US (including Retorno) by Bonnie Bade (1993), Gaspar Rivera-Salgado (1999), Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado (2004), and Konane Martinez (2005), among others. While I do not know of other studies of La Partida specifically, several studies of neighboring villages in the same district (Villa Alta) proved informative, particularly those by Laura Nader (1991) in the 1970s, Lane Hirabayashi (1993) in the 1980s, Salvador Aquino (2009), Alejandra Aquino Moreschi (2010), and Holly Worthen (2012).

Methodologically, relational analysis requires ethnographic and historical study of the *interactions* within a community, first locally, then across its multiple, transnational sites, and in its engagement with surrounding political structures. In most migration research, scholars either aggregate individuals and households (as in demographic studies), or focus on the macro-level state and political economy. By contrast, I examine how relationships within each site *mediate* the broader political economy. I argue that the community, as the primary social, political, and economic unit that organizes life in rural Mexico as well as migrant networks, and shapes their lives in the US, is analytically critical to migration.²² Looking at particular communities makes it possible to understand how on-the-ground practices give migration different meanings in each place. Meanwhile, analyzing the interplay between sending and receiving shows how development and migration form part of the same historical process. While this approach shares some features with “transnational” analyses of flows of people, money, and ideas (e.g., Levitt 2001; Smith 2006), I focus instead on *relationships*, illustrating how the pathway as a whole gets shaped, even by people and things that “stay.”

The second innovation of the “community migration pathways” concept is that it understands migration as a *dynamic process*: a history that changes over time. Rather than seeing immigration as an event, I trace the histories through which movement begins. And, rather than seeing migration as linear – or a form of “progress” – I look at the interactions between sending and receiving sides, as both get transformed by their members. Methodologically, this means that instead of asking the traditional questions of “Why do people leave?” or “How (how much) do they integrate into the United States?” I focus on how particular kinds of interactions between Mexico and the United States *emerge*, and how they *change* over time. To do so, I supplement ethnographic observation with historical accounts.

Finally, the study of “community migration pathways” highlights that migration - rather than being a single or aggregate process - takes multiple forms. While this process is structured and constrained by macroeconomic and national-level political processes, it takes shape at the local level. Therefore, even villages as apparently similar as Retorno and La Partida can diverge in dramatic ways. Methodologically, this means that the study of migration must be *comparative*, juxtaposing places we would expect to be similar in order to highlight the conditions and political arrangements that send them down distinct paths. In this dissertation, I focus on communities in Oaxaca and receiving cities in Southern California because within these apparently similar sending and receiving sites, neighboring locales varied dramatically, thanks to the isolated political development of Oaxaca’s mountain villages and the polarization of Southern California cities. While these contrasts may be more dramatic than those of other nearby communities, they draw our attention to the important ways on-the-ground practices and relationships mediate the structural conditions of migration.

²² While the community is unusually salient in Oaxaca, it also provides means of referring to the institutions around which people in many rural areas organize their political and economic activity, even in other contexts.

The Contrasts of Departures and Returns

At each of the three moments of a community migration pathway – construction, reconstruction, response – the *contrasts* between different sites, specifically Retorno and La Partida, compel us to rethink key questions in the scholarly literature. In particular, I focus on three questions: First, in the moment of *construction*, how do hometown political dynamics channel migrant-sending communities into different destinations? Second, in the moment of *reconstruction*, how do migrants’ destinations entrench their political silence, as well as their migration paths? And third, in the moment of *response*: how do migration pathways shape the segmented subjectivities through which these cross-border communities understand and defend their “freedom”? While the dissertation traces each community migration pathway in turn, I use the remainder of the introduction to juxtapose Retorno and La Partida at each of these three moments, illustrating how their contrasts contribute to scholarly debates. Focusing on the importance of relationships, dynamics, and contrasts, I begin with the moment of construction and then move on to the moments of reconstruction and response.

Construction

The contrasts between Retorno and La Partida at the moment of *construction* illustrate how local political dynamics channel villages into different destinations and foster distinct, gendered patterns of movement to (and from) the United States. I find that in Retorno, the roots of temporary migration lay in the local history of dispossession and debt. In the early 20th century, the village was dominated by a clientelistic elite who twisted its ostensibly “communal” political structure to their own benefit, demanded land and tributes from the indigenous sharecroppers, and drove the poor into debt. When recruiters came to Retorno from Northern Mexican agro-industries, these sharecroppers were vulnerable, so migration became class-based, selecting for the poor. Working on Northern Mexican farms, in turn, blocked the migrants from building broader social networks or going to school, so that even when they went on to the United States, they remained limited to farm work. What’s more, because the conditions on Northern Mexican farms were so horrific, they pushed migrants to return to the very village that had excluded them. This was particularly true for women, who faced a double burden as farm workers and mothers. By refusing to continue migrating, the women helped create a masculine pattern of migration on to the United States.

By contrast, I show, La Partida’s political structure was more communitarian, enabling members to pursue their aspirations and move to urban areas and producing linear migration. Historically, La Partida aggressively defended itself against outside incursion, particularly its traditions of political participation, communal landholding, and redistribution. As of the mid-20th century almost everyone had enough to eat, so when recruited to miserable jobs on Northern Mexican farms, they repeatedly refused. Meanwhile, the village’s increasing political and economic interface with nearby urban areas encouraged members to aspire for more education and higher standards of living. This was particularly true for young women, who saw urban life as a way out of male domination, producing a young, female set of migrants. As members went to urban areas, they built skills and made diverse sets of friends that – particularly among women – would

give them multiple options and enable them to be selective about their entry in to the United States.

How would existing research explain these differences? Scholars have long known that migrant communities vary in their destinations, economic niches, patterns of movement, and class and gender selectivity; yet, the origins of these patterns remain unclear. Existing studies of “why people leave” focus on individual or family-level decisions, employer recruitment, or state-level policies (Sassen 1990; Zolberg 1999). While some scholars have looked into the importance of “context of exit” (Portes and Bach 1985; Fitzgerald 2009; Rodriguez 2010), they focus on the nation-state, such as the political differences between Mexico and Cuba that produced labor migration from the former but political exile from the latter (Portes and Borocz 1989). Meanwhile, studies of individual migrants heavily emphasize the importance of social networks (Massey 1987b; 1990; Massey et al. 1987). Most migrants, these studies explain, come to their destinations through others from their home communities. Yet, these theories say little about the material and political histories through which each community builds the *external* networks that root its migration process in the first place to cities or farms.

Meanwhile, most scholars attribute gender differences in migration either to direct recruitment of men or women, or to “levels of patriarchy” on the sending side, as if members’ understandings of whether migration was “masculine” or “feminine” preceded the act of moving itself (Massey, Fischer and Capoferro 2006). In the Mexican case, scholars have often attributed the predominance of male migration to the highly patriarchal culture and the US government’s recruitment of Mexican male farm workers in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s for the so-called “Bracero” Program.²³ Meanwhile, Mexican women have been framed as associational migrants, on the premise that most come to the US as dependents their male relatives (Cerrutti and Massey 2001). *Retorno*’s gender arrangements echo this pattern; yet they show that the masculine character of migration was not predetermined but instead got made in relation to particular class-based experiences on Mexican farms. *La Partida*’s pattern, meanwhile, defies existing literature, further helping to show how migration came to be seen as feminine, in relation to the particular, egalitarian class dynamics of the sending town.

I argue that the local-level political history and practices of sending communities help explain how their members are affected by state-level policies and employer recruitment, how their migrant networks emerge, and why they come to understand migration in distinct, gendered ways. I contend that hierarchical and egalitarian social structures, developed through each community’s historical relationship to outsiders and the state, condition members’ reasons for leaving their home villages, either by depriving them of resources and driving them into debt, or by encouraging their aspirations. These understandings shape the form of migration as it emerges. That is, they condition whether villagers are susceptible to recruitment for the most grueling migrant jobs (farm work); how they self-select by class, gender, and age; how they *understand* these lines of

²³ Derived from the Spanish word for “arm” (*brazo*), “bracero” referred to “strong arms” or manual laborers. The program emerged during World War II to cover labor shortages and continued until it was debilitated by worker strikes.

difference; and whether their first forays as migrants are to cities or farms. These first forays, I suggest, expand or limit each community's networks and human capital, enabling those in Mexican cities to opt into cities in the United States and confining those in Mexican farm work to remain in farm work across the border. They may also reinforce temporary and permanent patterns, as farm workers face misery and return home while urban migrants enjoy comforts and stay. Finally, they re-gender migration, as women and men attempt to navigate the class constraints and possibilities they experience as migrants.

This reframing highlights that even though we might assume that sending community political structures get degraded or left behind in the process of migration, in fact, they shape this process, with long-term repercussions for migrants' choices and wellbeing abroad. Second, whereas we tend to think of "the culture of migration" as a question of the quantitative *prevalence* of migration in a given community (Kandel and Massey 2002), this culture also has distinct, qualitative dimensions that define what migration means. Third, step-wise experience may play an important historical and analytical role in mediating the connections between hometowns and international destinations, entrenching patterns such as temporary or permanent movement but also transforming them, as in the effect of driving women to go back to Retorno rather than persist in equally degrading farm jobs in the United States.

Reconstruction

Second, comparing the *reconstruction* of the community migration pathways of Retorno and La Partida from the US side helps shed light on how migrants' destinations contribute to their ongoing patterns of departure and return, by shaping the experience of exclusion and exploitation in the United States. In North County San Diego, as Rosa Delgado's story suggests, migrants from Retorno faced a *criminalizing* "deportation regime," provoking not only terror but also a sense of exclusion, withdrawal, and alienation. Because the police arbitrarily targeted undocumented migrants for deportation, respondents felt they had no control over their fates. Rather, treated "like slaves," they felt alienated from the United States. This was particularly true for women, many of whom were the last to arrive and depended on their male counterparts for information and mobility. These experiences in North County reinforced the pattern of return, with women leading the way. Even migrants who did not return right away continued thinking of themselves as temporary, "grinning and bearing it" until they could go home. This mindset also supported the separation of – and interdependence between – male breadwinners in the United States and their wives and children in Mexico.

By contrast, La Partida's migrants experienced life in Los Angeles in terms of a *moralizing* logic, in which the police, social services, and employers appeared to mark them as either "bad" (criminal, lazy, or dependent) or "good" (law abiding, hard working, or self sufficient). This binary gave migrants a sense of agency and motivated them to perform and even aspire to "good" behavior. To the extent they felt rewarded and affirmed for their efforts, respondents in LA identified with the United States. It was in this particular context – while migrants "played the game" of being good immigrants – that they themselves adopted integration as a goal and that they came to view the US as the land of "progress" and "opportunity." Women, who were more frequently framed as

“good” (while police tended to target men), were especially prone to compare the United States favorably with their home village, settle in California, and perpetuate a linear migration pathway. Nevertheless, given that most remained undocumented, these migrants’ acceptance of the integration narrative helped obscure their ongoing exclusion. At worst, this attitude even fostered an ideology of self-degradation, in which “good” immigrants remained humble, refusing to protest or demand the human rights they continued to be denied.

An array of studies suggests that such differences are widespread, and that undocumented migrants’ experiences in the United States can vary dramatically, with distinct political effects. On one hand, scholars show that some undocumented migrants come to feel *abject* (meaning discarded or rejected): they distrust the government, fear the police, and remain silent about their exploitation and residential segregation, such that they feel “against” the law (Bumiller 1988; Calavita 1998; Ewick and Silbey 1998; Nielsen 2000; Walter, Borgois and Loinaz 2004; Holmes 2007; Chavez 2008). However, other undocumented groups view themselves as *subjects* (meaning agents or members), construct a sense of belonging, and in some cases go so far as to consider themselves “with the law,” such that they feel protected by the current system and advocate for inclusion within it (Coutin 2000; Seif 2004; Abrego 2008; Cordero-Guzmán et al. 2008). In conjunction, recent studies of migrant women and men note that their experiences of being undocumented in the United States and the changes in their household gender relationships vary dramatically with the local context (Dreby and Schmalzbauer 2013). What explains the differences?

While there is a vast scholarship on effects of “being undocumented” and the political arrangements that keep the system of migrant “illegality” in place, neither set of theories accounts for the *multiple* logics this process may take. Research on immigrant incorporation frames undocumented migration as an individual “condition” that impedes upward economic mobility, political participation, and social integration in the United States (see Menjívar and Abrego 2012 for a review of research attesting to such effects), creating a particular form of “segmented assimilation” (Portes and Zhou 2003). In answer, others have drawn attention to the important role of the state, or what Nicholas De Genova (2004) calls the “legal production of migrant illegality.” These scholars argue that by defining Mexican migrants as “illegal immigrants,” the federal government enforces their disenfranchisement, social exclusion, and poverty, inflicting a form of violence (Ngai 2004; Menjívar and Abrego 2012). Most attribute this effect to one of two mechanisms: either a structural mechanism, in which state exclusion reinforces family separation, so that migrants can work for a lower wage while maintaining their families at a lower cost of living back in Mexico (Burawoy 1976) *or* a subjective mechanism, in which state repression produces feelings of fear (Gonzales and Chavez 2012; Menjívar and Abrego 2012). Nearly all remain silent on gender.

While confirming the importance of political exclusion, I argue that the effects of exclusionary laws must be understood in terms of their local *implementation*. In a context where states and cities have increasingly taken immigration control into their own hands (see Varsanyi 2010), I contend there are in fact *multiple*, different logics of power at work in the US control of undocumented immigrants. In a given US city or state, police,

employers, and other institutions put into practice the federal mandate to criminalize undocumented migrants, either amplifying policing and persecution or protecting migrants and refusing to execute federal orders.

I find that their practices tend towards two distinct logics. One is the *criminalizing* logic described in most existing literature: it marks undocumented migrants as violators of the law, merely for having crossed the border. However, there is a second logic at work as well, which I call *moralizing*. The latter divides “bad,” criminal immigrants from “good,” deserving ones. It reinforces this division discursively, as well as by providing services, protection, and support – apparent “rewards” – to those migrants whom institutions deem “good.” I argue that migrants’ feelings of belonging, their desires to integrate in the US or return to Mexico, and their senses of their own ethnicity and class are shaped by the predominant logic of power in their particular destination. More criminalizing destinations, such as North County San Diego, make migrants feel powerless and excluded. Meanwhile, moralizing destinations like LA give migrants a sense of control and a feeling that they belong. There, migrants *consent* to the political and economic system that excludes them. For undocumented migrants, “integration” is not the inherent goal of the process of migration. Indeed, in the criminalizing regime, members reject integration altogether. In the moralizing logic, meanwhile, the *idea* of integration forms part of an ideology, in which acceptance of US laws and appreciation for the recognition of “good” immigrants encourages migrants to acquiesce in their own exclusion. While that ideology does correspond to material benefits and women’s feelings of increased autonomy, it also ties those relative benefits to a way of thinking that may, ultimately, help to set limits on migrants in the long-term. In sum, while both logics perpetuate migrants’ marginality, the first does so through coercion, and the second through the combination of coercion and consent.

The criminalizing and moralizing logics are also gendered in distinct ways. Criminalizing regimes, on the one hand, reinforce women’s isolation and subjection to their male counterparts. By keeping undocumented migrant women in terror, criminalizing regimes isolate them within their homes, leaving them dependent on men who may abuse them and cutting them off from supportive social networks or state protection (Quereshi 2010). By contrast, moralizing regimes tend to masculinize “bad immigrant” criminality and feminize “good immigrant” subordination. While more moralizing areas tend to offer protection and support to women victims of domestic violence, this reinforces the idea that women are “victims” of their “criminal” male counterparts. The binary categories can tie women’s empowerment in the household to acceptance of their marginal status in the economy and politics of the United States; they can even foster *appreciation* for that country. And, they can pit women against men.

Response

Finally, juxtaposing Retorno and La Partida’s *responses* to migration highlights how the logics of power in US receiving sites interact with the ongoing evolution of members’ hometowns to produce distinct political reactions, as members struggle to sustain their communities, their rights, and their senses of “freedom.” In Retorno, criminalization, interdependence, and the pattern of return led migrants to identify with their home

village, transfer new ideas to that arena, and ally with those at home to restructure the community. From North County San Diego migrants (often men) collaborated with those based in the village (often women) to build a transnational movement to overthrow the village's elites and demand greater access to and distribution of state resources. As they did, they merged political identities around class, gender, ethnicity, and migrant status and linked their criminalization in the United States to the ongoing exclusion of indigenous communities by the Mexican state (Kearney 2000). Their movement fundamentally restructured Retorno, giving women and the poor new access to political voice – as well as to state development resources. Nevertheless, the new social supports fragmented their cohesion, exposing them to ongoing risks of corruption and inequity.

Meanwhile, in La Partida, migrants' "pro-assimilation" attitudes pushed many to abandon their hometown, though some built a hometown association to support and "improve" their village and bring it the kind of progress they associated with the United States. Back in Mexico, however, villagers felt that emigration threatened their communal, indigenous values, and that migrants were greedy and individualistic. To protect their way of life, the villagers codified community participation and insisted that migrants contribute their fair share. Their response sparked tense battles between migrants and non-migrants over the meaning of equality. In particular, these fights played out in the arena of gender, as "liberated" migrants sent support for women in the village, while those left behind remained wary of the imposition of Western "rights," in a framework historically defined by shared responsibilities and communal obligations. As La Partida reinvented its communitarian "traditions," it also distanced itself from state development programs, which threatened to privatize its land and fragment its people. Still, it remained ambivalent where gender was concerned.

Scholars concerned with the relationship between migration and hometown development have focused almost entirely on the effect of "flows" from migrants' destinations back to their hometowns, sometimes referred to as "migrant transnationalism" (Waldinger 2013). In particular, they have debated the implications of remittances, some arguing that the resources migrants send home tend to be used for consumption and promote dependency (Cornelius 1990; Díaz-Briquets and Weintraub 1991) while others contend that "migradollars" boost the Mexican economy and have indirect multiplier effects (Durand, Parrado and Massey 1996; Portes 2007). Others highlight the "social remittance" of ideas (Levitt 2001; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010), debating whether migrants help democratize their hometowns, such as when they "send back" democratic practices or women's rights (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999; Fox and Bada 2008). Given that gender scholars often identify "women's empowerment" with the United States, they often use hometowns as a "control," as if gender there is static and women "left behind" (see critique by Archambault 2010). Those who do examine how gender changes in migrant-sending communities tend to suggest that women's leverage comes through taking on new burdens in men's absence, or – once again – from the "social remittance" of egalitarian gender ideas from the "outside" (Levitt 2001). I argue that even though transnationalism research begins to rectify the home-away divide, its focus on flows remains too narrow.

Instead, I contend that the very *meaning* of “development” in Mexican villages – that is, the kinds of social change and/or sustainability they pursue – reflects their particular relationships to the United States. Community migration pathways produce distinct political struggles. First, the interactions between migrants and non-migrants can forge different forms of transnationalism, such as interdependence, as in Retorno, or division, as in La Partida. Second, each community’s *understanding* of migration affects its priorities back home. Thus, Retorno’s feelings of exclusion from the United States and its migrants’ desire to return home kept the village focused on economic sustainability. By contrast, La Partida migrants’ apparent “integration” in the US sparked concern in the village about *cultural* degradation. These priorities, in turn, shaped the ways each village interacted with Mexican state development projects, seeking financial support in the former, and autonomy in the latter. The contrast between Retorno and La Partida illustrates the importance not only of the *quantity* remitted but also the *quality* – or character – of migration.

Meanwhile, the *similarities* between Retorno and La Partida, make it clear that sending communities play a key political role as alternatives to the United States. Much research about migrants’ politics has focused on their activism on the receiving end (Voss and Bloemraad 2011). Yet, a transnational lens shows how politics cross borders. Migrants who appear politically “withdrawn” from the US vantage point may displace active political engagement to their hometowns, while those who appear most “integrated,” as in La Partida, provoke political reactions from their hometown counterparts, even when they themselves are not involved in formal cross-border activities. When scholars divide sending and receiving sides, or even when they focus on things that “flow,” they obscure this deeper relationships, in which sending communities get politicized *vis-à-vis* the US.

In both Retorno and La Partida, the *politics* of migration – and not just its demographic effects – transformed the social structure of the community, particularly its political practices and gender relationships. While Oaxaca’s “indigenous traditions” of participatory politics are often seen as historical legacies, in fact, they changed dramatically in the context of migration, as Retorno democratized, while La Partida reinvented its communalism. Likewise, while almost all studies of gender and migration presume that patriarchal histories preclude gender change and the impetus for equity comes from *outside*, here, it came from *within*. Not only were politics expressed in *terms* of gender, as Joan Scott (1988) argues, but new gender understandings also emerged in the process of doing politics. Women became politically active in the context of a struggle to sustain and democratize their communities. Men, also counter-intuitively, collaborated with women, encouraging their engagement as part of a broader strategy to defend the ways of life they had reason to value.

To illuminate the interconnections between particular sending and receiving sites, the rest of the dissertation traces the community migration pathways of Retorno and La Partida. First, in *Chapter 1* I set the stage for Retorno and La Partida’s migration to Southern California by laying out the political economic transformations that shook Mexico and the United States at the end of the 20th century. I then proceed to the empirical findings. The first half follows the historical emergence and dynamics of

Retorno/North County, oriented around temporary migration and return. I begin with the construction of the pathway in *Chapter 2*, then I examine its reconstruction in North County San Diego in *Chapter 3*, and in *Chapter 4*, I consider how the pathway of return sparked a transnational political response. In the second half, I turn to La Partida/Los Angeles, whose relationship was defined by “departures,” both of migrants from their hometown and of those who stayed in the village from those who left. Again, I follow the historical construction of the migration pathway in *Chapter 5*, the reconstruction of migrants’ pro-assimilation relationship to the US in *Chapter 6*, and, in *Chapter 7*, the migrant hometown association and the village’s communitarian political response. I conclude by considering the ramifications of these historically evolving pathways and gendered political struggles.

Chapter 1

“The Border Crossed Us” Oaxaca, California, and the Production of Migration

In the United States, popular media often describe undocumented Mexican migration in terms of “waves of illegals” who “cross the border.” The formulation makes migration appear to be driven by the migrants themselves, who “violate” America’s borders along with its laws. Yet, a broad sociological literature shows that Mexican migration to the United States – particularly the dramatic rise in the number of undocumented migrants living in the US in the 1990s and 2000s – has been propelled by a combination of US government policies and US-promoted liberalization on the Mexican side (Burawoy 1976; Sassen 1990; Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). In the context of ongoing economic transformations, these policies undermined the rural subsistence economy of Mexican villages and converted their members into a vast, disenfranchised, low-wage workforce in the United States. In short, as one immigrant rights slogan puts it: “We didn’t cross the border. The border [that is, US policy] crossed us.”

This chapter traces how, in the final decades of the 20th century, US and Mexican policy created a “system” of undocumented migration (Burawoy 1976). I begin on the Mexican side, explaining how, from the 1970s through the 1990s, the marketization of Mexican policy around farm subsidies and land ownership debilitated rural livelihoods, at the same time that the state began to invest in industrialized agriculture. Meanwhile, on the US side, employers started recruiting Mexican workers to meet growing demand for fresh fruits and vegetables and to fill low-wage service jobs. Yet, the United States government began to shift from relative disregard for undocumented migration to policies that increasingly marked migrants as “illegal.” Not only did it reinforce the border, a symbolic boundary line, but it also dramatically increased internal policing and deportation, particularly in the 2000s, bringing the threat of expulsion into migrants’ daily lives. These policies, in dialogue with growing battles between Mexico’s political parties, would shape ongoing state development on the sending side.

Indigenous migration from Oaxaca to California is particularly emblematic of this process and therefore an excellent site to examine it in more depth. The Oaxacan experience epitomizes the transformations in both political economy and culture. Indigenous communities, long exploited, excluded, and racialized within Mexican society, are the poorest subgroup in the nation. Thus, they were particularly hard-hit by economic restructuring. Yet at the same time, the villages’ isolation allowed them to sustain collective political practices throughout the 20th century, dramatically distinct from more individualist, Western systems. The degradation of these practices dramatizes the political clash that attends economic restructuring. Meanwhile, Southern California has been a paradigm of immigration control since the 1980s. Its long history as a home to undocumented migrants makes it an excellent place to study the long-term effects of migrant “illegality.”

Yet what makes both Oaxaca and California particularly analytically useful is that

within each region, communities and cities vary dramatically in their political composition. Historically, once again due to their isolation, Oaxacan villages developed local-level social structures that differed widely even in nearby towns. Meanwhile, the cities of Southern California diverged in their approaches to policing undocumented migrants – with towns in North County San Diego like Escondido and Vista becoming notorious for their restrictionism, while Los Angeles was the core of the immigrant rights movement. This deviation, which began in Southern California as early as the 1980s, prefigured a growing polarization in city-level approaches to immigration control across the United States. On both ends, these variations help shed light on the ways local arrangements mediate the political economy of US migration, producing distinct articulations of development, gender, and migration.

The Marketization of Rural Mexico

The seeds of the contemporary Mexico-US migration system were planted in Mexico in the 1960s and 70s, as the nation's oligopolistic ruling party, the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), sought to “modernize” Mexico by withdrawing support from small farms and investing in the large-scale growth of industry and agro-industry. For most of the century, Mexico's small farmers had subsisted on un-irrigated land thanks to government price supports for 11 basic crops (Taylor et al. 2005). Yet, starting in the 1970s, the Mexican government – with US counsel – began to deregulate agriculture, withdraw farm subsidies,²⁴ and open its markets to mass-produced US food (Singer and Massey 1998; Gereffi, Spener and Bair 2002; Martin 2003; Harvey 2004; Light 2008). Then, in August 1982, thanks to a combination of overspending and a drop in world oil prices (on which Mexico relied), the country faced debt crisis and devalued its currency 100%, cutting real wages in half (Zabin 1992). Led by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and “technocrats” from the United States (Babb 2001), the financial bailout and subsequent structural adjustment ended Mexico's protectionism, reduced public sector spending, and eliminated price supports for basic crops including corn (White, Salas and Gammage 2003). The reforms dramatically lowered the prices at which farmers could sell their produce and worsened poverty nationwide, particularly in rural areas, rapidly degrading rural villages that Mexican leaders explicitly considered “backward”²⁵ (Fox and Aranda 1996).

Then, in the early 1990s, Mexico extended these market reforms, privatizing the banking system, selling off government firms, deregulating markets, and repealing Mexican villages' communal rights to their land. In the 1930s, in the wake of the Revolution, Mexico had instituted sweeping land reforms, granting communal land tenure, or *ejidos*, to large numbers of rural villages. Yet in 1992 President Salinas de Gortari reformed this provision of the constitution (Article 27), permitting the private sale of land in such areas for the first time and fueling the privatization of 50% of Mexican

²⁴ From 1977 to 1979, the federal government reduced its support for basic grains from 85% to 76% of its 1960 value (Fox 1992), failing, to match its support for corn farmers to rapid inflation.

²⁵ In 1992, Luis Tellez, the Mexican undersecretary of agriculture, suggested that the rural proportion of the Mexican population would and should fall from 26% to 16% within a decade or two. He argued that if agriculture represented only 7-8% of the GDP, only that percent of the population should live in rural areas (Barkin 2003).

land (Fox 1995). In conjunction, de Gortari created government agencies expressly dedicated to urging communal landholders to title their lands, that is, to privatize.²⁶ Then, in 1994, de Gortari negotiated the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Canada, which would further decrease trade barriers and tariffs and allow for the import of US corn, still subsidized by Washington, and therefore much cheaper than now un-subsidized Mexican corn.²⁷ From 1993 to 1995, real prices for corn in Mexico dropped 26%. By 2003, subsistence farmers in villages like Retorno and La Partida earned a mere 11% of what they had a just decade before. Thus, working at a loss, nearly a million rural households stopped growing corn for sale (Stephen 2007). For their own consumption, it was now cheaper to buy imported corn from the United States than to grow it themselves.

Indigenous Oaxacan Villages: The Perfect Victims

Given their socioeconomic marginality and heavy dependence on rain-fed, subsistence corn farming, indigenous, rural villages in Oaxaca were the perfect victims of these efforts to “modernize.” Located at the southern convergence of Mexico’s two massive mountain ranges, the state of Oaxaca has an extremely rugged topography, particularly in the regions of the Mixteca (Retorno) and the Sierra Norte (La Partida), and 58% of its people consider themselves indigenous (INEGI 2010). Driven into remote, mountain villages during the Spanish conquest, groups like the Zapotecs and Mixtecs were historically neglected and exploited by Mexico’s industrialized North. As of 1970, before large-scale US migration began, up to half of the indigenous population was illiterate and 73% of the state lived in subsistence farming villages of 2500 people or less, few of them accessible by road. Meanwhile, just as subsistence production crashed, the indigenous population boomed, producing land shortages that added fuel to the fire (Rivera-Salgado 1999). To this day, 90% of Oaxaca’s agrarian population has incomes below subsistence level, more than 60% live in homes with dirt floors, and most families making a living through 1) remittances, 2) tourism, and 3) the government welfare program *Oportunidades*, in that order (Novo 2004).

Indigenous villages in Oaxaca are also interesting because through the 20th century most of them had participatory political systems based on mutual obligation, rather than Western-style rights. Because these communities were so remote and their land of relatively low value, both colonial intervention and postcolonial state presence were more limited there than elsewhere in Mexico, often relying on a tribute system run by local strongmen (Kearney 1998; Chance 1989; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Rivera-Salgado 1999). To facilitate this indirect control, colonizers – and then the Mexican state

²⁶ He called these programs, shrewdly, the “Program for the Certification of Communal Rights” (*Programa de Certificación de Derechos Comunes*, or PROCECOM) and the “Program for the Certification of Ejido Rights” (*Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales*, or PROCEDE). PROCECOM’s interactions with Retorno and La Partida are discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 7.

²⁷ De Gortari implemented two major programs purportedly to offset the impact of restructuring: PRONASOL, which provided funds for infrastructure projects like drinking water and paving roads, if the recipients paid for or supplied the necessary labor, and PROCAMPO, which offered farmers \$100 per hectare to switch from corn to more lucrative crops – even though by that time corn farming was already a shadow of what it had been (Fox 1995).

– organized the indigenous people into self-governing municipalities, dividing communities from each other but also giving each one relative autonomy to run its own politics (Wolf 1957; Greenberg 1995).²⁸

While implementation varies widely across villages, as of 2011, 73% of Oaxaca's 570 municipalities, including Retorno and La Partida, operated according to customary indigenous law, in a system referred to as *Usos y Costumbres*, or "Ways and Customs."²⁹ Whereas contemporary Western governments define citizenship in terms of inalienable individual rights, in this system – at least in its paradigmatic form – members *earn* rights through participation and the fulfillment of mutual obligations (Kearney 1998; Hernández-Díaz 2007; Stephen 2007). In a prototypical village, all adult married men are required to serve the community. Their obligations include 1) attending community assemblies, a direct, democratic body in which all major village-level decisions get made, 2) participating in communal labor known as *tequios*, to do public works projects ranging from infrastructure construction and upkeep to tree planting and 3) serving in unpaid civic posts in the village government.³⁰ Men rotate into these posts every few years when nominated by the assembly. Starting at the lowest ranks, such as policeman, they move up a hierarchy towards community president over the course of their lives, building status as they rise in the ranks. Yet these posts can also be onerous and are therefore known as "*cargos*," literally, burdens. The key distinction between the *cargo* system and liberal representative democracy is that the *cargo* holder does not represent the community in the sense of making decisions on its behalf; rather, he is expected to act only with collective authorization (Esteva 2007). Finally, the civil structure of *Usos y Costumbres* is usually tied to a religious hierarchy in which members are expected to contribute to annual Catholic festivals. While village service gives members status, influence, and rights to resources, the system can also be draconian: those who renege on their duties may lose standing, the right to live in the community, and access to common resources and land.

Indigenous communal politics have long been entwined with collective landholding. In the 19th and 20th century, once again thanks to their isolation, Oaxacan communities avoided the large land grabs common elsewhere in Mexico,³¹ by 2007, more than 70% of the state's land remained in communal holdings, 44% of them communes (*comunidades agrarias*) – including Retorno and La Partida – and another 28% of them *ejidos*

²⁸ It was this intentional demarcation that made such communities into a model for Eric Wolf (1957) called the "closed corporate community."

²⁹ Indigenous ethnic identity is not entirely coterminous with this form of political organization, but it is the root of the political system and the two largely map onto one another. The legal recognition of *Usos y Costumbres* in 1995 represented both a victory for indigenous rights and a ploy on the part of the state to channel social tensions and build loyalty within the indigenous movement.

³⁰ In a typical community, there might be between 50 and 100 *cargos* per year, including a *presidente* (mayor), *síndico* (sheriff), 4 *regidores* (councilmen) for health, finance, education, and public works, 4 *suplentes* (alternates – one per councilman), an *alcalde* (judge), 4 *principales* (elders), 8 police commanders, and numerous others, along with several committees of 4-5 each that oversee water, communal lands, education, health and so on.

³¹ Elsewhere in Mexico, by contrast, most rural families were landless by the time of the 1910 Revolution, never regaining the productive resource to generate capital, despite post-revolution land reform (Massey et al. 1987).

(Kearney and Besserer 2004; Esteva 2007).³² Under communal titles, land is transferrable only by birth or marriage, allowing members to pass on designated parcels within families but prohibiting them from selling it on the market (Nagengast and Kearney 1990). By undermining the importance of land – as well as the possibility of in-person political participation – migration transformed the culture and politics of this system.

Finally, the gender arrangements in indigenous Oaxacan villages also contrasted with those in the United States, tying the *cargo* system to entrenched patriarchy. Historically, *Usos y Costumbres* (customary law) has been defined as masculine, in conjunction with indigenous Oaxacans' complementary view of gender, in which men and women occupied different spheres (Marcos 2005).³³ In these arrangements, political duties fell to men. Because the villages considered families as units, male heads of household represented their wives and daughters in public affairs. Women, meanwhile, took responsibility for the home and children, the “female” form of contributing to the collective good. Yet, women's absence from politics blocked them from rights to property or child custody, as well as from political voice. Today, despite universal suffrage in Mexico, women's exclusion is legally permitted under customary law, and in about 75% of indigenous villages, *cargos*, *tequios*, and even voting remain exclusive to men (Velásquez 2004). Women, meanwhile, have only held public offices (*cargos*) in 9% of indigenous villages (Barrera-Bassols 2006). In conjunction, indigenous women face Mexico's worst gender disparities in education and health and its highest rates of gender violence; 45% suffer partner abuse and 75% some type of gendered violence (Gibson 2005).³⁴ According to existing theories, this is precisely the kind of patriarchal context where the rise of women leaders like Rosa and Maria seems most surprising. Oaxaca's patriarchal history, like its participatory politics, accentuates the cultural implications of rural villages' deepening relationships with the United States.

Migration and the US “Illegality” State

On the receiving side, the growing farm and service economies helped drive the recruitment of indigenous Oaxacans as low-wage workers, first in Northern Mexico and then in the United States, particularly California. In the 1970s, US commercial vegetable and fruit production began to explode, thanks to new demand for fresh produce. This shaped agro-industry on both sides of the US-Mexico border, expanding not only California farms but also their counterparts in Northern Mexico. In the 1970s, the Mexican government fueled the development of vast agro-industries by investing in the

³² *Comunidades agrarias*, the legal basis of social tenancy in Retorno and La Partida, as well as most villages in Oaxaca, are distinct from *ejidos*, or communal titles granted in the early 20th century as part of post-revolution land reform. Communes are more widespread in Oaxaca and *ejidos* in the rest of Mexico (Esteva 2007).

³³ Lisa Mary Sousa (1997) explains that Mixtec and Zapotec cosmologies “underscore the centrality of the concepts of complementarity. Both societies conceive of the universe as composed of two parts: female earth and male sky ... both male and female elements were necessary to symbolize Mixtec and Zapotec social, economic and political life.”

³⁴ Oaxaca is one of only two Mexican states that, as of 2011, had not incorporated a 2007 federal law against violence against women into its state constitution or penal code. Nevertheless, the issue is complex; the Mexican state has also *used* women's rights as a tool to undermine indigenous peoples' communal political practices (Hernández Castillo 2001).

commercialization of agriculture as part of its broader “modernization” strategy, particularly in the valleys of Culiacán, Sinaloa and San Quintín, Baja California (Novo 2004). By the early 1980s, California growers, attracted by the lower costs south of the border, started entering joint ventures to expand export production into Mexico, financing and marketing Mexican tomatoes and other crops (Zabin 1997; Velasco Ortiz 2002). Yet, because agro-industry developed in relatively unpopulated areas of Mexico – bringing new irrigation technology to once-desert regions – nearly all the workers had to be recruited from elsewhere in the country. By that time, communities in Western Mexico had already begun sending migrants to the United States, where they made significantly higher wages than those offered on Mexican farms. To find workers willing to work for low pay under notoriously miserable conditions (Wright 2005), growers from Sinaloa and Baja California began to recruit in – and bus workers from – the rural indigenous villages of Oaxaca (Novo 2004). As technologies improved and agroindustry boomed in these regions, they imported hundreds of thousands of indigenous migrants from Southern Mexico each year (Wright 2005).

In conjunction, on the US side, union representation in agriculture withered. While Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers (UFW) had made important gains in the 1970s, bringing California to a peak of about 80,000 unionized farm workers, by the 1980s, the unions were disintegrating, with union representation in California farmwork falling to only about 5,000 by the 1990s, or 2% of the labor force (Zabin 1997). In farming, manufacturing, construction, and meatpacking, unionized workers were replaced with non-unionized, low-wage counterparts, many of them undocumented Mexican migrants.

Meanwhile, as middle and upper class women entered the workforce in Mexico and the United States, the service sector grew as well. In California, in the decade from 1980 to 1990 alone, the demand for domestic workers and gardeners doubled. While service employers rarely recruited workers directly from their villages, they opened urban alternatives to migrants and offered comparatively well-paid and less-toilsome jobs (Stephen 2007). As Mexico’s first wave of undocumented migrants to the US earned legal amnesty in 1986 (see discussion below), employers sought replacements, often looking for workers who would be even more exploitable. Because migrants from Oaxaca already working in farms and services within Mexico, they were an ideal target. From 1980 to 2002, migration rose 352% from rural Mexican villages to other parts of Mexico and 452% to the US (Taylor et al. 2005: 103).

This shift helped draw indigenous people from Mexico’s South – particularly Oaxaca – into an ongoing stream of US migration, converting Oaxaca into the nation’s 7th largest sending state after the “traditional” sending region of Western Mexico. Yet, in contrast to Western Mexicans, who had established direct US ties during the Bracero Program, most Oaxacans moved to the US step-wise, unable to afford the *coyote* (smuggler) fees until they had accumulated wages from internal jobs (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004). From Retorno and La Partida, about 70% of pioneer US migrants arrived via internal destinations in Mexico. In the 1980s and 90s, Oaxacan migration shifted steadily away from internal destinations and towards the United States, with the US share of migration rising from 30% to almost 90% of all migrants over the decade (Cornelius et

al. 2009). By 2004, as many as half the people born in Oaxaca lived elsewhere, with around 250,000 indigenous Oaxacans leaving each year for the United States (Cohen 2004).

The Production of Migrant “Illegality”

The changing economy coincided with – and was supported by – the US government’s “illegalization” of Mexican migrants. By rendering Mexican migrant workers “illegal” and threatening them with deportation, the US government helped sustain their vulnerability and tractability as workers (Burawoy 1976; De Genova 2004). From 1942 to 1964, in the so-called “Bracero” Program, the US government had directly recruited Mexican men on 40-day contracts to work US farms. During this period, the state remained relatively lax towards undocumented migration. However, in the 1970s and 1980s the US began to redefine Mexican migrants as “illegal immigrants” (Ackerman 2014), transforming a legal to an illegal flow (Massey 2012). In 1986, the US Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) granted amnesty to three million undocumented migrants, giving them a chance to apply for legal residency. As these migrants moved into better jobs, the bottom rungs of the labor market opened up to a new wave of migrants. However, the legislation also laid the groundwork for a system of enforcement that would mark subsequent migrants as criminals and bar them from legalization.

Under the new regime, migrants who arrived after 1986, including most of those from Retorno and La Partida, had few routes to legalization. The new legislation barred undocumented migrants from a path to legal residency, except through employer visas (which were extremely limited and largely restricted to highly skilled workers) or through immediate family. Even if migrants had family members who were citizens or legal permanent residents willing and able to sponsor them, the “line” for this process of legalization lasted 18 to 20 years – long enough that even family members of legal residents who had lived in the United States for decades were still waiting for their applications to be processed as of my fieldwork in 2010.³⁵ Therefore, even migrants who had authorization often brought their families across the border illegally, unwilling to wait out the family separation. By 2012, nearly 60% of all Mexican migrants in the United States were unauthorized. Even among those with legal residency, two thirds first entered the United States without documents, rendering them legally deportable under current laws (Massey and Malone 2003).

After 1986, the US state increasingly directed its repressive power – and even violence – at these immigrants, including both undocumented and legal permanent residents (Massey 2012; Menjivar and Abrego 2012). While providing amnesty to some, IRCA dramatically increased funding for the US Border Patrol and criminalized the hiring of undocumented workers. In 1993 and 1994 the US also instituted programs to intercept migrants at the busiest crossing points on the US-Mexico border: El Paso-Ciudad Juarez (Operation Blockade) and San Diego-Tijuana (Operation Gatekeeper) (Nevins 2002). Then, starting with the US Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant

³⁵ Due to quotas on the number of Mexican migrants legally admitted per year, even those legally able to get papers had to “wait their turn,” for as long as 20 years, during which time they remained unauthorized.

Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996, and particularly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, US immigration law became increasingly intertwined with anti-terrorism efforts and crime enforcement (Menjívar and Abrego 2012). In 2001, the federal government dismantled the old Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and transferred its power to the New Department of Homeland Security, folding immigration enforcement together with anti-terrorism. The same year, the PATRIOT Act authorized the arrest, imprisonment, and deportation of non-citizens without judicial review (Massey and Pren 2012). Then, in 2005, the US House of Representatives passed a bill to label both crossing the border and hiring or providing services to undocumented immigrants as felonies. Finally, in 2010 and 2011 states like Arizona, Alabama and Georgia all passed legislation criminalizing undocumented migration.

Thus, the United States created what Douglas Massey and Karen Pren (2012) call “a permanent bureaucracy for the persecution of immigrants.” As of 2013, the US government was spending nearly \$18 billion a year on immigration enforcement, more than it spent on the FBI, Secret Service, Drug Enforcement Administration and all other federal law enforcement agencies combined (Meissner et al. 2013). By 2010, the budget for the US border patrol was 24 times its level in 1986 (Massey 2012). Meanwhile, as of 2012, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the branch of the Department of Homeland Security responsible for enforcing immigration laws including deportation, had a \$6 billion dollar budget, up from \$3.3 billion in 2003 (Passel and Cohn 2011). Under Presidents Bush and Obama, deportation reached record levels, increasing nearly 600% from 69,680 in 1995 to 396,906 in 2011 (United States Department of Homeland Security 2012). In 2012, the immigrant detention system was the fastest growing component of the US prison industrial complex (Massey 2012). Netting both unauthorized migrants and legal permanent residents, the “deportation regime” (De Genova 2010) subjected more than 22 billion people to a permanent climate of threat.

City police played a key role in this shift. As US immigration control increasingly turned to internal enforcement, it relied on police to identify migrants and turn them over to ICE, “devolving” immigration control from the federal to the sub-national and city levels (Wells 2004; Inda 2006; Gilbert 2009; Donato and Armenta 2011). In the 1990s and 2000s, legislation such as IIRIRA Provision 287(g) and the Secure Communities Program (started in 2008) charged local police with reporting undocumented migrants to ICE officials. The programs enabled police to check anyone who was detained and suspected of being “illegal” against a Department of Homeland Security database and to hold undocumented migrants for release to federal authorities. While police-ICE collaboration ostensibly focused on “criminals,” it empowered police to target immigrants in general, on the basis of minor violations such as working as day laborers or driving with broken taillights (Shahani and Greene 2009). As of 2011, 73% of the 400,000 migrants deported under these programs were expelled for the “crimes” of traffic violations or crossing the border (United States Department of Homeland Security 2012). This imposed a “criminal” label on immigrants in general, regardless of whether they had in fact committed crimes. Instead, the ties between the police and immigration control brought the threat of deportation into migrants’ daily lives, making many afraid to drive, shop, or take their children to school (Stuesse 2012; Coleman 2012). As enforcement

sowed widespread fear, the mandate to enforce immigration law also undercut the police's mission to protect communities (Marrow 2011).

The process of criminalization was particularly dramatic in Southern California, a point of concentration for newly arrived immigrants, especially from Oaxaca (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004). Because of California's proximity to the border, it was a gateway area and one of the first to establish local-level police practices related to immigration control. Many of its cities – including both Los Angeles and San Diego – were early adopters of local immigration control policies, providing paradigms for sites elsewhere in the United States as migration diffused. Because migrants have lived in the area so long, focusing on this region helps shed light on the long-term processes and implications of migrant “illegality.” With nearly one in ten adult workers in California being undocumented, as of 2010, the state provides an iconic site to study the effects of deepening exclusion.

*“The New Latino Underclass”*³⁶

Paradoxically, the restrictive border policing fueled rapid growth in the undocumented Mexican migrant population; it also deepened its socioeconomic marginality (Massey 2005). At the border, increased enforcement diverted migrants from urban crossing points such as San Diego, California into the Arizona desert, where the costs and risks of crossing skyrocketed. While these costs did not stop migration, they did inhibit migrants from returning back and forth to Mexico (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002; Massey 2008). As a result, migrants stayed longer in the United States; in a given year, the likelihood that a migrant would return fell from nearly 50%, prior to IRCA (1986), to 24% afterwards. The border enforcement “trapped” a growing population of migrants, so that by 2010, 63% of undocumented migrants had been in the United States for more than a decade³⁷ (Taylor et al. 2011). The longer migrants remained, the more likely they were to bring spouses or start families in the United States (Massey 2005). The undocumented population exploded.³⁸ While 7 million undocumented people lived in the United States in 1997, by 2013, there were about 11.7 million (Passel and Cohn 2011).

In conjunction, migrants grew poorer and more socially isolated, sparking fears of a vast, “new Latino underclass” (Massey and Pren 2012).³⁹ In the 1970s, circular male migrants had converted their meager US salaries into Mexican pesos. However, once they stopped circulating, these migrants had to stretch the same income – of \$10 or \$15 thousand dollars a year – to sustain a much higher cost of living in the United States. Without legal authorization, migrants were consigned to poverty and social exclusion,

³⁶ Massey (2012) uses this phrase to raise the specter of an “underclass” often associated with the black ghetto in the 1960s.

³⁷ Of unauthorized adult immigrants in the US in 2010, 35% had lived in the country for 15 years or more; 28% for 10 to 14 years; 22% for 5 to 9 years; and 15% for less than 5 years. From 2000 to 2010, the share that had been in the US at least 15 years more than doubled (Taylor et al. 2011: 3).

³⁸ In 2002, Hispanics passed blacks as the US's largest minority, 60% of them of Mexican origin (Massey 2012).

³⁹ The word conjured the language of US poverty policies from of the 1960s and 1970s that focused around the “threat” of a black “underclass” in the ghetto (Gans 1995).

driving Latinos as a whole steadily downward in the socioeconomic hierarchy (Massey and Pren 2012). Over the 1990s and 2000s, Mexican wages stagnated and fell behind those of African Americans, with women's earnings declining even more than those of their male counterparts (Massey 2012). Lacking labor rights, undocumented migrants had little choice but to work at jobs that were unstable, violated labor laws, and paid minimum wage at best (Walter, Borgois and Loinaz 2004; Fortuny, Capps and Passel 2007). Migrants' tenuous legal status also limited their access to health care, housing, and education (Menjívar 2002; Painter, Gabriel and Myers 2001; McConnell and Marcelli 2007; Abrego 2006; 2008; Abrego and Gonzales 2010). Over the 2000s, Latino household wealth fell by 66% (Taylor et al. 2011), and Latino poverty rates rose steadily, to match those of African Americans (Pew Hispanic Center 2011).

As migrants, Oaxacans have, once again, been among the "perfect victims" of this exclusion. Because most indigenous Oaxacan migrants arrived after the 1986 amnesty, with few family ties to those who had arrived sooner, they lacked access to legalization (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004). They were thus the first generation to remain undocumented long-term; among survey respondents from Retorno and La Partida, 95% entered the United States without papers and 70% remained unauthorized as of 2011, despite having lived in California an average of 17 years. Undocumented status has also become more of a liability for contemporary migrants like Oaxacans than it was for earlier migrants, due to the growing violence against immigrants (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Menjívar and Abrego 2012). Finally, Oaxacan migrant workers have faced deeper economic and social marginality than mestizos (Runsten and Kearney 1994; Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004). Most have been confined to the lowest rungs of the US labor market, particularly farm and service work, and they face rampant labor abuses and more control by labor contractors than non-indigenous groups. They also earn lower wages and have less upward mobility than previous migrants, and they move more often for work. In conjunction, they have tended to stay in limbo for longer, integrating more slowly, settling less, and being more likely to return to Mexico (Zabin et al. 1993).

Race and Gender in the Context of Migrant "Illegality"

Oaxacans' marginality speaks to the racialized, gendered nature of the contemporary US system of "illegality." As Nicholas De Genova (2004) and Douglas Massey (2012) have suggested, the immigration enforcement system racializes Latinos – and especially Mexicans – just as the criminal justice system does for African Americans. While Mexicans make up 58% of the undocumented population, they are overrepresented among deportees, making up from 75 to 80% in a given year (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013). In addition, among Mexicans themselves, there is a racial hierarchy that keeps *indigenous* migrants, such as Mixtecs and Zapotecs, uniquely excluded (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004; Holmes 2007). On top of their undocumented status, indigenous people often face pejorative treatment from mestizo migrants, many of whom arrived in the US in prior waves. Often, low-wage employers encourage this ethnic segmentation in the labor markets, deliberately seeking out indigenous workers whom they presume to be more docile (Krissman 1995; Holmes 2007). Indigenous migrants, therefore, face a dual racialization, first as Mexican and then as indigenous.

The racialization of the system coincides with a growing feminization of Mexico-US migration (Donato et al. 2011). Until the mid 1960s, the US government Bracero Program recruited male migrants, laying the groundwork for Mexican migration to be one of the most male-dominated in the world, and leading both employers and migrants to understand migrant labor as masculine. In this period, men migrants were also supported by a gender order in which they separated from – and depended on – women at home, who continued to do subsistence agricultural work to sustain their families and enable the men to migrate on lower wages (Boserup 1970; Deere 1977; Sassen 2000; Rees 2006). However, starting in the 1970s, factories and households increasingly recruited migrant women to do low-wage work as well (Pyle and Ward 2003). As care work became commodified, these “female” sectors drew in increasing numbers of undocumented migrant women, often paying higher wages than comparable jobs for migrant men (Parreñas 2001; Tyner 2004). Female migration also increased due to IRCA’s family reunification policy, combined with the fortification of the border. After 1986, when millions of male workers were legalized by IRCA, many decided to stop circulating and bring their wives and daughters along (Cornelius et al. 2009). Thus, even though undocumented Mexican migration started out overwhelmingly male, women became increasingly likely to migrate in the 2000s (Donato et al. 2008). Finally, the deportation regime gave a new gender valence to undocumented migration, because it associated “criminality” with migrant men while practicing more tolerance towards undocumented migrant women. Indeed, as of the late 2000s, 90% of deportees were men (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013).

On the other hand, the growing integration of police and immigration control left many women isolated and more vulnerable to male control and domestic violence. Because most Mexican women migrants came after male family members, many lived in mixed-status partnerships, where the man was legally authorized but the woman was not. This gave men great control, enabling them to threaten their partners with deportation, and, often, separation from their children. The consequences were particularly striking in the area of domestic abuse. Even though the United States created the “U” visa in 2000 to protect undocumented victims of domestic violence, in practice, protection orders conflicted with programs like Secure Communities and 287(g). In a context where approximately 50% of immigrant Latina women are victims of intimate partner violence⁴⁰ – and as many as 77% of those in mixed-status couples – fear of the police can be debilitating (Quereshi 2010). Thus, whereas approximately 55% of US born victims of domestic violence reported it to the police, only about 14 to 18% of undocumented victims did the same (Orloff et al. 2003; Shaw 2009). Therefore, for undocumented migrants, the ostensibly egalitarian context of the United States often deepened gender oppression.

Yet, undocumented migrants have not remained silent in the face of this multi-pronged marginalization; on the contrary, the 2000s witnessed the rise of a strong immigrant rights movement, which staged the largest protests in the United States since Civil Rights. Women were some of its key leaders (Milkman and Terriquez 2012). Under

⁴⁰ This is slightly more than the 48%, in the same survey, who report having faced domestic violence in their hometowns before coming to the United States (Quereshi 2010).

the hostile circumstances, not surprisingly, 73% of Latinos opposed the arrest and deportation of migrants (Lopez and Minushkin 2008), and 91% of non-citizen Latinos favored a path to citizenship for the unauthorized⁴¹ (Taylor et al. 2011). On May 1, 2006, in answer to a bill in Congress that would have criminalized crossing the border, millions of migrants protested across the county (Voss and Bloemraad 2011). These and repeat marches each May Day would draw attention to their plight. After 2006, 56% of Latinos surveyed said they would participate in a future march, and by 2010, 22% of non-citizen Latinos surveyed – and 15% of all Latinos – had participated in a protest or march in the past year, dramatically more than the rates of political activity among the native born (Rodriguez and Rouse 2012). Particularly salient among the protestors were the young migrants known as DREAMers, many of whom declared themselves “undocumented and unafraid,” as a means to advocate for undocumented migrants to come out of the shadows and confront the US regime of terror. Meanwhile, 72% of Latino migrants also remained involved with their hometowns back in Mexico (Waldinger 2007), as that nation, too, sought to capitalize on migrants’ long-distance involvement to raise development funds and influence sending-side politics (Portes 2007; Fitzgerald 2009). Thus, migrants’ advocacy got woven into ongoing changes in Mexico.

The Changing State of Mexico

Migrants faced a changing Mexico as well. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Mexico began a process of democratization, as opposition parties arose to challenge the 71-year domination of the ruling party, the PRI. In 1988, for the first time, a popular challenger to the PRI arose – Cuautémoc Cárdenas – and helped build a new, leftist party: the PRD or Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*). As Cárdenas vied for the presidency in the 1988 election, he appealed to migrants to support his candidacy. While Cárdenas lost (arguably in a rigged election), he drew the PRI’s attention to the importance of migrant involvement (Iskander 2010). Then, in 2000, a second opposition party, the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) overthrew the PRI and won the presidency. Where the PRI had previously counted on rural indigenous communities to deliver block votes, it now faced contested elections, particularly in areas where migrants had begun advocating politically from afar.

Along with pushback against market reforms, pressure from migrants drove the PRI to reshape its relationship to rural, indigenous communities. First, while Mexico had been an international model for structural adjustment and the rollback of state intervention, it also created new institutions to maintain influence in rural life, particularly by channeling resources to rural municipalities, such as those funded by the World Bank’s “decentralization and rural development project” in the early 1990s (Fox 1995). Starting in the 1980s but particularly in the 1990s, Mexico began to “decentralize” resources to villages like Retorno and La Partida, for education, health, and “productive projects” ranging from household and infrastructure construction to entrepreneurship training (Grindle 2007; Iskander 2010). Second, as the PRI saw its power threatened, it accepted indigenous activists’ pressure to sanction the system of *Usos y Costumbres*, legally recognizing indigenous political autonomy in 1995 in hopes of securing its hold on

⁴¹ As compared to 72% of all US citizens.

indigenous villages – albeit with mixed results (Benton 2012).

Third, as Mexico democratized, it began to promote an agenda of “women’s rights,” providing “self esteem” trainings for rural women, pressuring indigenous communities to include women in politics, and making women central to its immense new development program known (now) as *Oportunidades* or “Opportunities” (Molyneux 2006). The program, which granted cash transfers to poor families, particularly in rural areas, made its support contingent on women’s – that is, mothers’ – participation in regular workshops, as well as their children’s attendance at doctors’ visits and school. Begun in 1999, by 2005 the *Oportunidades* program reached 5 million households and 25 million beneficiaries, nearly a quarter of Mexico’s population (Molyneux 2006). Such programs put women at the heart of Mexico’s ongoing “development.”

In addition, as the Mexican state and political parties began to recognize the political and economic leverage migrants wielded from afar, they sought to harness this power for their benefit. In the 2000s, family remittances to Mexico amounted to about \$23 billion US dollars a year (Waldinger 2007) and 435,000 US migrants returned to Mexico annually (Passel and Cohn 2009). As the PRI faced threats to its dominance in the 1990s, it began to offer migrants consular protection and other political services, eventually allowing for dual nationality so that they could vote in Mexican elections. The PAN party, which won the national elections in 2000, then made migrants central to its political agenda. In 2002, it created a program called 3x1, in which the federal, state, and municipal governments would match money sent by hometown associations for collective projects – primarily infrastructure, water, sewer, and roads – multiplying migrants’ contributions by four. As of 2008, the program provided about \$38 million US dollars worth of support to 2,500 projects – up to US \$60,000 per project.⁴² Thus, migrants’ involvement in Mexico became increasingly formalized, as the nation’s political parties – vying for power – sought to make creative use of its deep ties to the United States.

Contrasts within the Migration Stream

Oaxaca and Southern California are particularly illuminating places to study this history not only because they epitomize its effects but also because the political dynamics of the communities and cities in these regions vary dramatically on both sending and receiving sides. While sharing a common history, the regions illustrate variations within an apparently similar process. Thus, they reveal the critical importance of local political conditions in mediating political economic pressure and forging migration pathways.

While 20th century Mexico is often seen as a centralized regime, revolving around PRI control at the national level, in fact, the Mexican state took distinct forms in different locales (Joseph and Nugent 1994; Smith 2009). PRI hegemony was much more contested and incomplete than it appeared, with its leaders – beginning with Lazaro Cárdenas in the 1930s – actually forging an array of multiple regional arrangements, combining bargaining, coercion, and alliances depending on the local site (Rubin 1996). This was

⁴² Though the sum total of collective remittances through this program still amounted to less than one percent of family remittances from the US to Mexico (Iskander 2010).

particularly true in Oaxaca, where indigenous groups varied dramatically from town to town and had different forms of negotiating with the party and state. Though Mexico lacked formal local government until the late 20th century, in fact, Oaxaca was fragmented into municipal units, partly as a means to facilitate governance in a remote region. This meant that each village developed unique political institutions, with varying relations to the state and federal governments (Hernández Díaz 2007). Some indigenous villages in Oaxaca, like La Partida, used the “traditional” *cargo* system to mediate class hierarchies – providing as much as 30% of villagers’ annual food budgets (Dow 1977; Greenberg 1981) – and to defend themselves against extractive institutions such the state, landlords, corporations, researchers, and even NGOs (Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Kearney 1998; Aquino 2009, Esteva 2007). Yet others, like Retorno, used *Usos y Costumbres* (customary practices) to benefit the most well off, solidifying local fiefdoms (Wolf 1986). The contrasts across villages, which I will detail in the following chapters, illuminate the importance of local political histories.

Meanwhile, though Southern California may be seen as a “friendly” receiving area thanks to its large Latino population and relatively tolerant policies, at the city level, its treatment of migrants also diverged. Southern California has a longstanding tradition of city-level immigration regimes. Not only did its cities and counties pass local-level policies earlier than the rest of the country, but in practice, their police also took wide scope in interpreting, countering, compensating for, and transforming federal demarcations of membership (Wells 2004; Marrow 2011; Coleman 2012). On one hand, North County San Diego, a rural area near the Mexican border marked by hostility to immigrants, becoming notorious for its restrictionist policies (Garcia and Keyes 2012). On the other hand, just as North County *extended* police officers’ mandate to stop, detain, and deport immigrants, Los Angeles opted out of cross-deputization, promising protection, labor rights, and services to migrants (Tramonte 2011; Semple and Preston 2001). In 1979, Los Angeles was one of the first US cities to declare itself a “sanctuary city” for migrants, providing a model for others across the country. The divergence presaged what would, in the 2000s, become a nationwide war over immigration control, waged at the local level, with US cities and states passing more than 1500 bills and 240 laws related to immigration by 2007 (Massey 2012). San Diego and LA Counties do not “represent” restrictive or tolerant regimes in general. Yet because Southern California’s cities have long varied in their political-economic structures and treatment of migrants – even in a shared state political environment and geographic region – they help show the effects of local practices.

Understanding how local political differences affect migrant communities is crucial from both sending and receiving sides. First, it helps to shed light on unexplained variations like the dramatically different pathways of migration of Retorno and La Partida. Second, it highlights how political practices in sending and receiving sites mediate the impact of market reforms and migrant “illegality.” Third, by drawing attention to the practices through which migration pathways get reconstructed, it illuminates the conjunctures where political struggles – like those waged by hometown associations and migrant activists – can take effect. The following chapters trace how these local dynamics shaped the particularities of migration in Retorno and La Partida, mediating the wider process described above.

RETORNO

Prologue

On a dry summer afternoon in 2009, I take the five-hour winding van ride to the Mixtec village of Retorno, where dust lingers on the sunburnt grass, women amble through the central streets – paved a few years back with cement, – and young men in baggy pants swig Coronas from the corner store. As I arc over the mountain pass into Retorno’s outskirts, wizened farmers in tattered jeans lurch their ashen donkeys into the remains of the village’s corn fields. Yet, at the center of town, the arching doorways of fading manors divulge the lingering local inequities, and an old 15-foot campaign sign for Mexico’s ruling party, the PRI, dangles, torn, from the roof of one of the more glorious two-story homes.

Outside the town hall, two thin men in stained button-up shirts recline on wooden benches, turning their straw hats in their hands and surveying the scene; as they see me, each tucks the beer he’s been nursing under his outstretched legs. They’re circumspect but curious, too, asking me where I’m from and telling me, right off the bat, that they “know” California – know the strawberry and tomato farms of Escondido and San Marcos and Vista, in the desolate fields of North County San Diego. They even straighten up at the mention of *El Norte* (The North), as if pleased to see me – a piece of that well-known place – transplanted into their faraway town. Perching beside them as I wait for the village leaders, I ask when they went to the United States. But my question, I quickly realize, is naïve. “Who knows how many times!” one replies, revealing that the question hardly even makes sense to them. Neither can quite remember the first time he crossed the border – 1975? 1985? – or even the last. Rather, life in Retorno and North County San Diego blur together, the decades of migration merging into my interlocutors’ departures and returns, over the course of their adult lives. Even now, they’re not necessarily “back” for good, just for a time, until the jobs pick up again.

Later, inside the town hall, my reception is the same. I fidget nervously with my formal papers of introduction and begin a prepared speech about my research, worrying that the village leaders will challenge me or refuse me permission to stay. But the four men interrupt me almost immediately, far more concerned with sharing stories of California than with moderating my presence in their town. Though a line of people waits outside for their attention, the town leaders extend the meeting minute after minute, each one volunteering his tale of San Marcos or Vista or Oceanside. My test, it seems, is not what I’ve expected – to prove I’ll honor the village’s corporate structure – but instead to reminisce with its leaders, to bring back moments or people they have known “on the other side.” Sure I have permission, they finally nod, brushing my papers aside.

Their reminiscences notwithstanding, Retorno’s migrant life in the United States has been anything but pretty. In the main street women spill out of their doorways and wander arm in arm in their black shawls; as I amble around the village, one after another declares how they have suffered. They crisscross the streets selling tamales, fruit, or

tortillas – deep, reed baskets strapped around their shoulders and draped like drums over faded gingham smocks, – or poke their heads out of adobe houses and mini-mart stores. Each one wants to talk. Their people go to my country, they tell me, “Only to suffer, only to die.” That very first day, I hear the word “suffer” at least four times, as people insist that in California they live “like slaves.” “How they [you?] make our people suffer!” (*Como le hacen sufrir a nuestra gente!*) Regina yells out, the Spanish grammar leaving it ambiguous who is inflicting this pain. Meanwhile, as Juana passes me a Coke from her industrial cooler, she says, “We treat you [Americans] really well. But when we go over there, you pay us terribly. You don’t even realize how we suffer to cross [the border], or how much we pay ... You kick us out; you send us home even though we’re there to work. *No es justo*. It’s unjust.” The accusation ripples in my stomach as I go on, listening to the primary school teacher talk of children without fathers, of her own childhood working in the tomato fields of Northern Mexico, and of scrounging for food in the times when her dad was gone. I see the strain in mothers’ faces; nearly everyone in Retorno is tied to the USA. Everyone is “back” from somewhere.

Two days later, I see the politics of their fury. It’s the day of the secondary school graduation, a misty July morning on Retorno’s sloping hill. I arrive at the school building early, chatting with a few women – by far the majority – as the audience trickles into the open courtyard. First, mothers fill the folding chairs, bustling over gifts and children in their Mixtec shawls and gingham aprons, the occasional father by their side. Then a second group lines the outside: a crew of maybe 20 against each wall, men in their teens and twenties with shaved heads, black tattoos, and clean, loose jeans bedecked in chains. They’re quiet as the program takes its course, hands thrust in their pockets or crossed over black T-shirts bearing images of fire. I can’t help but ask the woman sitting next to me if many young men have returned; yet she dismisses my question, explaining, “They always come and go.” By all appearances, the only thing these young men share with the women in the center is serious, set, strong faces. But the director’s message gives me clues about both. Loudly, firmly he implores the eighth grade graduates:

Let’s hope you continue with your studies. Get college degrees, because in this country of Mexico, we need more professionals. We need anthropologists, psychologists, biologists, lawyers, teachers. We have had enough of emigrating to serve as the cheap manpower in the north [the US] (*Ya basta*). Let’s not be slaves to the gringos any more! We need graduates, and no more *braceros* [strong arms]⁴³!

As he says this, three of the middle school girls glance back at me over their shoulders, stifling giggles. The town, I will learn, has been transformed by the power of this dissent, even as it remains tied to the United States.

The next three chapters follow this pathway, tracing how Retorno’s unequal structure *constructed* its pattern of rural, temporary migration, how its experiences as migrants *reconstructed* people’s tendency to return, and how, as its members have *responded*, the community has been remade.

⁴³ The word “bracero,” refers to manual laborers, literally meaning “strong arms.” It rose to use during to the Bracero Program run by the US government in the 1940s-1960s.

Chapter 2

Deprivation and Debt: Retorno's Path into Farm work

In the 1960s, labor recruiters from the Valley of Culiacán, in Sinaloa, Mexico began visiting rural villages in the mountains of the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, in search of cheap workers for Mexico's emerging agro-industrial machine. In Retorno and surrounding communities, they found a group of indigenous sharecroppers – nearly 75% of the local population (Rivera-Salgado 1999) – who were effectively landless and driven desperate by debt. The peasants' desperation was just the “hook” recruiters needed; in the decades that followed, the communities would become deeply entrenched in circular patterns of work on Northern Mexican farms. Thus, migration took on meaning, members tell me, as a fix for debt. By the 1970s, hundreds of thousands of peasants – including most of Retorno – left Oaxaca each winter to work the Northern Mexican tomato crops; 10 years later, they would dig their heels into the fields of North County San Diego, rooting their migrant community there.

Often, studies of “Mexican migration” take it for granted that the first migrants from rural Mexican communities to the United States work on farms and are predominantly men (Massey, Goldring and Durand 1994). In addition, scholars highlight the importance of networks in channeling migrants into particular destinations (Massey 1990). Yet, presuming that migration is driven by macro-economic and household-level factors, they say little about the political conditions and material histories under which those networks develop. In particular, few have examined how the structure of sending communities channels members onto particular paths. There has also been limited analysis of the importance of step-wise migration (with the exception of Paul 2011), or the ways internal migration can structure and constrain the social networks that draw migrants to particular destinations in the United States. Finally, most studies of Mexican migration portray male migrants as agents, while women – implicitly passive – remain “behind” (Cerrutti and Massey 2001).

In this chapter, I trace the emergence of migration from Retorno to its history, and particularly its longstanding local-level class and ethnic inequality. I argue that Retorno's *hierarchical* social structure – amplified over decades of *dispossession* – produced *debt*, laying the groundwork for its members' rural migration. By the eve of large-scale migration in the 1950s, having begun as a headquarters for Catholic church evangelization in the region, Retorno fell into the hands of a few rapacious, mestizo landlords who deprived the indigenous, servant class of land and made them particularly vulnerable to recruitment into grueling farm jobs. Desperate, men, women, and children soon went north to work.

Second, I argue that the experience of internal migration – in which Retorno's poor majority circled between the village and Northern Mexican farm work – structured the options available to the community's first migrants to the United States and forged class and gender selectivity that would persist across the border. Conditions in Northern Mexican agro-industry were so miserable that families went there out of desperation and

stayed only for as long as was needed to pay off debts. Despite the history of mistreatment in the village, this compelled many migrants – particularly women – to return to the village, running from the squalor and labor abuse they encountered up north, reproducing the pattern of return. By the time migration to the US began, women and children were largely opting out. Rather than being “left behind” these women elected to *avoid* migration, reshaping its gender dynamics and actively constituting what has long been seen as a “natural” Mexican bias towards male migration.

Third, members’ history in their first step of migration, in Northern Mexican agriculture, shaped the “migrant capital” (Paul 2011) – that is, the social networks and sets of skills – that structured their options upon arrival in the United States. As farm workers, people from Retorno got little education, and few developed skills for other kinds of work. The only “resource” the experience gave them was exposure to *more* farm labor recruitment networks, across the California border. Retorno’s migrants found jobs in the US either through farm labor recruiters who came to the ranches where they worked in Northern Mexico or by demonstrating, once in the United States, that these ranches had trained them in the skills needed for large-scale agricultural work. In sum, Retorno’s historical development created a pattern of internal migration that selected the poor, indigenous families of the village and tied them to Mexican farms; from there, it drove women home, while linking men forward to the fields of the United States.

Debt and Division: A History of Class-Selective Migration

The roots of Retorno’s migration lay in its long-term history of class and ethnic division. Over the course of the 20th century, mestizo landlords used the veneer of the indigenous, participatory structure to concentrate political and economic power in their own hands, with the support of the Catholic Church, first, and later of Mexico’s ruling party, the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*). In the 1600s, the Catholic Church established Retorno as a regional center for evangelizing the Mixtec people, giving the church a strong base in the area (Velasco Ortiz 2005b). Over time, parish priests also aligned themselves with economically well-off villagers, to encourage them to sponsor religious festivals. The priests also demanded that *all* villagers contribute to at least twelve religious festivals a year, driving the peasants into debt. Rafael, a migrant in his mid 40s, reflects, “Religion was what kept us poor there [in Retorno], I think, because in the past, with the [traditional] festivals of Retorno and all, the person named to sponsor the festival spent thousands of dollars. Thousands of dollars, and the worst is that they didn’t have it. They would go around borrowing among the people, and whoever borrowed had to pay with interest, which is why many people went to the United States, to pay their debts.” Religious obligations, that is, fueled class divides. While a strong anti-clerical movement in the 1930s upended the church’s power in other parts of Oaxaca, including the Sierra Norte, where it helped to promote education and democratize community governance, in Retorno, the powerful church blocked these demands (Smith 2005).

In conjunction, around the turn of the 20th century, Spanish-descendent mestizo landlords began to take up land in Retorno and nearby villages, taking advantage of the Liberal reforms of Mexican President Porfirio Díaz to pay indigenous villagers for “rights” to land that was, in title, communally held. Respondents recount that around 1910, a few

wealthy families – the Ruizes, the Rios, and the Coronados – arrived in Retorno to buy up land.⁴⁴ The church backed these new mestizo *caciques*, treating them as holy and helping to label them the “people of reason” (*gente de razón*) (Bartolomé 1997). By affirming the new landholders’ divine rights to power and insisting that the indigenous people address them in the same terms they would speak to God, the church helped endow them with more power and durability than local landlords in nearly any other part of the state (Pastor 1986; Chance 1989; Monaghan, Joyce and Spores 2003; Velasco Ortiz 2005b).

The elites’ usurious lending practices and demands for tributes enabled them to capture indigenous families’ land. Ironically, whereas monopolistic landownership is usually the root of extraction from peasants, here, it was the reverse: elites’ religious and political power enabled them to *build* control of the land, by driving the peasants into debt. Thus, despite the fact that Retorno’s land was legally communal (like that of most Oaxacan villages), elites made the village look more like the feudal *haciendas* (plantations) that dominated other parts of Mexico than like an indigenous commune. As he weaves palm mats in his courtyard, 80-year-old Santiago remembers: “My father held communal land up on the mountains. But he had to sell it when I got sick [in the 1940s]. All his money disappeared, so I don’t have land, just a little plot for my house.” Likewise, Saul Molina, a stocky, 54-year-old indigenous migrant who now works in Vista, California, and is quoted in an extended interview with Laura Velasco Ortiz (2005) describes the way landholders forced Retorno’s Mixtec population into debt:

The indigenous people had to turn over their land for not paying tributes ... When a family member got sick, when someone had an emergency, [the poor] would say: ‘Lend me money, and I’ll give you the papers for my land,’ ... When there were epidemics, the white [elite] people hunted the [poor] people down and took their land. For example, if someone had a sick child, we had to take her to the white people [mestizos] for treatment ... That’s how people started losing their land (61).

Scholars show that throughout the Mixteca region, such settlers dispossessed the indigenous people of thousands of hectares of land. While communities like La Partida refused to privatize their common holdings, in the Mixteca, the newly arrived landlords crushed indigenous attempts at resistance (Lopez Barcenas and Espinoza Sauced 2003; Aquino 2009; Smith 2009).

Even though Retorno’s legal land title was communal – as in most Oaxacan indigenous villages – in practice, private property became the norm. As evidence, a 1960 report by Retorno’s leaders to Mexico’s National Agrarian Registry states that despite the communal title, “It shall be made known that in this village, all of the lands that belong to the population have been used for many years as if they were private property, to make money for the owners, and there is very little remaining communal land.” Indeed, as they appropriated land for themselves, the elites allotted only the most arid plots for common use: the rugged, rocky terrain high on the nearby hillsides. During my fieldwork in 2010,

⁴⁴ It is unclear exactly where these land buyers came *from*; villagers and archives in Retorno simply describe them as having arrived from nearby villages.

the councilman in charge of land in Retorno confirms the village's longstanding, de facto privatization of land, explaining, "People do not give it [the communal title] meaning, even though everything is communal." By 1950, although 92% of villagers made a living by farming, very few had cultivable land of their own. While a typical family of ten would need produce from four or five hectares to get by, 75% of Retorno's population owned less than one hectare (Rivera-Salgado 1999: 127). Rather, the median landholding was around 6/10 of a hectare – less than 1.5 acres – leaving farmers able to grow only about 20% of the corn they needed for personal consumption in a year (Wright 2005).

Similarly, while Retorno's political system was in principle participatory, in practice, the veneer of "participation" enabled elites to reinforce economic and ethnic divides. The village's land barons presided over its politics, aligning themselves with Mexico's oligarchic ruling party – the PRI – and mediating between the village and the PRI-controlled state to siphon money and labor from the rest of the community. Instead of following the customary indigenous governance system, in which members rotated through civic posts, these *caciques* (political bosses) demanded that the indigenous people contribute taxes, religious donations, and labor to the community, while blocking them from the more influential positions in town affairs. Saul Molina goes on:

In the town the traditional, PRI *caciques* had always had power, and an indigenous person could never run things, when the majority of us are indigenous ... The mestizos always held the positions of president, city manager, secretary, and they used the rest of us for the burdensome jobs ... Those [burdensome] jobs were obligatory. That's the bad thing; they used the customs for their own benefit and *Usos y Costumbres* [traditional politics] only helped the *gente de razón* (quoted in Velasco Ortiz 2005: 61).

For instance, when the Mexican government brought a program to pipe running water into the village in the 1940s, the wealthy families demanded that the indigenous come to dig ditches for the pipes, under the guise of *tequio*, or customary mutual aid. Abundio, a thin, gray-haired migrant in his late 50s, recalls, "My father went to dig the ditches where they'd lay the pipes – months and months of work. The whole town had to work ... [Yet] none of it was for his benefit. The benefits were only for the houses in the center." In short, the pretense of participatory politics allowed the elite to exploit indigenous labor for public works while excluding them from positions of power.

By the time migration began in the 1960s,⁴⁵ Retorno was characterized by deep ethnic and class divides. On one end were the *caciques*, the few mestizo families who controlled political power, land, and wealth. On the other end were the poor, indigenous sharecroppers, who made up the majority in the village.⁴⁶ In contrast to the "*gente de razón*" these families were called the "*naturales*" – or native, plain, simple people. Saul, born in the 1950s, describes the social divides that characterized the village of his childhood:

⁴⁵ There had been a small trickle of internal migration in the 1940s and 1950s, but it became much more widespread with the growth of agro-industrial recruitment in the 1960s (Velasco Ortiz 2002).

⁴⁶ See Krissman (1996) for a similar account of how sharecropping was dominant in a nearby village throughout the 20th century

All of my uncles were poor, because the owners of the land were the *caciques*, the ‘people of reason,’ the mestizos, who included direct descendants of the Spanish. No one – no indigenous person – had a piece of land in the center of the village. The indigenous were only in the [remaining] communal lands, on the steep slopes, or where there are lots of rocks ... All the homes on the main streets in the center, the brick houses, belonged to mestizos or white people. ... And the people that lived in the center of town were the landowners and the owners of the best houses; they were the ones that had both political and economic power (quoted in Velasco Ortiz: 61).

Basilio Ramos, another former migrant of the same age, adds, “There were some mestizos here in the town who were very influential after the revolution ... They were the teachers, the priests, and the landlords. The judges. The mayors. They were the owners of the town.”

To get by, the “*naturales*” worked as hired hands, if they could find work at all. Rosa Delgado, the 56-year-old female leader described in the preface, recalls that when she was a girl in the 1960s, “Here [in Retorno] we worked as day laborers. Weeding fields, picking corn ... We didn’t have land. If we wanted to work, it was only as hirelings, on other peoples’ land. That’s what you did ... And here there wasn’t work every day; sure, some days we found work, but the days we didn’t – that was the problem. That’s why we had to leave.” Saul confirms the same story, adding:

We were the servants. Us, our parents, our grandparents were the hired hands, the ones that did the work, the ones that planted, the ones that brought them firewood ... They worked for the rich men of the village, from the start of the corn planting season, and they would go work each day for them until the harvest. Then they [employers] would pay them [my parents] with a sack of corn. That was their whole salary, for working from May until December ... What made us migrate was that my mother didn’t even have a little piece of land (quoted in Velasco Ortiz 2005: 65).

Soon, Saul adds, with no access to arable land, the majority of Retorno was “dying of hunger.” Thus, people like Rosa and Saul attribute their migration to the vulnerable position in this servant class.

By the middle of the 20th century, these poor families had not only lost their land but had also begun to accumulate debts. They borrowed to cover gaps in slow seasons of sharecropping, buy medicine for sick children, or contribute – as obligated – to the church. When debtors missed a payment, respondents remember, the wealthy lenders would berate them, standing screaming outside their houses, threatening to throw them in jail, and bombarding them with shame. Mercedes, a migrant in her late 40s, recalls:

We used to always take out loans from the people who had a lot of money in those days. And those of us who had nothing, we had to go ask for these loans. I would say it was – well, it was a great humiliation, because the people would say, ‘OK,

I'm lending at 10% if you want, and I want it paid back by such a date.' And there would be other people who would say, 'If you want it, I'll lend to you for 15% and for such a date.' Well, necessity made us accept [their terms], but what happened if that date came and we still had no money? Well, people would come to our houses, and they would scream really ugly things at us – that we had to pay that money, that we had messed things up with them, and that from now on, their doors were shut. Those were the humiliations that many people – not just me but many, many people – lived through in Retorno.

Given the shame of such obligations, by the time recruiters arrived, Retorno's poor were desperate for a way out.

At the same time, thanks to dramatic improvements in irrigation and the expansion of industrial agriculture, the growing tomato industries of Northern Mexico, particularly Culiacán, Sinaloa and Sonora, to Baja California, began sending recruiters to Oaxaca in search of thousands of cheap, compliant workers needed to staff the harvests from May through October (Garduño 1991; Becerril and Cornejo 1996). With Western Mexican villages already connected to higher paying jobs in the United States, recruiters forged into the long-excluded, indigenous South. To lure Mixtec workers north, they offered cash advances, promising to double or even triple the wages villagers earned as sharecroppers in Retorno (Stephen 2007).⁴⁷ They also provided transportation. Thus, each fall, the growers sent buses to the highland towns of Oaxaca and Guerrero to bring in workers in for the harvest, with as many as 60% of workers transported by their employers (Thompson and Martin 1989).⁴⁸ Each spring, the workers returned to Oaxaca to wait out the off-season. The map below illustrates the paths they took.

⁴⁷ When the recruiters from Culiacán arrived, several families from Retorno had already worked a few seasons as sugarcane cutters on Mexico's Caribbean Coast (Velasco Ortiz 2005; 2005b), but the wages in Culiacán were significantly higher.

⁴⁸ Of 170,000 workers that staffed the vegetable fields in the Culiacán Valley in the 1970s, around 50% were transported by their employers (Krissman 1994; 1995; Thompson and Martin 1989).

Map 2: Retorno's Migration Path



Migration took on meaning in Retorno as a fix for debt. As Stuart and Kearney (1981) put it, Oaxacan Mixtecs were “economic refugees, practicing crisis-induced, income maintenance migration.” Migrants’ memories of the trips north – not only to seasonal work within Mexico, but also to the United States – reverberate with the burden of debt. Indeed, for several of Retorno’s key, pioneer migrants to the United States, born in the 1950s, debt is the first childhood memory. One after another explains, “Families from Retorno *had* to go [migrate], because they were too deep in debt.” For instance, leaning against an old, unused oven behind her little tortilla shop, Rosa remembers coming of age as part of this massive labor flow, in which she worked picking tomatoes for more than two decades. “We used to go to Sinaloa seasonally.” She tells me, “We’d leave in November or December and come back in May or June. It became a custom: we came home from the North [of Mexico], my dad paid his debts, and then he took out more loans; so, by November or December we had to go again in order to pay them back.” Needing all the income they could find and loath to leave their children behind, the people of Retorno traveled as whole families, bringing even the youngest along.

Marcelo Sanchez, born in Retorno in 1953, offers another example. Lingering over a tepid coffee at his ranch house in Vista, California, he sighs, remembering how debt and seasonal migration shaped his early years:

My family went back and forth in the 1960s and 70s – 1971, 1972. We would go home [to Retorno] just to put in our crops, and then the harvest would come, and at the end of the year we would go back to Sinaloa and then come back again ... This didn’t produce anything, any material benefit, because we didn’t have livestock, we didn’t have land ... On that steep slope allotted to us, we got to keep maybe 25% [of the crops], and 75% would go to them [the landlords] ... So my

parents went into debt a lot. Among the people in the town, the ones that had money at that time made great profit off this, because they would charge 10% interest. So if my father went to ask for 1,000 pesos, they would lend it to him, yes, but they would write it down: for the following date it's this much, and for the next date now it's grown to *this* much. Then the debt would start to grow. And we would go to Sinaloa, but we didn't always earn much in a season. There were bad seasons, and we wouldn't make enough to pay off what my father owed. We could only pay half, and that other half continued accumulating more interest, so again we had to go.

Marcelo's parents' position in the sharecropping system trapped him and his generation in a pattern of seasonal migration, to a destination that would prove anything but an escape.

Class-Divided Migration

However, not all migrants from Retorno went to the farms; just like the village, migration was divided by class. While 75% of internal migrants from Retorno worked seasonally in Culiacán, the other 25% – the “people of reason” – started moving to Mexico City to seek education and “better themselves.” They left because, as one put it, “I wanted to be something – to be someone in life.” Basilio, a long-time migrant in his late 50s, explains, “These people, of course, their parents were rich ... They were used to being entrepreneurs, to being rich, so the place seemed small to them, and they left for other places, too. They were the ones who started to build the community of Retorno in Mexico City ... The mestizos went to Mexico City, as an ethnic group, and the *naturales* to the farms” (Perry 2007).

In Mexico City, elites got professional degrees in fields such as accounting or nursing. For instance, Diana, a member one of Retorno's wealthier families, moved to Mexico City in the mid 1970s to attend secondary school and then train as a lab clinician before returning to Retorno to run a store. From there, perhaps ironically, she continued the practices of usurious lending common to her stratum. She explained: “I have always liked living in the *pueblo*, but sometimes you have to leave because you want to keep advancing, you want to keep studying.” Because Retorno had no secondary school until 1980, as Diana puts it, she “had to go” to Mexico City. The divergent education rates among urban and rural migrants illustrate this class divide: while those who went to the farms achieved an average of 4.6 years of schooling, 50% of those who went to the city attended secondary school or beyond, getting almost double the schooling of the farm families, for an average of 8.2 years.

The class-selectivity of migration later extended to the United States, such that the first US migrants were almost all poor, indigenous *naturales*. The elite, who had been educated as nurses, teachers, and accountants, disdained the prospect of farm work. For instance, Sonia, the self-proclaimed daughter of a *cacique* who studied nursing in Mexico City, never thought about migrating to the United States. Doing so, she explained, would insult her dignity:

Why would you go to have them exploit you, when here you can be the boss? At least here you're the lion's head; there you'd end up being a rat's tail ... The day I go to the United States will be through the Golden Door.' [My friend] says, 'How are you going to go through the Golden Door? Where is the Golden Door?' 'I'd cross the bridge,' I told him, 'but only with my head held high. Or I'll marry a white [American] boy (*laughs*), but I won't go like this.'

Migrating as farm workers felt beneath them. Ironically, when elites did, eventually, begin migrating to the United State as well, they relied on the farm workers who had first established the village's networks in the United States. For instance, Ivan, who worked in Mexico City before moving on to the US in 1978, explained that by the time he arrived, a "whole generation" of his fellow villagers worked on the farms, so few other options emerged. Other elites tried the US for a spell and then rejected the status downgrade. For instance, after having been an accountant in Mexico City, Milagros Garcia went to pick grapes in California – to "sweep dollars," as she puts it. But, she adds, "I only lasted a month and a half before coming back; it was so degrading." While such elites had education – ostensibly giving them the capacity to forge their own networks into the United States – few were eager to do so, since they would likely have to begin again at the bottom of the US labor market. Thus, the village's class divisions were replicated in migration to the US: only the poorest undertook the journeys of debt.

The Torment of Culiacán

Farm Labor Conditions

When Retorno's poorer migrants went to work in the agricultural fields of Culiacán and San Quintín, they suffered profound abuses, which reinforced their short-term patterns of circling back home, even to the village that had excluded and exploited them. Yet, these migrants also built networks that would prove crucial to their insertion into circuits of agricultural labor in the United States, starting in the late 1970s. Though Retorno's migrants might have hoped to move out of farm work and into other, more stable, easeful jobs, few had the choice. Rather, the constant travel and strenuous work blocked migrant families from accruing education or networks that might give them access to other kinds of work. Instead, when the opportunity to move on to the US arose, they had no choice but to stay in the fields.

The Valley of Culiacán – the dark soul of the North American agricultural industry – is located on the Western Coast of Mexico, 1300 miles north of Retorno and 600 miles due south of Nogales, Arizona (see map above). As of 1990, its multi-million dollar annual harvest produced somewhere between a third and half of the tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, summer squash, zucchini, eggplants and chili peppers sold in the United States between December and May (Wright 2005).⁴⁹ Along with a few other smaller regions in the state of Sinaloa, the valley earns nearly a third of Mexico's entire income from export agriculture, providing a lynchpin in Mexico's 20th century development.

⁴⁹ The region is also a source of wheat and other grains, as well as marijuana, opium, and heroine.

Developed as an extension of US agroindustry, Culiacán has served as a paradigm of both agricultural modernization and labor abuse. It was one of the first test sites for and success stories of an ambitious post-World War II project to modernize agriculture and foster large-scale, high-yield production, referred to as the “Green Revolution.”⁵⁰ The project required massive foreign and domestic investment in irrigation projects, highways, and rail connections to the lucrative markets of the United States – as well as environmental restructuring, fertilizer, and chemical pesticides. Finally, of course, it relied on hundreds of thousands of cheap, imported short-term workers. By the 1960s, when migrants from Retorno first arrived, Culiacán had gone from being a sleepy, 16,000-person forest town to an agro-industrial hub of half a million people where, each harvest, 150,000 migrant farm workers plunged their hands into its soil (Wright 2005).⁵¹ For the latter, conditions were abysmal.

Given the debt and exclusion that had driven migrants out of Retorno, we might expect them to use migration as an escape. But Culiacán was worse. Its makeshift work camps – the only source of lodging – were legendary for their misery (Wright 2005). A lucky family got a cubicle, a nine by twelve foot space in a long, metal poultry shed made of black tar paper or corrugated tin, with three walls and one open side, which families often covered with tarps and farm crates for privacy. Human waste and agricultural runoff seeped across the ground. And most families cooked in these same, un-ventilated rooms, filling the air with smoke. Yet, those with rooms were the lucky ones. Each season, as ever more workers arrived, five or six thousand people would pile upon each other in a single camp. Basilio recalls, “It was one family per cubicle, but when the sheds ran out and other family members arrived, soon it would be two. So when no one else fit, people started to build their own houses out of cardboard and plastic bags.” Mothers and fathers raised families in these cardboard shacks, living for months on end with no electricity and no potable water, just trying to keep their children alive.

Thirty-five years later, memories of filth in the camps make migrants from Retorno weep with anguish. As of the 1970s, pesticides banned in the United States were still being sprayed on the tomatoes, with almost no protection for workers from the rashes, headaches, respiratory and mental problems they provoked. These chemicals ran off into irrigation ditches, the only source of water for drinking or washing in the camps. Workers also relieved themselves directly into these canals, and latrines – if they were available – emptied into the water as well (Wright 2005). Though the skin on Ximena’s 69-year-old face looks tough and battle-worn, tears stream down her cheeks when she recalls:

The water was so dirty! There were these channels (*She waves to show how they flowed by the sheds*). We used to go do our washing in that water. We would be washing, and the people that were nursing were washing baby diapers. The poop was just floating right there, and we drank that water. It wasn’t filtered, nothing. We drank

⁵⁰ In 1941, The Rockefeller Foundation and the Mexican Government jointly launched this program, whose techniques would ultimately spread through both poor and rich countries across the globe (Wright 2005; Jennings 1988).

⁵¹ By 1990 this number would grow to 250,000 (Wright 2005).

it like that. We would just grab a piece of cloth like this so it didn't catch any shit, and we drank it. Ay, no! [A: You didn't get sick?] Of course we got sick! Really sick, because that was toxic. That water was filled with filth, with infection, and that was the water we drank. So we suffered so much, until we saved our selves – until, well, I don't know, we paid our debt and we came back.

Once again, Ximena underscores the connection between suffering and debt. In *relation* to Culiacán, Ximena – like many others – began to see returning to the village as a means of “saving herself,” even though before she left Retorno, she had been so poor that she had no stable lodging and slept under a tree outside.

Adelina recalls similar misery. She went to Culiacán for the first time the year she was sixteen, carrying her eight-month-old baby on her back. Tears well up in Adelina's eyes as she gestures at her spindly teenaged daughter: “I was only her age – a little girl myself – and my baby died.” Nevertheless, Adelina returned to work in the Culiacán Valley every season for another eight years, describing:

We used to drink from the water running in the ditches ... Up above people would bathe, and down here below we're fetching the water to drink. And people went to the bathroom out in the open air ... So sometimes we got sick – diarrhea, sometimes vomiting, and there were children with fevers all the time, because there was no hygiene. We bathed and all that, we washed, we washed our clothes, but then it was useless, because the water running in that stream, in that canal, was the same water we drank ... The owners didn't care if we got sick. So whatever we earned, it ended up staying there, because the doctor took it, and the doctor was very expensive. Then the people who sold food – who had little tents in the fields – well, there they used to sell us corn meal, eggs, beans, rice at really high rates so that often when we went to buy food, we didn't even have enough to get what we needed ... That's why I never stayed there for a long time, for a full year. We just went for a little while, and then we would come back [to Retorno].

As a migrant from a village near Retorno put it: “There is sickness everywhere. Culiacan is a land of sickness. Sickness is in the water, the foods, the camps” (quoted in Wright 2005: 103). Therefore, when the work ended, migrants would retreat to Retorno, seeking reprieve.

The work – where men, women, and children labored side by side – was just as devastating as the camps. Adelina continues, “They used to run us into the ground, abuse us ... When I first went there, we earned 13 pesos a day, and we had to stand all day in the mud. There we stood, in the mud. Oh, it was so gross, and they would force us to cut the tomatoes fast, that is – the foremen who were in front of the people would make us work like that.” Often, they recall, they had to stand in mud that would make them sick. Rosa describes that to pick tomatoes: “You have to stand in the mud – in the water and mud – and you have to bend over to lift the plant and pick the tomato from the inside. And if we didn't do that they punished us. We would be wet up to here – up to our waists – and all day we worked like that, and that water did a lot of damage. My waist started to

hurt, my stomach – everything.” Others remembered the beatings and the foremen’s abuse. Angela explains:

We went to pick tomatoes, to work, and they treated us so badly for any little thing. You were always hustling, and still they abused us. ‘If you don’t want to work, go to hell,’ they used to tell us. Many people from here went, and we suffered a lot because of this abuse ... We used to have to walk through so much mud, through water. They wouldn’t let us stand where it was dry, because there were plants. ‘No! Get down from there! No!’ Sometimes, the mud used to reach our upper thighs, and we’d go around working in that.

In a study of conditions in Culiacán, Angus Wright (2005) describes similar conditions across Mixtec farm workers. As one of those he interviewed puts it, in Culiacán, “They treated people like slaves. They would order us around, making us go into deep mud in the fields to work, and beating people who refused to work under such conditions” (117).

Protests and Violence

In the early 1970s, students and farm workers in the Valleys of Culiacán and San Quintín began organizing for better conditions, such as cleaner water, and an end to labor abuse.⁵² The protests radicalized several leaders from Retorno, including Domingo Garcia, Basilio Ramos, and Saul and Abundio Molina, who were then teenagers working with their parents in the fields. In collaboration with student activists from the University of Sinaloa, they started to work as organizers, galvanizing as many as 16,000 farm workers at a time to strike, halt the harvests in the fields, and demand wage increases, improvements in lodging, schools for the children, and clean water. Over the course of the decade, these migrants from Retorno would be involved in dozens of strikes and make some gains in working conditions. As they did, they would help to form independent farm worker federations.⁵³ Later, they would also align themselves with radical wings of the Mexican Communist Party, as well as with the US-based United Farm workers, who, under the direction of Cesar Chavez, sent \$10,000 and trains of food to the striking Mexican workers. Given the scale of these protests – and the fact that most of the people Retorno worked in the fields together – nearly every migrant from the village got embroiled in the fights. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, the conflicts laid the first groundwork for their ongoing politicization.

Yet, these strikes also precipitated violent repression and further trauma. To crush the revolts, growers hired special security forces known as *Guardia Blanca* (White Guards).

⁵² Students, who had been radicalized after the Tlatelolco Massacre of 1968 and subsequent protests in Mexico City, quickly set their sites on the grim working conditions of Mexico’s most lucrative agricultural fields.

⁵³ Specifically, the Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (*Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos*, CIOAC) and the Independent Federation of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (*Federación Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos*, FIOAC). These are independent unions that emerged in the late 1970s in Sinaloa and Baja California and carried out major strikes for several years. They won several wage increases, but these were soon outpaced by inflation and had minimal lasting effect on the farm labor market (Zabin 1992).

These mercenary groups detained, imprisoned, and tortured strike leaders, including Domingo Garcia and Basilio Ramos. Hunched over on a bench outside his cement home in Retorno, Basilio, now 56, chokes on tears as he recounts how, when he was 18, the *Guardia Blanca* picked him up, stripped him naked, threatened him with castration and drowning, and beat him daily with a two by four, for weeks on end. “They were really, really nasty days of torture,” he weeps, adding, “I was destroyed – morally destroyed. I wasn’t even minimally prepared for the experience I had.” In response, he returned to the village for refuge. The violence shattered even for those at the fringes. Ximena, who had several young children with her in Culiacán at the time, remembers that after 13 years of working in the area, the clashes broke her forbearance. In 1974, the year she was nursing her fifth child, a group of student activists from the University of Sinaloa came to the camps, stealing food to give out to workers and encouraging them to fight for greater rights. It was only a matter of time until the police struck back. She recounts:

Five cars full of policemen arrived, and there were only four students and then they killed one. I crossed myself, praying they wouldn’t kill me, because they were shooting at me but they missed. One of my children – who was three years old – ran across the road, and I ran towards him to pick him up. I reached for him, and that’s why the bullet hit the student – the police shot him and killed him. Then they went dragging him around like a dog – around and around the whole camp ... The policemen said it was our fault that he died, and they stood there dragging him around like a dead dog ... From then on, I got very sick: I was bad and my baby bad. As if she was going to die, and the same with me. Like we just wanted to [die]. My husband used to wrap me up in a sheet and carry me to eat, to see if I had the will, but I just lay there. He would bring me any food I wanted, but I would not eat. I felt no hunger anymore.

Combined with filth and abuse, the violence scarred these migrants, so much that in Ximena’s words, they “wanted to die.” Staying in Culiacán to pay their debts was almost more than they could endure.

Producing Return

The conditions in Culiacán drove migrants to return to their village, encouraging a pattern of circular, seasonal migration. Rosa explains that while she spent nearly two decades going to Culiacán and San Quintín, she always preferred the village, even with her family’s longstanding exclusion and servant status:

I always liked it better here [in Retorno], because it was so dirty there ... That was the problem. That’s why we liked it better here, because there was well water – there still is well water. This water was already drinkable, even though in those days it wasn’t piped, it was just in the wells ... We were always coming and going, because we never went to stay, just to stay a few months, even though we spent the winters there for years.

Thus, Rosa – like most people of Retorno – followed a pattern of “always coming and going,” in which they returned for the clean water and respite, and then left again to pay off their debts.

Likewise, once the option arose to move on to the United States, migrants jumped to escape Northern Mexico – albeit to another set of farms. For instance, a migrant from the nearby town of San Jerónimo Progreso explained, “We don’t go there [to Culiacán] if we can avoid it. There’s better money on the other side [US]. And the life there in Culiacán is a very hard way to live” (quoted in Wright 2005: 120). As he implies, several men went, instead to the United States. When they did, the new, higher wages north of the border allowed women return to the village, which – due to the conditions in Culiacán – they hoped might ease their suffering.

(Re) Gendering Migration

Women’s experiences in Culiacán were especially trying, making women in particular want to return to the village. As women, they faced unique hardships in the camps and the fields. Though women picked tomatoes alongside men, they also had to cook, care for children, and tend to the sick. Mothers were loath to leave small children in the village, given that they would be thousands of miles away for several months, so instead they brought their families. While in Culiacán, respondents remember waking up at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning to grind corn, making hundreds of tortillas for their families on tiny, makeshift presses. As their children got sick and even died, as their huts ran with pesticides and human waste, women – responsible for keeping house – were charged with fighting the squalor.

Furthermore, women were often subject to gender abuse in the camps and the fields. Rosa explains that the integration of men and women at work allowed for sexual violence:

The men abused the women a lot. For example, there were many who raped the women, or touched them. They harassed them like that. And they would say things to them – who knows what ... Our husbands were really jealous, too, because men and women worked together there. So when the women would arrive home, they would hit us. They would accuse their wives of seeing other men.

When I ask Rosa if she ever stood up for herself, she replies, “No, because I always had that fear that they would do something to us, and I knew that my husband would get mad [hit me]. I felt that [defying him] showed a lack of respect for my husband, because that’s how they used to teach us.” Rather, Rosa swallowed the mistreatment, not only from unfamiliar men but also from her own husband. Graciela, who left Retorno with her husband in the late 1970s, at the age of 15, added that while they worked in the fields, “My husband started to drink a ton. He would beat me, he would verbally assault me – and the only thing I wanted was to come home to my parents.”

As a result, when the opportunity arose for men to earn higher wages in the United States, many women separated from their husbands and returned to the village. Nearly half of Retorno's migrants to Culiacán had been women. Yet, only 20% of these internal migrant women ever went on to the United States – compared to 60% of the men who had worked in Culiacán. Instead, when pioneer migrants from Retorno who went to the United States in the late 1970s, 93% were men. Even decades later, when several men brought their wives and daughters to the United States, expanding the scope of female migration, women never reached more than a third of the village's migrants to California (Cornelius et al. 2009). Studies often assume that the men's predominance among Mexican migrants – and their role as breadwinners – is “natural” due to the physical nature of farm work. Others suggest that male migration is a spillover of earlier US government recruitment, since, from 1942 through 1964, the US “Bracero Program” recruited Mexican men to work on US farms on short-term, 40-day contracts (Sana and Massey 2005).⁵⁴ Yet, migrants from Retorno came to the US stepwise, through fields in Northern Mexico where farm work was seen as appropriate for *both* women and men. To begin to see migration as masculine, they had to *change* their gender meanings.

Migration became masculinized in the context of class-based experiences: as women *reacted* to their exploitation in the Valleys of Culiacán and San Quintín, they helped re-gender Retorno's migration, from co-ed to male. The higher wages in the United States made it possible for men to support their wives, and enable women to raise their children in the relative calm and clean of the village. Angela, worked in Culiacán for nearly a decade but has never been to the US, despite the fact that her husband has gone back and forth to California for years. One day as I sit in her cool, cement kitchen, she sizzles a pan full of chicken, reflecting:

Would I say that I'm interested in going to the US? No. I went to Culiacán, and that killed my desire. Because of that, I imagine what it might be like ... So I said to my husband, 'Oh, no, I will not go around like that with my children. It's so sad. If you go to the US, so be it. But, I do not want to migrate anymore.' So, that's how our separation began; he started living in the US and me here.

Return gave the women reprieve from the harsh environment they had faced in Culiacán and spatial distance from their husbands. Mercedes recalls that in 1985, her husband betrayed her with another woman and then announced he was leaving for the United States. For Mercedes, this provided a chance to return to the village: “‘Well, it's OK,’ I told him. ‘Now I have a roof over my head, a place to stay. I'm in my home and if you want to go, go. If you want to send me money, fine, but if not, I will still raise my children; I will go out to work and my children will not want for anything.’” She confesses, “I no longer loved him. I hated him, and there, things fell apart; he came here [to the

⁵⁴ Several men from Retorno participated in the Bracero Program between 1959 and 1963, for instance, picking strawberries in Oxnard, California, asparagus in Arizona, or cotton in Texas. However, perhaps ironically, most of the participants were members of the elite. At the time, migrants required government connections to get the 40-day contracts, so going to the United States was a privilege. Basilio explains: “Among the people of reason, they would give each other the opportunity. They had the connections, and they favored their own people, like always. ... That's why more people of reason than indigenous people went to the United States in those years.”

US] and I stayed there alone.” Despite the stereotype that rural villages reinforce traditional patriarchy, for these women, returning to Retorno offered reprieve.

Nearly all of the families that had gone together to Culiacán divided when the man went on to the United States, as women sought to spare themselves and their children the misery they had gone through up north. Though Retorno’s movement had always been temporary, it was only at this point that it also became characterized by family separation.

Life the Fields: The Road from Culiacán to California

For men, the networks and skills built in Culiacán proved crucial on the path into California, both linking them to the United States and delimiting their options once they arrived. When pioneer migrants from Retorno established its networks in the United States in the late 1970s, at least three quarters came via Northern Mexican’s farms.⁵⁵ Thus, their primary networks in the United States were tied to farm recruiters, who forged the circuit first from Retorno to Culiacán, and then on to the area around Ensenada in the Valley of San Quintín in Baja California and ultimately into California. Often, recruiters provided transport and incentives for migrants to head further north. While migrants from Retorno had started out, in the 1960s and 1970s, working in Culiacán, Sinaloa, with the development of irrigation technology, a new, agricultural center arose in San Quintín, Baja California, just across the border from San Diego. To recruit workers, employers in San Quintín sent buses not to Oaxaca – as those in Sinaloa had done, but to Sinaloa itself, poaching directly from the other site’s tomato fields. Thus, Rosa remembers, after a decade of cycling in and out of Culiacán, “From there we moved on to Ensenada [Baja California] with an employer we called Camilo – one of the ones that started hiring people. They – the bosses [in Baja California] – said that they would pay for our expenses, our travel and our food.” Saul remembers a similar network, linking one farm labor site to the next. As I sit on his couch in San Diego, he describes:

First we went to [Culiacán] Sinaloa, and then from Sinaloa we would come to San Quintín. The bosses themselves transported people in pickup trucks with walls – or in carts. They would bring people in for the harvest, and from there they would take them to Vizcaíno in Baja California and then cross them back again in a boat to Culiacán. That’s how people started working in the San Quintín Valley, and then crossing over to the United States – the youngest ones. That was the circuit

From Baja California, “the circuit” then extended to California.

⁵⁵ Even in Retorno’s third decade of migration, the majority of its migrants to the US have come step-wise, via a destination within Mexico. As Mines, Nichols, and Runsten (2010) show, almost all indigenous migrant farm workers in California first migrated within Mexico on a temporary basis.

In the late 1970s, US farm workers began to unionize,⁵⁶ so growers sought cheaper, more flexible workers to replace those on strike and keep prices down, especially in the face of rising international competition and demands for fresh produce. Rather than recruiting directly, the farm owners used intermediaries or farm labor contractors (FLCs), often recruited from among the migrants themselves. These FLCs bring brought workers in from Northern Mexico to break up strikes and replace union crews (Krissman 1995; Velasco Ortiz 2002). After 1986, the pace of recruitment increased. That year, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) allowed earlier generations of farm workers to get legal status and find more stable and high-paying jobs, opening up the lowest rungs of the labor market. As California farms became desperate, the foremen in Mexico – many of whom worked for subsidiaries of the US agricultural firms, which financed production in Northern Mexico during the off-season – would recommend *coyotes* (smugglers) who could cross people into the United States. Some even offered loans for the trip (Krissman 2002). Thus it was not just individual breadwinners suddenly “choosing” to cross the border that drove them to the US, but rather the intertwined networks of Mexican and US agricultural labor recruitment that pulled them across.

Although the work in California was faster paced, it appealed to migrants because wages were as much as ten times higher than in Culiacán.⁵⁷ If migrants pinched pennies, they could support families living back in the village, rather than requiring women and children to work, as they had in Northern Mexico. California became the next step on the farm work circuit. The logic was, again, driven by debt. Saul explains, “In 1976 was the first time we came to the United States ... When we started crossing undocumented, we came out of a need to find work. The only thing we thought of was work, and it never even occurred to us that ‘Oh, I’d like to go live in *El Norte*.’ No. We came only to work – and to return to our *pueblos*.” As Saul suggests, Retorno’s first US migrants made sense of crossing the border in the same terms they had used to understand work Northern Mexico: as a short-term fix. Given the level of US wages and the conditions in Northern Mexico, by the end of the 1980s, people from Retorno began to shift from internal to US migration. Yet as they did, nearly 90% continued to work on farms.

Upon arrival in the United States, Retorno’s migrants had few alternatives. Their social networks (at least those relevant to their employment) were made up primarily of recruiters and other farm workers. Even after decades of migration, this gave them few leads to shift into different sectors. Therefore, of all Retorno migrants who had come via Baja California, 85% of continued to work as agricultural laborers upon arrival in the United States (Cornelius et al. 2009). While people of Retorno probably *wanted* to find

⁵⁶ In the mid 1970s, Chavez and the United Farm Workers in California ran massive union drives. They lobbied for successful passage of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act, giving farm workers the right to collective bargaining and union representation and securing increasing numbers of social programs for workers (Zabin 1992).

⁵⁷ While numbers vary, based on a survey conducted in the early 1990s, Zabin (1997) found an average weekly net income (after paying for housing, transit, tools) of US \$145 in California and US\$44 in Baja. As of 2007, meanwhile, Cornelius et al. (2009) found that weekly salaries amounted to about \$400 in California and \$88 within Mexico. In California, growers extracted productivity by paying workers piece rates and by externalizing the costs of recruiting, transporting, housing, and retaining their seasonal workforce (often to the Northern Mexican farms themselves). As a result, the binational wage difference was much greater than the differential in labor costs (Zabin 1997).

work in other economic niches, they lacked the contacts to branch out. As I will mention below, they also lacked the skills.

Having always worked in agriculture, farming was their primary know-how. Even when migrants sought work on their own – independent of recruiters – their experience on farms was definitive. For instance, in 1975 Marcelo, one of Retorno's first US migrants, became fed up with the impossible cycle of debt and suffering in Culiacán. So he crossed the border into San Diego County, with five dollars in his pocket and no contacts from home. But he recognized the tomato fields. There, Marcelo approached a blond man whom he took to be the boss and asked for work. He relates the conversation:

[The boss] said, 'You want to work? Do you know how to plant tomatoes?'
'Everything,' I said.
'Where have you worked?' He asked,
'Very little, here, but in Mexico I've worked in Sinaloa'
'Ooh, Sinaloa is a really productive farming area. How do you plant tomatoes there?'
'I said, well, in Mexico, ... you start with a sprout and some stakes.'

Hearing about his experience, the boss gave Marcelo a chance, and Marcelo demonstrated the digging practices he had learned in Culiacán. Impressed with what Marcelo had accomplished, the man hired him. Thus, even though Marcelo was illiterate, his agricultural skills helped him get a job. From there, Marcelo himself became a recruiter, drawing dozens of others from Retorno to work the fields at Oceanside's "Rancho Victor." Similarly, Fred Krissman (1994; 2002), who studied the village adjacent to Retorno, found that because production on both sides of the border was so similar – down to the packing boxes – when migrants arrived in the US, "The Mixtec found that they had already been trained for the job in Northern Mexico ... The main differences were in wages and working conditions; daily earnings were about twelve times greater, workplace safety and environmental regulations were enforced, and their foreman expected them to work a hundred times harder." Since the two sides used the exact same technologies, as one grower in Baja California quipped "We're a school for *El Norte* [the US]" (Zabin 1997: 349). Internal migration, in other words, primed migrants for work in the United States.

Yet, the pattern of internal farm work also deprived migrants of the skills and education to find other jobs. In Retorno, poor families rarely attended school. For one, they could not afford supplies. Rosa explained that as a young child, before she joined her family at work in Culiacán, "I only went [to school] for a year when I was 10, because we couldn't go to the school if we didn't have money – for books, notebooks, pencils. And for clothing, because going out there – well, we didn't have much clothing, maybe one outfit or sometimes two ... So instead I helped my grandmother when she went to work." Furthermore, elites directly excluded the poor from school by imposing rules that children who did not own shoes – that is, about 33% of men, 58% of women, and most children in Retorno in the 1950s – could not attend school. If indigenous children did attend, they were mocked. Rosa goes on: "When I tried to go to school, the [elite] girls that came from the center of town used to make fun of me. I'm not from the center of

town, but from the edge. And they would humiliate us, insult us by calling us ‘Indians’.” Finally, in the face of entrenched class divides, poor parents did not see the value of schooling. Marcelo recalls:

When I was little I didn’t get to study, because my parents didn’t let me. We used to live near the school, and I would hear the kids playing and want to go over there, but I never had the chance. Daily, I had to go out in the fields and work. My father used to say, ‘Why are you going to study? People who study end up just the same as those who don’t.’ He didn’t want to send me to school.’ ... Because of my parents’ poverty, I never went to school ... I went for about two months. But, that was all. From there we moved to Sinaloa.

Given the economic and political exclusion that defined the village, such parents did not expect their children to put such schooling to use – either as town leaders, or in professional careers.⁵⁸ Instead, they brought the children to Sinaloa to help pick tomatoes.

Working in Culiacán also entailed giving up education. Juana, who is 51 and illiterate, explains, “I never went to school, because from the age of 10 (1969), I went with my father to Culiacán. That’s where I grew up, and I met my husband there. Then I started to go with him.”⁵⁹ Other respondents added that even when their parents encouraged them to stay in the village to attend school, they did not want to be left behind. Dante, who began working in Culiacán at age 11, in 1984, recalls, “I left school after third grade. I didn’t want to stay [in Retorno] anymore. My parents told me to stay, but I felt really lonely there ... So I worked [in Culiacán], and the water came up to my knees. My shoes would fall apart – just to earn some money to help my parents.” Paloma also gave up education to be with her family, telling me, “My parents didn’t want to bring me to Culiacán, because I was in school and they said, ‘You can’t go. You’re studying and we’d prefer that you stay.’ But I said, ‘No, I want to go wherever you go, because with you I’ll be OK. It doesn’t matter if I have to work or whatever I have to do.”

By depriving people from Retorno of skills and contacts (human and social capital), internal migration constrained their alternatives. Having worked on farms, more than three quarters lacked a primary education, and nearly half remained illiterate. Therefore, when migrants arrived in the US in the late 1970s, Saul tells me, “We never went to school. Well, and at least my brother and I went but only through the third grade, while many other people didn’t even go to school at all.” Marcelo, likewise, sighs, “Life has been working in the fields, in the fields, in the fields.”

Conclusion

Retorno’s local-level history forged an unequal social structure in terms of ethnicity and class, which made the most marginal villagers susceptible to farm labor migration as a fix for debt. Then, during internal farm work, members were deprived of opportunities to build varied, external social networks or employable skills that might give

⁵⁸ The contrast to La Partida is striking: there, parents expected their children to be involved in village government, and therefore saw education.

them access to better jobs when they went on to the United States. As migrants moved north across the US border, their inability to be selective about destinations kept them trapped not only in this economic niche, but also in a hostile, exclusive political context, in this case, North County San Diego.

The history of internal migration consigned most members to farm work, a niche long correlated with economic precarity, labor abuse, and circular movement. Once in California, almost 90% of the village's migrants worked in the region's seasonal fruit and vegetable industries. Compared to undocumented mestizo and Zapotec migrants, they faced lower wages, less consistent employment, and more labor abuses (Holmes 2007; Stephen 2007; Mines, Nichols and Runsten 2010). As of the early 1990s, 72% of California's indigenous farm workers were paid piece rate and the rest hourly, and nearly 100% earned below the federal poverty level (Zabin 1997; Kresge 2007). Farms in San Diego County⁵⁹ were notorious for having the worst conditions in the state of California. Their growers often failed to pay minimum wage over overtime, and many, through the 1990s, did not pay workers at all (Zabin 1992).⁶⁰ Even when migrants from Retorno and nearby areas diversified into other sectors, because they lived in a hostile, rural area, they also suffered greater public aggression and tend to be more isolated, developing fewer social networks into non-farm labor markets and less upward mobility (Balderrama and Molina 2009). Finally, many families separated across borders – 67% in Retorno – with men going to the United States while women stayed in Mexico, adding psychological burdens (Brownell 2010). In conjunction, they circulated more frequently and fewer settled, with Retorno's average pioneer migrant staying less than two years and 98% of them returning to Mexico at least once, many more than ten times (Dinerman 1982; Mines and Anzaldua 1982; Portes and Borocz 1989). Even as of 2011, when most respondents had diversified into other economic sectors, 89% still planned to go back to Mexico.⁶¹

Retorno's story illustrates how migrants' social networks – and their insertion into particular US economic niches – are not independent of but instead constructed by their sending-side political histories. Step-wise migration plays a key role in delimiting the exogenous social networks – that is, in this case, the webs of labor recruiters – that define migrants' entry into the United States. Furthermore, the masculinity of Mexican migration is not just an automatic byproduct of a patriarchal society but instead gets

⁵⁹ From Baja California, San Diego was the primary crossing point and the first way station, so many migrants – being were too poor to pay smugglers an extra \$200 to get around the immigration checkpoint that separated San Diego County from Los Angeles – got “stuck” below the line (Zabin 1992). Though some early migrants from Retorno moved with the crops to areas such as Bakersfield, Fresno, Madera, Stockton – and even on to Oregon and Washington – the majority concentrated in the vegetable fields of North County San Diego.

⁶⁰ In 1992, Claudia Smith, a long time migrant advocate, said: “In all my journeys throughout the [United] States and throughout the rural areas of this state, I've never seen wages or working conditions as depressed as what I've seen here in Northern San Diego County. The dimension of the abuses here, which range from employers refusing to pay wages to the lack of water in the fields, is several times worse than in any other part of the state” (quoted in Zabin 1992: 24).

⁶¹ While the economic crisis during my fieldwork in 2009 and 2010 may have increased Mixtecs' rate of return, past studies show that this is an ongoing pattern; even in the 1990s, 85 to 95 percent of families in Mixtec migrant-sending communities included returned migrants (Ortiz Gabriel 1992).

produced in articulation with class relationships, as women make active decisions that reshape the dynamics of migration, in answer to their experiences of exploitation. In sum, the particular expressions of class, ethnicity, and gender on the sending side – both in migrants' hometown and in the context of internal migration experiences – has long-term implications for migrants' pathways once they begin to work in the United States.

Chapter 3

“Like a Slave”: North County San Diego and the Life of Return

I arrive at Ricardo and Salomé Garcia’s home in Vista, California one warm Saturday evening in 2010. The street bustles with boxy white trucks that sell fruit out the back and tight-jeaned teenaged girls, laughing off porch railings. Inside the Garcia’s one-bedroom apartment, their nine-year-old daughter Mari is squished between her three siblings on the bed, engrossed in a school worksheet. The TV sprays black and white. The signal costs too much, Salomé admits sheepishly. As we talk, Ricardo, a strawberry worker in dirty black pants and a torn T-shirt, glances at his four children and sighs, as if to explain the whole scene, “We bet it all for them.” In the 1990s, Ricardo migrated alone, coming and going from Vista for seven years. Then, in 2001, he brought his wife and toddlers. Looking back, he pauses, “I don’t know what we have to give them ...” A siren interrupts his thought, and the noise of a helicopter – the sounds, that is, which keep undocumented families like the Garcias living in fear. While police don’t come inside, Salomé tells me, “They’re always out there. So we’re afraid to leave.” A few hours later, just after 9:00pm, I make my way back to the car. As if to confirm Salomé’s story, the street is dead. No music. No noise. Just one white car, shining its headlights in my eyes, hovering while I fumble for the directions home. Then I see the floodlights on the mirrors and realize: it’s an unmarked police car, just waiting in the darkness. In San Diego County, migrants from places like Retorno meet the US military and conservative retirees, so the border zone has never been friendly territory. Living there, migrants feel temporary and excluded, like perpetual visitors who eke out a living in a land that is not theirs. As Ricardo puts it when I leave, “We want to go back [to Retorno], but – well, here we are.”

Retorno’s pathway challenges traditional research on immigrant receiving sites, which focuses on integration, or the path migrants take “into” the US labor market and society. Scholars argue that over time, even among communities that begin in farm work, migrants’ economic positions improve, along with a growing sense of belonging (Massey, Goldring and Durand 1994; Alba and Nee 2003). Recent research on undocumented groups has complicated this narrative by arguing that fear keeps migrants perpetually on the margins of US social and political life (Chavez 2007; Massey and Pren 2012; Menjívar and Abrego 2012). In keeping with such findings, even as Retorno’s migrants diversified into other kinds of jobs, they continued to feel excluded and alienated from the United States. They reacted by returning – or planning to return – home. Women, whom most research expects to “lead incorporation” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), were at the forefront of these actions.

In this chapter, reversing the usual “integration” question, I seek to explain the persistence of return. This framing of the question builds on the idea that coercive US immigration control perpetuates migrants’ ongoing ties *to Mexico*, as a means to reproduce an exploitable labor force (Burawoy 1976). To better understand the on-the-ground mechanisms of this process, I examine how the local-level political economy of North County San Diego made Retorno’s migrants feel excluded and withdraw.

First, I argue that local policing of and policies towards immigrants in North County took a *criminalizing* logic, which reinforced Retorno migrants' orientation to Mexico. North County was notoriously restrictionist starting in the 1980s and 1990s, prefiguring a nationwide trend. There, police involvement in immigration control provoked widespread fear, just as most analyses of contemporary migrant "illegality" suggest (Menjívar and Abrego 2012). Yet, I add to this argument by showing that fear is not an effect of coercive immigration control *per se*, but of its *arbitrary* implementation by police, employers, and other institutions in the receiving site. In North County San Diego, I find, these institutions targeted migrants *regardless* of their "good" or "bad" behavior; that is, they treated all migrants as if they were criminals. As a result, respondents found the police – and other government institutions as well – unpredictable. Never knowing when they might risk deportation, they felt powerless and perpetually afraid. The uncertainty also made them see US immigration enforcement as perverse and illegitimate. Because respondents saw no particular logic to who was deported, their only strategy to escape this fate was to avoid government institutions altogether and lay low.

Second, this political context set the stage for migrants' experiences in the workforce. While scholars generally suggest that rural migrants' circulation is driven by the seasonal economic structure and isolation of farm labor (Dinerman 1982; Massey et al. 1987; Goldring 1990), I argue that the criminalizing context shaped other sectors as well. Although people from Retorno had gotten connected to North County San Diego through agriculture, by 2011, 60% of them worked in industry and service, the same sectors as most people from La Partida. Yet, these employers *also* used the restrictive environment of North County to threaten, exploit, and abuse workers. The political context shaped labor relations or "production politics (Lee 1995). Thus, it was not the economic niche alone but the experience of exclusion more broadly that drove them to return home.

Third, these effects were particularly strong for women migrants, who suffered doubly in the United States, defying the popular perception that migrating to the US empowers Mexican women (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Because men had come earlier, nearly all the women who did come to the US followed their husbands, and many were undocumented while the men had legal permanent resident status. Having arrived after men, they also had fewer friends, less experience, and smaller support systems in the United States, and most made less money. This left women dependent on their husbands for income, information, social networks, and protection, giving the men a large degree of control over their daily affairs. Because arbitrary immigration policing made women afraid to go out and see friends – let alone to contact the police directly – those in abusive relationships remained trapped. In answer, they took a "grin and bear it" attitude toward household mistreatment, until, they hoped, they could return to Mexico.

Finally, I show that in response to their experiences in North County San Diego, people from Retorno continued to identify with their hometown. They did not, as scholars often presume, take assimilation as their goal. Rather, the receiving context reinforced the orientation migrants had when leaving the village: to use migration as a stopgap measure for paying debts. Focused on return, they maintained a "dual frame of

reference” (Piore 1979; Waldinger and Lichter 2003), understanding life in the United States *in terms of* their positions back home. Oriented towards Mexico, many accepted lower wages on the premise that they would later translate into Mexican pesos. They also withdrew socially and politically. Therefore, fear also marginalized migrants indirectly, by encouraging them to focus on return, rather than on life in the United States. In the 1980s and 1990s, people from Retorno would stay in California just long enough to pay their debts and then circulate home. However, in the 2000s, border enforcement became more aggressive and crossing more costly, so things shifted: respondents were now trapped in the United States, *wanting* to go home. Now, it was not circular movements but instead the temporary *mindset* that encouraged migrants to “grin and bear it” until they secured the funds to return to Retorno for good. The “mental exit” left most respondents in a prolonged state of limbo. When they *were* able to return, women led the way.

The Criminalizing Logic of North County Immigration Control

In the past three decades, San Diego County has been at the vanguard of the nation’s growing war against undocumented immigrants. Because the county lies within 100 miles of the border, it is technically a “zone of exemption,” where border patrol officers have license to search for undocumented immigrants without warrants or probable cause. As early as the 1980s, when the rest of the nation still turned a relative blind eye to undocumented migration, federal immigration control officials worked all over San Diego County, often in collaboration with the police.⁶² By the mid 1990s, San Diego had become the vanguard of new efforts to shut down the border, through “Operation Gatekeeper.” As the United States poured funding into border enforcement, the area became increasingly militarized.

Every respondent who worked in San Diego County in the 1980s remembers running from “*la migra*” (immigration control), who would find and deport them both at work and where they lived. For instance, Mateo, who came and went several times over the decade to work on tomato farms, recounts:

La migra used to chase us. Wow, they would take us on some races; we would run until we reached this side of the hills and then we would hide ... We were really pursued. Every two weeks or twenty days they would come, and if not they would follow us at night. And they could find you easily! Because you just walked up to sleep in the hillside – where we made our little houses – and they would follow our little paths and come to take us out ... Like once they kicked us out at night, while we were sleeping. They picked us up and handcuffed us and took us off to Tijuana ... Then we had to go back again to the battle of trying to get across the border.

In the 1980s, even though undocumented migrants elsewhere in the US faced a relative absence of policing, those in San Diego County were perpetually subject to border patrol.

In the 1990s and 2000s, San Diego County police became increasingly

⁶² Indeed, in the mid 1980s, the county’s “Border Crime Prevention Unit” became notorious for murdering migrants.

intertwined with this immigration control. Starting in 1994, San Diego County shared a joint special unit with the border patrol, authorizing police to call ICE and hold a detainee if her immigration status became apparent, regardless of criminal conviction (Maya 2002). In the 2000s, San Diego County, especially cities in North County such as Escondido and Vista, aggressively expanded police power to enforce immigration. For instance, San Diego County was the first in California to implement the Secure Communities program, cross-deputizing police to detain “criminal aliens.” Likewise, starting in 2010, Escondido became the only city in the United States to have a special agreement with Federal Immigration Control and Enforcement (ICE), placing federal immigration agents *inside* the police department and charging regular police officers with bringing any undocumented migrants to ICE’s attention (Marosi 2011). The area’s intermingling of police and immigration control went above and beyond that occurring at the federal level.

Empowered, the police used an array of pretexts to stop immigrants. For instance, police in Escondido used California’s unlicensed driver law to set up traffic checkpoints, ostensibly to stop drunk drivers. Yet, as of 2011, 90% of those detained at such checkpoints were undocumented migrants (Guidi 2011). Upon stop, the police confiscated migrants’ cars, kept them for 30 days, and charged more than \$1,000 to recover them, sometimes detaining or deporting the drivers.⁶³ According to media reports, they also detained migrants at will in public places ranging from pharmacies and supermarkets to the streets of Latino neighborhoods. Respondents report being stopped for violations such as driving without a seatbelt or riding a bicycle on the sidewalk. Even in the course of protective work, including domestic violence calls, police were reported to check migrants’ legal status (Sifuentes 2011). Conjuring such “crimes” enabled the police to stop migrants indiscriminately, as they moved about public areas.

Meanwhile, city councils in the area also passed increasingly restrictive policies targeting undocumented immigrants. For instance, the cities of Vista and Escondido blocked the Mexican consulate from distributing identification cards that might provide access to public services like libraries, and anti-immigrant protestors demanded that institutions like banks cease to accept the cards. Likewise, in 2006, the Escondido City Council passed a measure banning renting property to undocumented migrants. While this measure was held up in legal disputes, the city soon turned to other exclusionary “quality of life” ordinances, such as prohibiting street parking in Latino neighborhoods. Similarly, in 2006 the city of Vista adopted a resolution preventing the hiring of day laborers, blocking most undocumented migrant workers from doing their jobs.

The social basis for this political orientation lay in the fact that Republican voters and anti-immigrant activist groups dominated local politics, even though cities like Vista and Escondido were nearly 50% Latino by 2010. As the Latino population in the area grew rapidly, more than doubling in size from 1990 to 2010, anti-immigrant hostility flared. By the late 1980s the San Diego County Chapter of the Ku Klux Klan – which

⁶³ Between 2004 and 2011, the city earned more than \$500,000 a year from five tow companies, each of which paid the city for the right to charge an impound fee, a tow hitch fee, and a 30-day impound storage fee totaling about \$2,000 per car (Frey 2012).

had previously lain dormant – revived to become one of the strongest in the country. In the 1990s and 2000s, radical anti-immigrant groups like the Minutemen Organization and Americans for Immigration Reform supplanted the Klan, while sustaining its violent, nativist orientation. These groups drove the anti-immigrant policies and aggressive policing that would shape area migrants’ day-to-day lives.

The politics also reverberated in San Diego County workplaces, where employers were encouraged to use immigration control as a threat vis-à-vis undocumented immigrants. In contrast to LA, the county extended few labor protection to undocumented migrants. Rather, local city councils in Escondido and Vista mandated the use of E-Verify (a federal documentation check system) (Garcia and Keyes 2012). Furthermore, according to respondents, employers *used* this context of aggressive immigration control to pressure undocumented workers, threatening to call the police should workers complain or misbehave. Some even invited ICE officials to conduct I-9 audits, browbeating workers into submission. When workers attempted to unionize, the employers fought by threatening to institute E-verify, saying they would implement regular documentation checks against anyone who joined a union. Meanwhile, informal workers such as day laborers also faced persistent harassment, not only when police would “survey” their regular hiring sites, but also thanks to city level ordinances such as the one in Vista, promoted by the local chapter of the Minutemen, that directly expanded enforcement against day laborers and fined anyone who hired them (Danielson 2010).

Arbitrary Enforcement

North County San Diego police enforcement instilled fear not just because it was ubiquitous but also – perhaps more importantly – because it was arbitrary. In North County, respondents felt that police and employers targeted *all* migrants, with little regard for their behavior. Less than half of the 20 deportees I met from Retorno had criminal histories. Rather, when respondents spoke to me about deportation, they regularly cited cases where people were deported for offenses as minor as riding bicycles on the sidewalk. The *public* nature of enforcement reinforced the feeling that it could occur anywhere. In surveys, 29% of respondents had friends or family detained by police, and two thirds of those detainees had been stopped on the street. Furthermore, police stops resulted in much higher rates of detention and deportation than elsewhere in the nation; when police did stop respondents, 39% were detained (compared to 3% of legal residents nationwide), and 23% were deported (Garcia and Keyes 2012: 12).

The policing of immigrants in public places and the unclear boundaries between police and ICE made respondents feel targeted. Interviewees like Pablo, who have lived in Vista since the early 1990s, observe, “Supposedly they say that police and immigration are two different agencies, but here that’s not true.” Others describe raids, detentions, arrest, and deportation from places like shopping centers or pharmacies. Genaro, for instance, a sales clerk in his mid 20s, tells me of a friend who was deported while they were on the bus ride to high school, recalling, “They sent him straight to Tijuana, with his backpack and books and all.” Álvaro, a construction worker in his 50s, adds, “A lot of times the police wander around in places like bars, dance halls – public places where people drink. So it’s just a matter of waiting, and when people go out they hunt for us.”

Because rural North County had almost no public transportation, migrants had to drive to get around. Yet, the police often used traffic enforcement a strategy of immigration control, making driving extremely risky. During my six months of fieldwork in 2010 and 2011, almost every time I go somewhere with a migrant from Retorno – whether to her children’s school, the grocery store a mile down the road, or a community event in the next town – she gives me the keys to her car and asks me to drive, even in cases when we have met just minutes before. Dozens of respondents describe being detained, having their cars impounded, or being deported in the context of traffic stops, for claims like failing to stop at signs, having cracked windshields, not wearing a seatbelt, or “suspicious driving” (Garcia and Keyes 2012: 11).

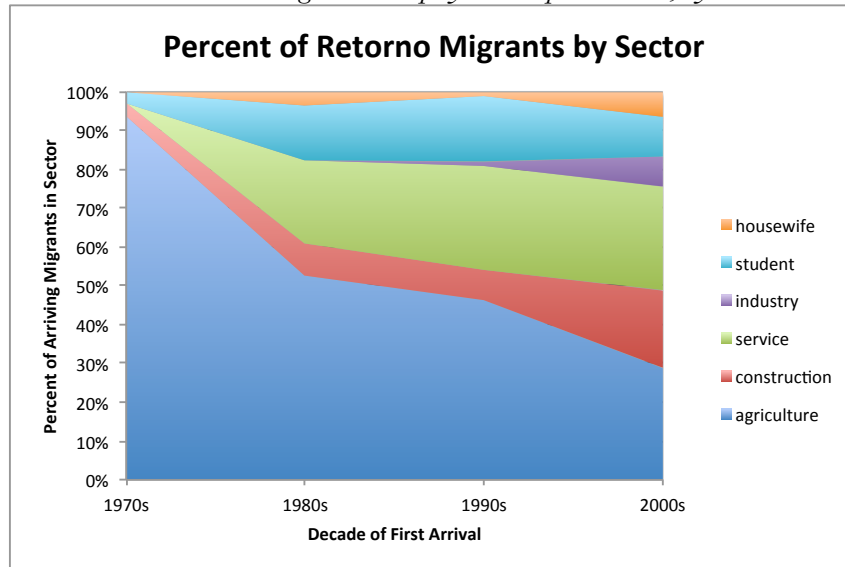
Therefore, respondents felt that instead of using immigration control to deport actual criminals, North County police used the *label* “criminal” to persecute innocent, hard-working, law abiding migrants. For example, 52-year-old Rosalia, who has been a resident of Vista, California for 15 years, describes, “Last week they deported two friends from my hometown, women. They had been here forever ... They were on their way to work, in the van, and the police stopped them and called migration and right there they took them away.” Rosalia underscores that her friends were deported despite features often associated with being “good,” such as being female, going to work, or living in the US for a long period of time.⁶⁴ Similarly, 40-year-old Carolina suggests that the police in Vista do not differentiate on the basis of hard work or merit, telling me, “The police take away lots of cars, and if you don’t have a license or papers they kick you out [of the country]. I’ve seen it lots of times when I’m on the way to work ... They don’t care if migrants need work.” The perception of arbitrariness extend earlier memories as well, even from the 1980s, when police were not yet tied to immigration control elsewhere in the United States. For instance, Marcelo, who, in the 1980s, lived near the farms where he worked, remembers a perpetual cat and mouse game: “When we lived on the hillsides, the *migra* used to treat us badly. They were mean, as if they wanted to hit us all the time – always really hard, scaring us so that we would return to Mexico.” Throughout Retorno’s history in North County, the uncertainty of enforcement made respondents feel *treated* like criminals, even when crossing the border was the only time they had ever broken the law.

The Criminalizing Workplace

The economy of North County San Diego intertwined with the criminalizing political context. At work, the region’s employers echoed the arbitrary, racialized treatment that migrants experienced from the police. They also used the threat of calling the police as a tool of labor control. While one might assume such strategies were particular to agricultural work, respondents reported such labor coercion across various sectors. As shown in the chart below, while migrants from Retorno came to North County through farm work, they eventually branched out into other sectors, as most immigration literature predicts (Massey, Goldring and Durand 1994).

⁶⁴ Refer to Bosniak (2012) for a discussion of the use of such traits in immigration advocacy.

Chart 1: Retorno Migrants' Employment Upon Arrival, by Decade



Source: UC San Diego Center for Comparative Immigration Studies Survey, 2011

By 2011, 60% of Retorno's migrants worked in similar jobs to those of La Partida, like factories and housekeeping. The production *politics* in North County labor become clear when we look at their distinct experiences in such jobs.

In North County factories, unlike in LA (see Chapter 6), employers used immigration enforcement as a threat. For instance, Adan, who has been working at a factory in Vista for almost ten years, explains that his employer uses regular documentation checks to instill fear in workers, telling me, “They keep asking for papers, for social security numbers, and the people with borrowed papers, we’re always there biting our tongues.” Likewise, 32-year-old Onésimo mentions that immigration officers have visited his workplace dressed in the guise of civilian police. Mercedes, who worked in several jobs over her 17 years as an undocumented migrant, adds that in each one, the treatment was the same: “If someone speaks up, they fire him – or they say that they’ll call immigration control on him. And once, yes, migration control did come to the factory, and people were so afraid that a lot of people ran.” As she suggests, the employers would occasionally call in ICE to do I-9 audits, causing undocumented workers – who made up the vast majority – to run away in fear.

In the area, intimidation also predominated as a strategy of labor control. For example, Paloma, an undocumented migrant who spent several years picking tomatoes and cucumbers in North County, describes, “I just cried and cried, Abigail, because there are foremen that – they don’t care. They have no feelings. It doesn’t matter to them – they’re just saying, ‘hurry up! We have to finish! We have to send these boxes of tomatoes or cucumbers!’ And they don’t care, they have no feelings – as if they’re more with the boss than with the worker.” Similarly, outside of farm work, Mercedes remembers how her managers would verbally abuse workers and keep them from 5:00 am to 11:00 pm without paying overtime. She recalls:

As illegal immigrants, we started to live through abuse in the factories. Through so much humiliation ... At one point, I started to work in a factory where they printed T-shirts. But, likewise [referring to a prior job], the manager of that factory used to scream horribly at us (*nos gritaba horrores*). That he wanted the work done, but now, but faster. 'If you want, and if not, the door is big enough for you to get out.' In that company, they also made a lot of people cry; there was a lot of mistreatment of people – too much ... verbal, but they were shouts as if we were – it's like remembering in the years when they had black people working in this country, like the slaves. That's how they had us.

The coercive work context – echoing state coercion – made many respondents compare their workplaces to slavery.

As the comparison suggests, North County San Diego employers also racialized migrants, often using to lighter-skinned Mexican-American foremen to disparage indigenous workers. As Seth Holmes (2013) has shown, farm employers racialize Mixtecs not only as *Mexican* migrants but also as “naturally” inferior to mixed race employees – and therefore suited to more arduous tasks. Rosa Delgado remembers, “They discriminate against us a lot in the United States. The managers, the people [immigrants] that have already been there for a long time [who often served as foremen]. They call us ‘*Oaxaquita*’ [little Oaxacan] stinking pigs there. It's ugly there, because among us immigrants there's discrimination.” In this despotic, racialized regime, economic mobility into other sectors did not necessarily foster better conditions at work; rather, working conditions were embedded in the political context. Pre-marked by race at work – just as in interactions with the police – workers in North County had little room to earn recognition or rewards based on “good” behavior.

Powerlessness and Fear

Because they were targeted arbitrarily, respondents felt powerless. They dissociated the risk of deportation from good or bad behavior, suggesting that, instead, the deportees they knew had been kicked out for “political reasons, bad *luck* [my italics].” Paloma, who has been working in the US 18 years at the time of our interview, describes this lack of control. She explains:

Since I don't have papers ... Well, we can die hoping [for immigration reform], but you see, there is nothing ... those hopes are almost stupid – for an undocumented Mexican to say, 'I'm not going back to Mexico.' Immigration is out here, each day, and one day they're going to find me, and then they'll find me guilty of being illegal here, and I'm gone to Mexico. They're just going to take me; they're not going to ask 'Would you like to go?'"

Even though Paloma wanted to stay in the US, she felt defenseless to protect herself. With no choice over her future, she was impotent.

Deportees, meanwhile, often believed they were suffering unfairly from the projection of criminality onto undocumented migrants as a whole. For instance,

Onésimo, a 32-year-old who was deported from Vista, California in 2009, laments, “Because 8 or 10 or 20 other people – fellow Mexicans – end up committing big mistakes, big crimes there [in the US], we all pay ... because of other people that behave badly there, innocent people pay.” In stark contrast to informants in LA, not one respondent in North County believed that she could avoid deportation through “good” behavior.

Arbitrary treatment instilled fear because it made migrants feel powerlessness. The notion that police could detain anyone, anywhere, *by race* terrified migrants. In North County, 67% of 121 respondents surveyed from Retorno were afraid to drive a car, 64% to walk in public, 37% to go to the hospital, 36% to take public transit, and 36% to go to work (Garcia and Keyes 2012: 16). Roberto, a 32-year-old a construction worker, links this fear to what he calls “not knowing”: “There is always, always fear,” he explains. “[You think] ‘Who knows when the police will stop me, when they will find out that I don’t have papers, when *la migra* will stop me.’” Similarly, while I am interviewing José, a 24-year-old warehouse worker, a police car passes the local Starbucks where we are seated, and he darts away from the table, trembling. He explains that any sight of the police fills him with fear. Likewise, Armando, who recently gave up on the US and returned to live in Mexico, recalls, “I used to go around with that feeling of anxiety all the time: when I left work and got on the freeway, going to stores. It was a stress you took on in everything.”

Respondents’ nervousness about arbitrary enforcement also extended beyond the police to public institutions. For example, Dulce, who gave birth in Vista, California in the early 2000s, remembers, “When I had my daughter, they gave her Medi-Cal [state health insurance]. I think that’s good, but it scared me, too, because I said, ‘Maybe it’s a trap – or they’re doing something mean to us ... I was afraid, really, really afraid.’” Salomé Garcia, likewise, explains that though she has had two children in the United States, “I’ve only seen a doctor twice in my life; I’m too scared.” Finally, Moises, a 30-year-old migrant with five years experience in Vista, describes reading a news story about a woman who was deported after calling the police during a domestic dispute. After that, he says, “I don’t feel safe going to the police or the courthouse. It’s hard. But you can’t trust that nothing will happen” (Garcia and Keyes 2012: 13). Given such distrust, many respondents avoided public institutions altogether, even, for instance, when they needed protection from domestic abuse.

Gendered Terms of the Criminalizing Regime

For women migrants, the criminalizing context of North County imposed constraints above and beyond those faced by men. In the early phase, particularly before the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, US migration from Retorno was nearly 95% male. After Culiacán, women had *rejected* migration, so nearly all US migrants in the 1970s and 1980s were men, and 67% of couples divided across borders. In the 1990s, more women started to come north, either because their husbands had obtained legal permission in 1986 or because border enforcement stopped the men from moving back and forth. Yet, the pattern of masculine migration persisted; as of 2011, only 33% of Retorno’s US migrants were women, and back in the village 45% of women still had husbands working in the United States. When women did come to California, 71%

arrived married and as of 2007, 90% lived with their spouse (Cornelius et al. 2009), giving them little independence. On top, several left their children behind.⁶⁵

When women migrated to North County, many came reluctantly, remembering their miserable experiences as migrants in Northern Mexico. Their longing for home – and the feeling that they came out of obligation rather than choice – predisposed them to see the US as a hostile environment. Teresa explains that when her husband asked her to join him in California in 1988, after he received legal authorization, “I felt bad [about it]. I didn’t want to join him, because it was never my plan to come here [to the US] ... I felt really horrible to leave my town.” Yet, Teresa’s husband insisted that she come, threatening to find another wife if she refused (indeed, her husband later confirms this story). Camila, likewise, adds, “I didn’t have any desire to come here, but when I married my husband he said, ‘You’re coming,’ and then I didn’t have a choice.” In other cases, debt drove women to join their husbands, to help the family economically. Dora, for instance, ultimately became fed up when her migrant husband spent his money on alcohol and failed to pay off their loans. In the 1990s, she decided to come to California herself to avoid the shame of facing angry lenders, over and over again. She recalls:

[My husband] would get drunk and take out money – take out loans ... at a rate of 10% interest, so, of course, his debts grew and grew. Then he came here [to the US]. At the times he had a little money, so he sent it, but what he sent was to pay debts and more debts. So then I would end up with nothing again. ... I was so ashamed when people would come to charge me ... Finally it made me so angry that eventually I took up and came to the US to help him pay off those debts.

Mercedes, who also came to pay off debts, reflects that because she “never imagined myself here [in the US],” coming north “was very, very sad for me.” Longing for her home – and the three children she left behind – she cried and cried.

Second, women tended to come later than and in association with men, so they depended on their husbands and fathers for information, protection, and income. Of migrant women surveyed, 97% came as associational migrants, following their husbands or fathers. Because men from Retorno tended to have been in the United States longer and be more familiar with public spaces than their wives and daughters, women relied on them for information about risky areas and immigration patrols. For instance, Lupita moved to Vista, California in 1998, at the age of 18. When she arrived, her husband had already been a strawberry picker there for seven years. Although Lupita worked, her husband controlled her mobility:

When I arrived, I felt despair sometimes, and I would sit in the house and cry. I wasn’t familiar with anything, and I was afraid to go out. Then, he [my husband] would tell me, ‘Don’t go out much, because immigration control hangs out down there at the corner’ ... I was afraid to walk outside alone. It was very hard. Except when I went to work, I just stayed locked in my room. I’m not really informed about where [it’s safe] to go, so I waited for the weekends to go out with him.

⁶⁵ See Dreby (2010) for an account of the agony of such family separations.

Lupita was unable to move about without her husband's help. The risks and threats of North County immigration control immobilized women within their own households, deepening their dependence on husbands.⁶⁶

Third, women's dependency was exacerbated by the fact that several men had legal authorization while their wives did not. Some of the earliest male migrants had been granted green cards in the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act; when they brought their wives, even *if* the men put in for papers (which several did not), the women had to wait decades for approval. This gave the men control in a variety of ways. For instance, when I arrive at Emilia's house in Temecula, California, a long, 45-minute drive from her relatives in the town of Vista, her husband opens the door, and steps way back, refusing a hello, leaving too much space between us. Emilia, usually vivacious, looks up from the other side of the room, bawling. As soon as he leaves she begs me to drive her to the supermarket, a short, two-mile drive with a license, but a very long walk for someone without. In the car, she brings out pictures of the bruises on her face, of his abuse. Yet, she is afraid to report him, she explains, since he is authorized and she is not, and she worries that he might try to get her deported, separating her from her three children. She tells me, "I hope they wouldn't take away my children. He used to threaten me like that, that if something happened he would take away my children." She pauses, appealing not to police protection, but to God: "Please, God, come. Come help me."

Similarly, Mercedes confides that coming to live with her authorized husband – particularly in a context of poverty and stress – exposed her to greater domestic violence. In 1994, Mercedes, then 34, joined her husband in Vista, California where he had already been working for several years. He beat her viciously. Yet, when police came to inquire, she refused to turn him in, afraid to lose the higher salary he could get thanks to his status as a legal permanent resident. She describes:

Someone called the police and I had gone outside to cry. When I saw the police car arrive, they asked me if I was OK and I said 'Yes' ... and I told them, 'I twisted my ankle, but I'm fine.' When they asked if anyone hit me, I said 'No, it's fine.' [A: Why didn't you want to tell the police?] I was afraid they would do something to him ... and he was the only one working, because he had permission to be here ... and for fear that they would put him in jail and he'd end up without work. That's what made me afraid ... so I didn't denounce him, and we spent years like that. He continued; he never changed.

Mercedes put up with the abuse not for fear that the police would do something to her, but because she depended on her husband financially and could not afford to lose his income. The sooner they paid off their debts, the sooner Mercedes could go home to her three boys. She dared not draw out the process by subjecting her husband to arrest.

Although 90% of women respondents from Retorno in California held paid jobs –

⁶⁶ See Dreby and Schmalzbauer (2013) for a similar account of migrant women in rural areas such as Montana.

traditionally seen as mechanisms of liberation – more than two thirds said they *lost* domestic autonomy and influence upon arrival in the United States. Rather, masculine domination in most Temporo couples deepened upon migration, as it did in other rural and restrictive areas.⁶⁷ For example, 34-year-old Ana remembers going to Vista, California with her father to pick strawberries in the 1990s, when she was 18. Though she had a primary education and wanted to work in elder care, Ana’s father would not let her leave his sight. Therefore, she ended up cooking for him and working for lower pay in the fields. She recalls: “I did whatever he did because he was very jealous [controlling] and would not let me leave the house – on one hand because of immigration control – but I went wherever he did.” Paloma, quoted above, also says that her husband refused to let her participate in events run by the Retorno migrant community: “I used to like to participate in [civic] events. Now, I would like to be involved, to be part of things ... But, it is one of those things that I can’t decide for myself. He [my husband] always has to decide for me or give me permission to do something or not. He doesn’t let me feel free.”⁶⁸ While many scholars see the US context as liberating for migrant women, in North County, it was the reverse.

In comparison, the hometown of Retorno came to hold increasing appeal. While most migrants had been destitute sharecroppers as children, by the early 1980s – as I will describe in Chapter 4 – migrants had begun to demand economic and political democratization in the village. Poorer families now had growing influence and access to resources, including education. What’s more, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the Mexican state had also started to provide more funds to rural municipalities, helping install a secondary school in the community that their children could attend. By the time some women started going to the United States in the 1990s, Retorno had also established a pattern of male migration. This meant that there was a strong community of women living in the village and that when women went to California, they often left their children behind. Returning meant being part of this community and, most of all, being able to spend time with their children. Even though Retorno had been extremely patriarchal in the past, excluding women from political participation and subjecting them to male domination, as women returned, they actively changed its gender dynamics as well.

How the Criminalizing Context Fostered Withdrawal

Social Isolation

In North County, however, the feeling of fear kept migrants socially isolated, particularly women. In the early phase of Retorno’s migration, in which more than 90% of migrants were men, the touchstone of their US experience was being homeless, or what they refer to as “the caves.”⁶⁹ Throughout the 1980s, between 10,000 and 14,000 farm workers in San Diego County – including nearly all of the migrants from Retorno –

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Kibria (1990), Parrado and Flippen (2005), and Schmalzbauer (2009).

⁶⁸ Studies such as Menjivar and Salcido (2002) and Quereshi (2010) show that undocumented status strongly discourages women from reporting domestic violence.

⁶⁹ Given the high cost of housing in San Diego County and the lack of available land, homelessness has been a much more persistent problem for undocumented migrants there than in other agricultural areas of California.

lived in “spider holes,” they dug out in local canyons or beside the fields and covered with old, foraged plastic (Zabin 1997). These camps offered them no electricity or running water and no protection from the Mexican-American gangs who came to beat them up and rob them of the few dollars they’d saved. Each winter, cities like Vista and Carlsbad razed the camps; each summer, the workers from Retorno and other Mexican villages would rebuild (Sanchez 2007).

The “caves” symbolized Retorno’s suffering in the United States. Every migrant I interviewed from the time (all men) recalls these ditches like a talisman of their misery, but also of their masculinity, youth and bravado. Mateo, who came to work in Oceanside every summer throughout early 1980s, sets the scene as we wait for burritos in one of Vista’s new strip malls, “Look, the little huts were like this: let’s say a piece of wood the size of this table, and we would put a [plastic] door on it – run it along the front. Then we would put down trees or branches, and we would curl up in that little space, hunched over, holding our knees.” Marcelo, who also spent decades living outdoors, shows me around the old hillsides, indicating how four or five people would group together in a ditch. He adds, laughing with at least a little bit of pride, “If anyone had money, well, what we would do was go by the liquor store, buy a beer and not eat. The beer cut our hunger.” Ivan adds, “We were a group of people all from the *pueblo*, sometimes twenty, thirty of us all together – a whole generation. We were young at the time, so we would have fun ... but people drank a lot up there in the caves where we lived, and we always had problems with the people who drank a lot.” While the caves may seem “fun” in retrospect, they nurtured problems like alcoholism that would plague the men for years to come.

The caves reflected and reinforced migrants’ social and racial isolation. In the 1980s, there were relatively few long-term Latino residents in cities like Vista and Escondido, so migrants were often targeted by race. Mateo, who spent most of the 1980s working strawberry and tomato fields in the area, explains:

When we would try to go down to the supermarket, they could pick us out by our black hair. Like, I remember one day they [immigration control] took me off the bus here in the transit center ... and they got me right here [in the center of Vista]. We practically couldn’t go buy food at all, so we just ate what the lunch trucks brought to the fields. And since we had just gotten here from Mexico we didn’t have any money, so we’d borrow from the lunch man ... We didn’t like it [in the caves] much because they started to rob us. Young men would arrive. We called them the *cholos* (gangsters) – *pochitos* (US-born Mexicans-Americans), who would come from Vista, Oceanside, and they would come to steal our money in the night. And that – well, it made us panic, you know? ... When they would come they would threaten us with guns – because we had almost no money.

The exclusions were intertwined: because migrants were afraid of being identified by race and deported, they almost never came down to the city. This left them confined to their spider holes, meaning they had to buy lunch from farm vendors, going into debt until they could pay it back. Homeless and set apart from the rest of society, they were also

easy targets of robbery and assault, often by other Mexican migrant groups.⁷⁰

While I am living in North County in 2010, the isolation reverberates. Like Ricardo and Salomé at the start of the chapter, migrants from Retorno feel trapped in their trailers, down long dirt roads, or their one-room apartments in the shadow areas behind North County's flashy strip mall developments. They keep the blinds drawn. Though my average interviewee has lived in North County more than fifteen years, few have ever eaten food at local restaurants, and they rarely go to the seashore, only 20 miles away. Rather, without cars or driver's licenses – and with no public transit to speak of – most move on foot, walking to meet me or waiting on the corners for jobs and rides. For example, Cristina, a 38-year old respondent, says that police enforcement keeps her immobilized at home. She reflects, “You can't go out. Even to go grocery shopping. They [the police] hit us; they treat us really badly; they put us in jail. You're trapped.” Lupita, likewise, describes sitting at home alone and crying, thinking, “Now what do I do? What do I do?” Yet, she adds, “When someone sends you a text message to say, ‘Don't go out; immigration is in such a place,’ why are you going to go looking for it, right? So, you try not to go out and to stay in the house.” Even when I call ahead, respondents are so afraid they almost never answer when I knock on the door. Or, they often ask me to drive them around for mundane errands, to avoid the incredible hassle of doing them on foot.

Respondents from North County were also trapped geographically. While one might expect them to make a beeline for more tolerant cities within the US, arbitrary policing kept them afraid to drive or move in public, confining them to the area. Even though Los Angeles is only 90 miles away, only two people I meet from Retorno had ever been. Rather, checkpoints and rigid enforcement kept them stuck in North County. This isolation and entrapment, I argue below, helps keep them oriented to Mexico.

“Like a Slave”: The Rejection of the United States and the Orientation to Mexico

With policing unpredictable and no logic by which they could proactively advance – no “game” as in LA, – respondents in North County rejected the United States as unfair, illegitimate, and racist. Many felt that US institutions discriminated against them outright (which, while not surprising, distinguishes them from those in Los Angeles). For example, Basilio, a 56-year-old man who worked in the US more than 20 years before returning to Retorno in 2011, denounces:

People say that we have to understand that they [the US] are protecting their country from what they see as a danger [migration]. But there are great lies in that. People [migrants] – just like any others – need medical help, but only a few of them, no more than other people. But they [the US] take that to say we're parasitic, lazy people, that we're people prone to drug trafficking, that we're undesirable because we're ignorant, we're short, we're brown. In other words, plain racism. Politicians say they're opposed to all this ... but in practice they're in

⁷⁰ In fact, these assaults helped to precipitate Retorno migrants' first protests in Vista, California in the mid 1980s; as they watched fellow migrants get beaten and robbed, respondents began to mobilize to demand better housing and more protection.

agreement with the most racist, backward sectors of that country. So they're hypocrites.

Under North County's criminalizing regime, nearly all respondents found the US treatment of migrants profoundly unjust; in their eyes, the immigration control regime had no legitimacy. Over and over, they emphasized that they were persecuted by police and employers even when, as Paloma put it "I know I am not doing anything wrong."

Under this unfair system, along with fear and isolation, respondents felt *abject*, that is, excluded, expelled, unwanted, or discardable (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). Basilio, an important political leader among Retorno's migrants (as I will describe in Chapter 4), underscores the coercive, racist exclusion of migrants from the United States:

It [the US] is a place where the hostility might not take a physical form, it might not take the form of direct aggression, but you know it's there. If the boss hires you, if he gives you work, the truth is that it's because he needs you. But he doesn't want you. They want your work, but they don't want the presence of migrants. They want the cheap labor force, but they don't want to see their neighborhoods, their areas, the cities they start to populate with ever more migrants ... There is that rejection, those feelings of viewing other people [migrants] like inferiors, like children, and [thinking] 'If we have to exploit them, well, let's exploit them. And if we have to use them, then use them.'

After nearly three decades working in the United States, Basilio highlights the contradictions between US racism towards migrants and its need for cheap labor. Like him, all but three of 37 migrants who had worked in North County use the word "suffering" to describe the United States, and more than a third say that in California they feel "like slaves." By tying their own experiences to the history of African American slavery, they underscore the racialized injustice of Mexican migrant "illegality." All but two interviewees agree: "There is no freedom here [in the US]."

Instead, respondents associated autonomy and wellbeing with Mexico. Women were especially vociferous in expressing this opinion, almost all saying they long to return to the village, for personal wellbeing, for happiness, for "calm." For example, Camila tells me, "Right now I don't want to be here at all – I feel horrible here because ... I think that life is nicer there and there's not pressure or anything like here ... it's nicer there because life is calmer – the only reason to be here is because there's no work there ... that is my dream." Feeling similarly confined, Lupita also hopes to go back to Retorno, saying, "I want to return to Mexico. I like my village; I like it a lot. There, you don't have this fear of going out, like here. There, no, because you're free ... The thing I like best about my hometown is the freedom. You don't have that pressure."

In *contrast* to the United States, the village – the very community that had driven migrant families into debt as sharecroppers and kept women excluded from public life, - took on a new valence. This relationship might be summed up by a common refrain among migrants that puts the two nations side-by-side: "*México, país de la libertad; Estados Unidos, país de La Chingada* (Mexico, country of freedom, United States, country where

you're screwed).” In common parlance, “La Chingada” means “getting screwed,” but the phrase recalls the Mexican legend of the rape of La Chingada – the indigenous woman – by white colonists (Paz 1950). The metaphor is perhaps more fitting than they know.

The Practice and Promise of Return

I call this community “Retorno” because exclusion in North County made people want to return home – in fantasies if not in practice. Feeling “like slaves,” 60% of survey respondents from Retorno left California within five years of arriving. As of 2011, in the face of increasing criminalization and economic hardship, 89% hoped to one day go home (Andrews et al. 2013).

Starting in the 1980s, the conditions in North County San Diego fostered a circular pattern of migration, similar to that Retorno’s migrants had practiced in Culiacán and San Quintín. They stayed in the US a year and a half on average, with 98% circulating, moving in and out of the US as many as ten times over the course of their lives. Some would stay for a few months, some for a few years. In these early years, they were so mobile that when they tell stories it is hard to tell whether they are referring to Mexico or the United States. Even though some became legalized in the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, many took advantage of their US residency to circulate, rather than to settle (Velasco Ortiz 2005b). Mateo describes the constant motion:

In total I was living there [in the caves] about six years – six years, but we would come seasonally. We would go back to Mexico for six months and then we’d come back. We would go back to the *pueblo* because that’s where we had our families – we’d come and go, come and go. I just thought to myself, ‘I can’t go on like this.’ ... The moment I got back to the *pueblo*, I set to work as well, and then when I finished planting, when I finished my farming – in July or August – July, August, September, October – I would go to the US up to six months and no more, and then back to the *pueblo* once again, to do the harvest, bring a little money from the US, and enjoy myself.

Yet, in the village, the migrants would go back into debt – little helped by the few dollars they could save in the United States. Angela, who stayed in Retorno while her husband went to California, remembers the pattern:

He [my husband] would go to pick tomatoes in the United States and he would send me maybe two transfers and then come back. Oh, how much debt we were in sometimes, so the work would pay off what we owed. And when he had paid it off he came back [to Retorno], and then he would go into debt, and once again he would leave for the United States. So, it was really hard for us, because as soon as you pay things off, here comes something else.

Tied by separation and return, Retorno and its migrants in North County remained deeply interdependent.

In the mid 2000s, however, people from Retorno started to stay in the United

States for increasingly long periods. With the costs of smuggling rising above \$5000 (more than a third of most respondents' annual income), they became wary of much back and forth. To return, they felt, they needed to amass enough money to stay in Mexico. So by 2011, of the 89% of survey respondents who wanted to leave, only 8.4% actually considered doing so that year (Andrews et al. 2013). Griselda, who had lived in the US almost two decades, offers an example. Ensnared in an old couch beside the husband who used to beat her mercilessly, she tells me, "I'm fed up with this country. The only reason I can't leave is because my sons are still here, they need me ... the only reason to be here is because there's no work there." Similarly, Basilio, whom I interview once he returns to retire in Retorno, explains, "Here in the village there's little hope of supporting your children ... so my children [also migrants in their 30s] decided they're better off staying in the United States, that things will still be better there. With things as they are currently [economically], it will be better to stay – to fight with immigration control, to fight with the police, to fight with the racists, but there they will stay." Trapped, respondents lived in a precarious state of "mental exit," working in California but dreaming of home.

Withdrawal, Forbearance, and Political Silencing

Migrants' "mental exit" – that is, the *idea* of returning without the practice – also helped to keep them exploitable and politically quiescent, despite their dissent. Respondents continued to consider migration a stopgap measure, rather than as the work they would do for their entire lives. *Believing* they were about to go home gave many a "dual frame of reference," in which they remained oriented to Mexico (Gleeson 2010). The idea that their time in the US was limited – and that they might one day exchange their US wages into Mexican pesos – made them willing to tolerate low wages, labor abuses, and inhumane treatment in ways that a permanent resident in the United States might not. During interviews, they regularly express willingness to put up with exploitation and abuse for "a short time." For example, Teresa describes the incredible grind that has defined her employment in North County: "I have worked ceaselessly, without stop – with the little kids, too – October 1988 until now, Abigail, besides Saturdays and Sundays. I started in a factory ... They never made me permanent; temporary and temporary ... All the jobs were bad! Because it's hard, really – ay, no! – quick, like a race. Ay, no! For me, they were all bad." Yet Teresa put up with it, wanting to go home. Others go so far as to say they prefer temporary jobs, because it "allows them to come back."

The orientation to Mexico also inhibited union organizing. Even though migrant workers in North County San Diego felt abused and treated unfairly, they did little to protest, because they were focused on home. For instance, Basilio remembers that in the early 1990s, the United Farm Workers started a campaign to try to recruit Mixtec migrants, including those from Retorno. It failed. When I ask why, Basilio tells me that although the migrants were angry and politically active:

We didn't have a union life as such. Our movement was more communitarian – more social, but not union ... When we got together at the farms [where they worked], it was to see if we could put doors on the church [back home]. If we

[organizers] had arrived with our story that we wanted them to join Cesar Chavez's movement, well, they would complain, and it wouldn't work. They didn't know anything about Cesar Chavez; union organizing in the United States had no interest for them.

Of nearly 40 people I interviewed in depth, not one had ever been in a union. Even facing discrimination and exploitation in the United States, their long-term plans – as well as their political energy (as shown in Chapter 4) – centered on Mexico.

The idea that they were “short-term” migrants also encouraged women, as hinted in the section on gender above, to tolerate abuse. For example, 52-year-old Dora believed she would stay in California only until she and her husband paid their debts. When her husband beat her, Dora's employer – for whom she worked as a housekeeper – attempted to intervene. Yet, Dora stopped him. She recounts:

I got a job in Riverside, but each week my bosses would bring me here to Vista where he [my husband] was. Two times he beat me really badly ... he hit the side of my cheek and I couldn't eat for three days. So, one time I came with my bosses, and the man, Mr. Smith, said, 'I am going to put him in jail, because I don't like people like that.' But, I said, 'No, sir, I came to work to help him out a little bit, but I'm leaving – just let it be – I'm leaving.' 'OK, right,' [he said], and the man didn't get involved. Then when I had enough money, I left.

In the face of multiple forms of suffering, including such abuse, respondents remained stoic, on the premise that it would all end soon.

While nearly everyone from Retorno objected to the conditions in the United States, they gave up hope for inclusion or change. The fear and police aggression of the 2000s entrenched that political withdrawal, terrorizing migrants who attempted to engage in political struggle. By the time of my fieldwork in 2010 and 2011, even through migrants articulately critiqued US aggression, racism, and criminalization of migrants, they also expressed political resignation. “That's just life,” people would tell me over and over. Indeed, it seemed, they lived in a state of siege, and resigned to believe that they would not stay in the United States, that their fates lay back in Mexico.

The promise of return also inhibited migrants from protesting US immigration law. In the 2000s, only two North County respondents had ever attended an immigration protest. Some feared arrest; others felt detached from US life. For instance, 24-year-old José explained, “So many of us would like immigration reform, but the truth is, I have never been in any organization or anything ... The reason is that my main goal is to go back. The truth, for me, is that I don't have any motivation in the US I'm leaving. There, I feel free.” Assuming they would go home, many respondents, as José put it, lacked “motivation” to demand better treatment. This attitude was particularly prevalent among more recent migrants, who had come to the United States once the criminalizing regime was in effect, so they knew no alternative. Given that early migrants from Retorno had been active in immigrants' rights protests in the early 1990s – as I will describe in Chapter 4 – the contemporary expressions of withdrawal seem surprising. Yet, as policing ramped

up in North County in the 2000s, it fragmented migrants' efforts to organize. Mercedes reflects that though she attended immigration protests in Vista, California in 2006, they were small. Most of the immigrant advocacy organizations were based in Los Angeles, which, to an undocumented migrant with no driver's license, felt like the moon. Mercedes quickly became disillusioned, telling me, "Yes, I went to the protests when they had them in Vista, but they never listen to us. We can cry louder and louder, but they will never hear." Like her, younger and more recent migrants look back on their predecessors' activism with cynicism. Now, they say, "You can't do that."

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how North County policing criminalizes migrants, producing exclusion and withdrawal. I show that fear is not just an inherent reaction to policing but reflects a particular feeling of powerlessness, in the face of arbitrary, racialized surveillance and employer abuse. I also take us beyond the simplistic idea that US values are liberating for women, highlighting, instead, the dual exclusions they face. Yet instead of describing these exclusions as the "sum" of class, race, gender, and nationality, I show how these forms of difference get *articulated* – that is, expressed, and joined to each other – within the specific history of Retorno, as it meets the context of San Diego County. Women's isolation and vulnerability to domestic violence *as women*, I contend, arose in relation to North County's practices of immigration control. Finally, I conclude by showing how economic exploitability and political quiescence are not "automatic" effects of undocumented immigrants' disenfranchisement. Migrants may be angry, but kept silent by their desire to return home.

Yet, I will argue in the next chapter, such migrants are not always silent. To fully understand Retorno's politics, we must look at *both* sides of this transnational community. In Chapter 4, I show that Retorno's migrants were not paralyzed, but, in fact, acted aggressively on their rage – and on their hopes for freedom. They did so by displacing politics back home. Fed up with their powerlessness in the United States, they waged a transnational movement, striving to democratize their village and build a life away from the exclusions of North County San Diego. And importantly, while women may look like victims from the US vantage point, they were central to this political transformation.

Chapter 4

The Return of Politics: Cross-Border Contestations of Gender and Class

The people of Retorno responded to their exclusion from North County San Diego by turning their fury – and their actions – back home. Collaborating with sympathetic allies in the village, they galvanized an extraordinary cross-border social movement. It would not only fundamentally reorganize the hierarchical village that had driven them out; it would also link class, ethnicity, and gender across borders, in unprecedented transnational organizing (Kearney 1998). The process began as migrants and their allies broke down the hierarchy that had marginalized them in Retorno and insisted on redistribution within the village. Then, Retorno began to reach out to other, nearby communities and demand greater resources from the Mexican federal and Oaxacan state governments, mobilizing together as Mixtecs for the first time. In the process, women became key political players.

This story begs us to rethink scholars' views of the relationship between migration and development, or what some call the “hometown impacts” of migration. In considering how migration reshapes sending communities, sociologists have focused on what the United States *gives* migrants, or the things that “flow” from Global North to Global South, namely: money and “democratic” ideas. Most argue that emigration has transformative potential in sending communities *if* migrants remit their wages for productive investment, or if they “bring home” civil rights and democratic politics they learned in the United States (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999; Levitt 2001; Portes, Escobar and Walton 2007; Fox and Bada 2008). Both of these interpretations imply that migrants' ability to change their hometowns hinges on their economic and cultural incorporation on the receiving end. Meanwhile, where gender is concerned, such views are even more pronounced: most studies of gender and migration suggest that women gain voice – whether in the United States or in sending villages – to the extent they assimilate liberal rights and Western norms.

Yet, in Retorno, the lever of democratic change was not migrants' effort to make the village more *like* the USA, but their struggles to *avoid* the kind of persecution they faced in North County San Diego. That is, it was not assimilation but *anti*-assimilation politics – anger with the racism and unfairness of the United States – that sparked hometown restructuring. Even though Retorno's migrants rarely made enough money in North County to remit home, they *still* triggered productive investment in their village. However, they did not do so by remitting money they had made in the US. Rather, driven by a strong interest in going back to Retorno, they advocated for resources from the Mexican state. In the process, women gained political influence not by *adopting* US rights and norms, but instead through the struggle to *oppose* the exclusions of “the other side” [of the border]. Men, perhaps unexpectedly, supported them in this effort.

If we look only at the US side of the story, as told in Chapter 3, North County's criminalizing logic appears to silence migrants politically, funneling them into the “safety valve” of return home. Yet, when we look at migrants' actions transnationally, it turns out

that this “safety valve” did not in fact suppress political struggle but only displaced it, geographically relocating migrants’ defiance from the United States to their community back in Mexico.

I argue that Retorno’s migration pathway set the conditions for this transnational movement. As I showed in Chapter 3, the criminalizing environment in North County (like the misery of Northern Mexican farm work) produced two primary reactions: first, a rejection of “integration” into of the United States, particularly its undocumented underclass, and second, identification with the home village and the practice (or promise) of return. Together, identification and return led migrants to invest in the village for their future, as a concrete alternative to life in the United States.

Migrants’ returns to the village also fostered what we might call “the return of politics,” linking struggles across space. For one, the majority of people currently living in Retorno had been migrants themselves, helping members align across borders. Members’ regular movement back and forth also helped them connect the abuse they suffered as migrant workers to the inequality they had long faced back home. They did so in two phases: first, in the 1980s, coming off labor strikes in Northern Mexico, they formed a committee that deposed the old elites. Then, in the 1990s and 2000s, they built a broader movement called the *Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional* (or Indigenous Oaxacan Binational Front, henceforth “FIOB”) to demand migrants’ rights, Mexican state resources, and village-level democratization. These efforts also connected people of Retorno to broader struggles for change, primarily through the rise of Mexico’s left-wing opposition party, the PRD (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*).

In conjunction, the FIOB helped dismantle male control over local politics. It did so, I argue, because women’s grim experiences in the United States gave them new inspiration to transform their village, just as their predominance in the sending site made them strategic allies for men who also sought democratic change. In sum, Retorno’s migration pathway set the conditions for an extraordinary “deep transnationalism” which entailed not only flows of money and ideas but also the articulation of gender, class, and protest, across space. Still, Retorno’s movement remained structurally constrained, subject to the fragmenting effects of ongoing class inequity, political party contestation, and repressive US immigration control.

Bringing Politics Back: Migrants Depose “Those Families that had been in Power the Whole Time”

The first “return of politics” occurred in the early 1980s, when migrants who had been politicized in strikes while working in Sonora and Baja California came back to overthrow the old *caciques*, or village elites, who had been linked to ruling PRI. In the late 1970s, even after villagers in Retorno had begun migrating seasonally to farm work in Northern Mexico, the families who had long usurped land and political power sustained their stranglehold on the village government (see Chapter 2). Basilio, a migrant farm worker who became a political leader, recalls that even as of 1980:

They [the village leaders] were the descendants of those families that had been in

power the whole time ... Dario Coronado [the president] had a really high and mighty attitude; he was generally one of those people that considered himself a 'person of reason,' and he didn't care at all about other people ... Dionicio Coronado [his father] had been municipal secretary for about 20 or 30 years, so he knew all the ins and outs of the municipality ... That man had been secretary for life. He had been secretary for like 25 years, or more. He *was* the town government.

The Coronado family was the living legacy of Retorno's hierarchy. As the Mexican state began to decentralize funds to the villages in the early 1980s, their abuse of these leadership positions became unmistakable. In particular, in 1980, when Retorno received state funding to build a secondary school, the Coronado family pocketed the money and never conducted the work. Saul remembers how he began to see the corruption, to see, as he tells: "These men [the Coronados] were robbing us, betraying the *pueblo's* trust, because the government report said the classrooms were finished, but the classrooms still hadn't been constructed." What's more, while the state had provided funds to pay construction workers, the village leaders kept this money as well, instead demanding, in the name of "tradition," that poor villagers provide *tequio*, or free labor. Not only did this echo a pattern that had existed throughout the 20th century of "exploiting the *pueblo*" (Saul's words), but it also enabled the leaders to further enrich themselves.

Seeing this abuse of power, internal migrants, who regularly circulated in and out of the village, transferred the political radicalization they had developed in the fields of Culiacán and San Quintín. While working as tomato pickers in these sites, most migrants from Retorno had joined massive strikes, which, organized by radical student groups and farm worker federations,⁷¹ mobilized up to 16,000 people at a time, paralyzing the region's farms. Through these strikes, Retorno's key leaders, including Domingo Garcia, Basilio Ramos, and Saul and Abundio Molina, became involved with the Mexican Communist Party. While they were wary of formal party alignment, these leaders did attend trainings with the Communists, in which, Basilio recalls, "We talked about Marxism, about the proletariat. We talked about the bourgeoisie, and all that. At that moment, we were interested in national political issues ... At the most general level, our goal was to get rid of the PRI, the party that for years and years had governed Mexico." Such trainings helped the migrants develop a radical critique of their subordination.

With this lens, a few young, migrant men got together to form a group that would advocate for radical political change in their home village – in connection to a broader, national-level struggle for equity and against corruption.⁷² The group named itself "The Popular Civic Committee of Retorno" with the word "popular" highlighting its critical, class lens. In contrast to most migrant hometown associations, which fundraise to send

⁷¹ Including the Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (*Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos*, CIOAC) and the Independent Federation of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (*Federación Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos*, FIOAC), along with student activists from the University of Sinaloa.

⁷² At the time, there was already another committee of migrants from Retorno in Mexico City made up of elites who had moved there for education. It was called, perhaps ironically, the "Representative" Committee of Retorno.

collective donations to their home villages, this committee aimed to *change* Retorno – to reshape it socially and politically. Diego, one of the founding members, remembers, “All the members of that group – we were all people without resources, without any stable jobs or anything, and our goal was to make this [inequity] more political ... to attract people to Communist ideas.” Basilio adds that by drawing on the Marxist critique they had learned in Culiacán, the group “developed tools to push for true Change in Retorno.” He continues:

We twisted that [Marxist critiques from Culiacán] to what was going on here [in Retorno] ... For example, we used to call anyone who owned things here “rich” and compare them with the bourgeoisie ... Sinaloa [Culiacán] opened our panorama. There, it was another thing; there, there really was a bourgeoisie. But we brought that back to this social sphere ... that we had to take out the PRI, to form a leftist party that would really push for democracy in Retorno and in all of Mexico.

At that time, in the early 1980s, the PRI was still the only political party in the nation, controlling Mexico’s politics through a centralized, corporatist regime. Migrants’ organizing in Retorno emerged from – and would continue to tie into – leftist organizing that sparked the rise of the first opposition party, the Democratic Revolutionary Party (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, or PRD), starting in the late 1980s. As they did, they also built opposition to the PRI’s minions within the village, local leaders who had long profited from its patronage.

The “Popular Committee” – many of whom had taken construction contracts on the Mexico City metro system at the time, in an unusual interruption of their ongoing pattern of farm work⁷³ – galvanized dissent throughout Retorno by exposing the Coronados’ (PRI leaders’) corruption and organizing simultaneously in Mexico City and in Retorno. To help expose this corruption, the committee began fundraising, trying to get as many migrants as possible to contribute to the secondary school – and therefore watch where their money was going. Diego describes:

We took all the money we were contributing and kept really good records. We organized everything, and we knew exactly how much money we had and that they [the village leaders] were hiding a good part of the money – more than 50%. That was how we started the work ... And people start to be annoyed and say that the president was crooked. Then they [organizers based in the village] – Domingo, the Molina brothers – started to criticize him [Coronado]. With the hope of doing something, they started to call meetings; they started to question his mismanagement of money and to raise the idea of putting him on trial for this.

Meanwhile, Saul Molina was organizing on the ground in Retorno. He adds, “the

⁷³ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Mexico City built a vast metro system, mostly relying on all-night hard labor digging tunnels by poor migrants from places like Oaxaca. The system often recruited manual laborers from farms like those where poor migrants from Retorno worked. Yet, the jobs only lasted about a year – from 1979 to 1980 – before Mexico’s economy crashed, sending Retorno’s migrants back into farm work.

migrant organizations and the people living in Retorno came together ... the Committee started to challenge them [the leaders], and we [in Retorno] started to organize the community to stop putting up with these type of people.” By exposing the leaders’ corruption, the organizers *linked* the Popular Committee’s critical, Marxist lens to direct action in the village.

In 1981, the community assembly overthrew the Coronados. Basilio describes: “Led by this group of young pioneers [migrants] that were about 20 years old, they overthrew a PRI government. They kicked them out of the town hall and the *pueblo* refused to recognize them, driven by these guys. From there forward, people lost respect for the PRI.” As Basilio suggests, kicking out the *caciques* was not only transformative within Retorno, but it was also symbolic of a broader protest against the PRI, which had fueled local political bossism.

Nevertheless, the migrant activists remained economically vulnerable. When Mexico fell into debt crisis in 1982, nearly everyone from the Popular Committee lost their jobs, where, at the time, they were digging subway tunnels for the Mexico City metro. As a result, most moved on to farm work in North County San Diego. As they did, the PRI retaliated back home, and their movement for local democracy remained short lived. In Diego’s words, “There was no real taking of power.” Nevertheless, even though the activists scattered, their political visions lived on.

New Iterations of Struggle in North County San Diego

When men from Retorno began to work in North County San Diego, they brought their political lens from Culiacán and the Popular Committee to bear on the feeling of exclusion in the United States. Basilio continues the story: “When we got to the United States, many of the same people went that had already been in [the struggle in] the village, and we thought, ‘Well, if we already did this in one place and another, then we have to do it in the United States.’” Therefore, in 1987, migrants from Retorno formed a new version of the Popular Committee, based in Vista, California.

This time around, feeling excluded from the US, the committee focused on making Retorno into an economically and socially viable home. As they explained to me, they wanted the “*pueblo*” – as a village – to finally become a place that belonged to its “*pueblo*” – its people – as a whole.⁷⁴ Living in “the caves,” most members of this new committee were homeless and economically precarious, so they fantasized about rebuilding Retorno, so they could one day return. Therefore, they worked to materially prepare the village: they helped pave the streets, install a potable water system, and obtain licenses for collective taxis – the primary, paid form of public transportation in rural Oaxaca. A few even advocated for irrigation systems on the hope that when they went back, they might be able to own land for the first time in their lives. Saul, for example, imagines that he will eventually go home to a place where “The land is yours,” adding, “When I was a child, my mother’s family had no land, but now, that land is within reach of the people who were poor.”

⁷⁴ See Curiel (2011) for an extended analysis of how, in the process, they remade the concept of “pueblo.”

Migrants' orientation to return also encouraged them to mobilize around Mexican politics more broadly. In particular, as the PRD party arose in the late 1980s, they supported it from afar. Basilio describes, "Our lens was focused on Mexican society. We said, 'why are we going to do this [work on US-side issues] if it's not necessary? What we have to do is change our political landscape – *our* people – and recognize that what's needed is to change Mexico. So, to change Mexico from the United States, that was the goal." In 1986, they brought Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the leader of the PRD and the first presidential candidate to oppose the PRI, to North County San Diego, to organize among migrants. Domingo explains, "For us he was the most important iconic leader of the left ... so we organized a meeting so that he could present in San Diego."

Yet migrants were also living through day-to-day struggles *in* the United States, which their radical politics ultimately compelled them to confront as well. Fantasizing about having some land back in Retorno, Saul explains that he nevertheless became involved in politics in the United States. Even while the migrants were organizing for change back home, he tells me, "At the same time, here in San Diego, we started getting into struggles around racism, struggles that the *cholos* (Mexican-American gangsters) would rob *la raza* (the [migrant] people). Also the fight that when we would get to the border, the federal police [of Mexico] or the customs officials would extort us, demanding 50,000 pesos, or you're out"(Quoted in Velasco Ortiz 2005: 190). Angry, respondents from Retorno began to protest at consulates against border extortion and to demand protection from Mexican gangsters. In 1988, a fellow migrant was badly beaten by locals, near the Vista, California farms where most people from Retorno worked. Shaken, they responded by organizing a protest. For the first time in San Diego's memory, hundreds of migrants took to the streets. They did so, Saul explains:

To show the city and society how badly migrants were treated. They had accused this guy of stealing something, and they tied him up like this in the doorway of the store, and they put a paper bag on his head and funny eyes, and it was a denigration of his person, right? His rights – and that was enough – to protest the action ... and that was our first action, enough to say, 'We have to defend migrants.'

The march galvanized media attention to migrants' plight and fostered struggles to educate migrants about their labor rights (Zabin 1992).

As Retorno's Popular Committee waged these struggles in the US, they began to build ties with other groups of Mixtec migrants, expanding the Popular Committee of Retorno to become the *Mixtec* Popular Committee, in recognition of their shared indigenous ethnicity and the consequent plight. Domingo Garcia remembers, "Then, in California, we made it larger. It stopped being just about Retorno and no one else. We had to see that we had fights to wage as *migrants*." In the early 1990s, in conjunction with protests against 500 years of colonialism in the Americas (since the arrival of Christopher Columbus), Retorno and several other indigenous migrant communities, primarily Mixtec, came together to form the *Frente Indígena Oaxaqueña Binacional* (FIOB, or Oaxacan Indigenous Binational Front), with the aim of linking their demands for

migrants' rights with the call for state resources back home. They named Domingo Garcia the first general coordinator. Their purpose, he recalls, was: "More than anything we were supporting the issue of support for our communities ... the idea was to organize, coordinate, and demand more projects, a project to support community development, but also to confront the problems we have as migrant workers" (Quoted in Velasco Ortiz 2005: 221). Thus, they brought long-distance struggles together.

Transnationalizing the FIOB

The formation of the FIOB in California helped to launch a new movement to restructure Retorno, and to transform Mixtec communities' relationships to the Mexican state. In 1994, galvanized by migrants' strikes in North County San Diego, the FIOB installed itself in the Mixtec region of Oaxaca with the idea of pressuring the state to channel "productive projects" to villages like Retorno, giving migrant families the possibility to earn an income within their hometowns. In the process, they again transferred resources, particularly the regional coalitions they had built with nearby villages while living side by side in the "caves" of San Diego County. They also sustained the alliance with the PRD that they had built in the United States.

Sympathy in a Pueblo of Returnees

In Retorno, as of 2011, 88% of adult men and 57% of adult women living in the village had once been migrants, either in Northern Mexico (65% of men and 46% of women), or in the United States (63% of adult men and 20% of adult women). In contrast to La Partida (as I'll show in Chapter 7), these villagers hardly thought of their hometown as a "protected" space; rather, as wives of migrants and former migrants themselves, they sympathized with the "suffering" migrants faced. For example, Eduarda, a mother in her 50s whose husband and sons had worked in California, tells me, "When we go over there, they [you?] pay us terribly. They don't even realize how we suffer to cross, or how much we pay ... Then they kick us out; they send us home even though we're there to work. It's unjust how they treat us. Why?"

This sympathy helped the FIOB galvanize the community. Like migrants, non-migrants wanted to remake the village into a *pueblo* (town) that belonged to its *pueblo* (people). Luis, a teacher who became a FIOB leader on the Retorno side, describes:

Our goal was, above all, the possibility of having a *pueblo* that was different – a developed *pueblo*, a *pueblo* that could count on educational institutions that would raise the level of development, a *pueblo* that might have access to public programs from the state government. But we couldn't imagine Retorno getting access to these things if we didn't organize ourselves. Therefore, the fundamental step – in order to influence things and have a different town – was in the organizing.

Thanks to these coinciding visions, the FIOB was able to mobilize as much as 90% of Retorno, particularly young people and women. Rosa Delgado recalls, "We were really, really taken with it – really focused. Everything he [Domingo, who was the key FIOB leader in Oaxaca at the time] told us to do we did."

Meanwhile, Mexico's decentralization of resources for "municipal development" helped set the stage. In 1995, shortly after the FIOB set up an office in Oaxaca, Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo began a major push to decentralize state funds to the municipal level, providing rural communities like Retorno with resources for expenses ranging from infrastructure to stipends for individuals who served in the municipal governments (Fox 1995). In addition, various state agencies began to offer grants for development programs ranging from sanitation to reforestation and "women's empowerment." Nevertheless, as in the past, corrupt village leaders continued to siphon off these resources. Although state funds (the principal source of money for development in villages like Retorno) were supposedly disbursed directly to village governments, in practice, they were often channeled through the ruling political party, the PRI, which used the handouts to maintain a network of clients.

In order to get access to the new state resources, the FIOB had to take direct action. Therefore, along with a rising number of other popular groups in Oaxaca, they began staging marches, blocking highways, and striking in order to pressure the government to give *them* (rather than the PRI) resources. They demanded support for agricultural projects and taxi licenses, along with direct grants to movement leaders and the municipalities they represented.⁷⁵ Displacing the PRI, these social movement organizations became new interlocutors with the state, enabling indigenous people to obtain resources to which they had not previously had access. The FIOB, specifically, waged large-scale marches and road blockades in Oaxaca's state capital (to which they would bus villagers from Retorno and other nearby communities), thus securing resources for its member communities.

Through these direct actions, the FIOB secured resources never before accessible to the poor, indigenous, rural majority. Funds came from the Oaxacan state government, as well as Mexico's National Indigenous Institute and the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, and they went to fund agricultural resources, technical assistance in irrigation, infrastructure investments such as paving roads and building bridges, home improvements like roofing and cement floors, and training in human rights and women's empowerment. The FIOB also secured concessions for collective taxis, which enabled members of the villages to earn money as drivers, earning almost three times as much per week as local farm hands. By the 2000s the FIOB would have more than 20,000 members in 70 towns and be active in several other states. In addition, the FIOB's growing media attention in the United States enabled it to obtain funding from institutions including the Welfare Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Vanguard Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Inter-American Foundation, National Endowment for Democracy, California Endowment.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ This pattern remained dominant in Oaxaca until 2004, when the newly elected governor Ulises Ruiz declared he would no longer tolerate it, sparking the rise of a major six-month uprising by a coalition of left-wing movements, called the APPO, or Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca.

⁷⁶ For instance, the MacArthur Foundation funded education projects about human rights; the Vanguard and Rockefeller Foundations helped the organization develop a "strategic plan, the latter also providing for computing and administration; and the Inter-American Foundation gave \$600,000 for projects in farming and bird-raising, as well, later, as training in the strategic management of municipal state resources.

As the FIOB ascended, it also sought to link community development to the struggle for political change across Mexico. In the late 1990s, opposition parties had arisen nationwide and were challenging the PRI's hold on power. The FIOB joined this fight by launching Luis Perez (the teacher from Retorno) as a PRD candidate for state senate. In 1998, they waged a massive campaign to support Luis – and through him, to promote both the FIOB as an organization and the PRD as a left-wing political party. In 1999, this campaign successfully got Luis elected as the first-ever indigenous representative to Oaxaca's state congress. The effort linked the FIOB deeply to the PRD, making it hard for many villagers to distinguish between them.

Meanwhile, within Retorno, the FIOB once again drove democratization, this time with the support of state resources and a vastly expanded organizational infrastructure. This time, the FIOB's institutional force enabled Retorno's majority to not only overthrow the existing president but also to dismantle the historical *structure* of *Usos y Costumbres* (customary practices), which – as Chapter 2 showed – had been turned against them and tied to class domination. In 1995, FIOB activists and sympathizers installed a village president who would advocate for their interests; it was the first village government, as they put it “elected by the *pueblo*.” This time, the “old PRI” was gone for good.

The new government, led by a teacher named Martín González, took up the project the Popular Committee had begun in the early 1980s, dismantling political and religious traditions associated with the perverse history of “*Usos y Costumbres*” in the village – in which elite mestizos exploited the poor indigenous people under the guise of “custom.” First, they ended the practice of requiring *tequio* (unpaid labor) from village citizens and insisted that all government positions be paid. Second, after a series of consultations with migrants living in North County San Diego and Baja California, they reduced the number of annual religious festivals from twelve to one, doing away with the onerous obligation to contribute money. For the remaining annual festival, they replaced the traditional sponsorship system, or “*cofradías*” – which could cost a sponsoring family thousands of dollars and many years of debt – with a small annual contribution from everyone in the village. Basilio reflects:

One of the great satisfactions – something that FIOB has given us and that was in our plans from the beginning – one of the great dreams – was to end the *cofradías* (religious sponsorship requirements) in the *pueblo*. Many people thought that the *cofradías* were a detriment to the community, but there was also a lot of resistance to change ... Still, after six or seven years people were really happy, because now families don't get sacrificed. Many families from Retorno had to leave, and many couldn't return because they were so in debt.

Dismantling “tradition” gave poorer villagers relief from the disabling debt that had driven them to leave.

In addition to restructuring local politics, the new FIOB-affiliated government also promoted redistribution. Not only did the FIOB obtain *more* resources from the state, but its allies also distributed those resources more evenly among villagers. Javier, a long-

time FIOB advocate and twice president of the organization's branch in Retorno, explains, "Around that time, a lot of money was coming in from the government, from SAGARPA,⁷⁷ and so on. But Martín [the new president] also distributed a lot of resources, or at least they started to be distributed more evenly." In addition, instead of pocketing resources as the prior leaders had done, Martín's government used state money to improve infrastructure on behalf of all.

Finally, FIOB advocacy fostered greater democratic participation in Retorno, to include migrants, indigenous people, and the poor. While doing away with "*Usos y Costumbres*" – the customs that defined many indigenous communities – the new government repeatedly insisted that the *pueblo* meant *all* of the people in the town, who should all be represented (Curiel 2011). The new leaders held meetings with migrants, who had consistently been barred from political representation on the premise that they did not meet existing requirements for residence in or "service" to the village.⁷⁸ Over time, the new village government also formalized the electoral system so that community members would vote by ballots, rather than having elite leaders deliver votes on their behalf. Most importantly, they began to include women.

Articulating Struggles for Gender and Class Equity

One of the most amazing aspects of this social movement was the central role that women came to play, becoming its essential militants on the ground in Retorno, decisive for the organization's ability to effect change. While women had been almost entirely excluded from village politics until 1995, as the FIOB arose, they rapidly became central players in both the organization and internal community affairs. As Luis Perez, who was both the PRD state senator elected through FIOB efforts and Retorno's community president from 2005-2008, describes, "In the 1990s, women could not even approach the town hall. They did not come to the community assemblies; they did not go before the judge, not even to the schools ... [With the FIOB,] their participation was an explosion, so much that the school committees are now dominated by women; the health committees are dominated by women, the government social programs, too."

Women's militancy was crucial to the FIOB's power. On the ground, they were the ones who obtained economic resources and waged the struggle against the PRI. Javier, who served as the President of the FIOB committee in Retorno in the late 1990s, remembers, "Here in Retorno there were four or five women leaders who were the ones that really mobilized the people, and we [the FIOB] were only effective with their support. That's how we started to make changes in the local society – in politics, and in development projects, too." Rosa Delgado, one of the first of these women leaders, adds: "When the state representative came, almost all of the women – we grabbed him and we demanded that the government bring us things. We [women] put in that [opposition] government."

⁷⁷ The Mexican Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food.

⁷⁸ These demands for service were often used as a barrier to entry in political debates, enabling elites to claim that because migrants had failed to sponsor traditional religious festivals while away, they should not be allowed to hold civic office.

I argue that Retorno upended its old gender order for two reasons: first, to break down class inequities, men in the FIOB needed allies on the ground. Therefore, they directly encouraged women to participate. Their class perspective made them see the importance, both instrumentally and ideologically, of including women. As they dismantled village political traditions, they also dismantled the patriarchy to which the former had long been tied. Second, *women* became activists through their own efforts to build an alternative to living in the United States. Invested in class equity and the sustainability of their village, they took on agency not “as women,” but in order to make it possible to live in their hometown. They aimed their activism and making Retorno into a “*pueblo*” that included its people as a whole.

Men – particularly those in the FIOB – played a central role in drawing women into local politics, mobilizing them in very intentional ways. For instance, FIOB leaders encouraged reluctant housewives to take direct action by starting out with “feminine” political tasks, like bring food to members on strike. The FIOB also solicited development projects targeted specifically at women and insisted that, to secure the funding, women *must* get involved. In 1996, Rosa Delgado became one of the first six women to take up this call, ultimately becoming the key female activist in the village. She recalls:

There was a village assembly in November or December, I think, to appoint the town council. And they [male FIOB members] told us to come down here to the town hall. Then they said, ‘You know what, I’m inviting you to the assembly that they say they’re having here.’ [We replied:] ‘But how!?! If they don’t accept us women?’ ‘No,’ he [Domingo] said, ‘They are going to accept you. I already talked with the president’ ... Since there was also a FONHAPO⁷⁹ project – for roofing – he said that they were going to give us tiles for our roofs ... suddenly they were taking our names for those tiles. And when they took our names, then they said they were going to appoint someone – but it had to be a woman, because this program was for women.”

Rosa went to the village assembly at Domingo (the FIOB leader)’s insistence, and then, while there, was appointed to run a roofing project aimed at women. Rosa adds that the FIOB also helped solicit “women’s rights” trainings from the Mexican state in order to train and empower female activists who would join their cause. She explains, “Domingo got us [women] involved. He said the government was sending resources for women, and he brought people to train us, about the law, about the government, about human rights. We didn’t even know that we could complain about our husbands’ abuse. Rather, they would go and denounce our husbands for us.”

The FIOB – which now counted a majority of the village as its members – also helped women convince their husbands to let them serve as activists and leaders. Adelina, for instance, explains that when her husband saw her attend meetings, he “started to be jealous.” Yet Domingo, who considered Adelina crucial to the movement, helped

⁷⁹ The FONHAPO or *Fondo Nacional de Habitaciones Populares* (National Fund for Popular Dwellings) is a Mexican government agency that provides and improves housing for the poor.

convince her husband to sanction her new role:

He [my husband] didn't want me to go [to meetings] anymore. I told him that if he didn't want me to, I wouldn't go anymore. I didn't want to be fighting about that: 'You encouraged me and now you don't want me to go – now that I'm on the inside' ... but then [Domingo] said, 'Actually, the people really want you. They need support [resources],' he told my husband, 'But there is no one to stand in front. Plus, I can see that Adelina is really sharp.'

The need for leadership in the FIOB's class-based struggle provided leverage for shifting gender relations as well.

Some of men's reasons for including women were strategic. Women represented the majority of villagers, with most men in the United States. Thanks to migration, the percentage of men in the village of working age (15 to 65) had declined from 60%, in 1970, to only 38% in 1990 (INEGI 1970; 1990). As men's social status and sense of masculinity became linked to migration, community service also lost prestige. Martín, who served as village president from 1996 to 1998, recalled, "People [men] did not want to participate anymore; they did not want to contribute." As a result, women stepped in to keep Retorno alive. Dora Lopez, the first woman to serve on a town committee, explains, "Women had to be on the committees, because all the husbands went to the United States, and there were just women alone, so the only ones that went to the meetings were mothers." Meanwhile, the Mexican state increasingly started to promote "women's empowerment." In the 1990s, Javier remembers, "The [development] foundations also started to see that women's participation was critical, so they started to give projects for women – like, well, it started with chicken rearing, with weaving palm [crafts], and then mushroom projects, Lorena stoves, micro-lending." Such projects made women key levers for soliciting state funds.

Domingo Garcia, who ran the FIOB in Oaxaca from 1994 until 2001 and acted as its central charismatic leader, delineates for the instrumental calculation that men made as they encouraged women's involvement:

We wanted women to come [participate] because it was necessary – look, we'd been struggling, and when we [the FIOB] got Martín elected – a little bit before – we started trying to incorporate the women ... we thought: women are the other force, the other half of our power. Even more, because they are the ones who are there, they are the ones who see – and now more women go to the community assemblies than men.

With women's predominance in the village and the opportunity for women-oriented development projects, men activists – both in the US and on the ground in Retorno – saw that including women was crucial to their success.

While the role of gender-and-development funding might suggest that Retorno's gender transformation came from the top down, emanating from the Mexican state, what is important is that – in stark contrast to La Partida (which refused the programs, as

described in Chapter 7) – the FIOB *took advantage* of this opportunity, *using* the new set of resources to effect change. Meanwhile, though organizers’ interest in gender equity may have been piqued in the United States, it is too simplistic to say these ideas “came from elsewhere.” Rather, given that most studies expect returned migrant men to revert to patriarchal ways (Guarnizo 1997), what is interesting is how those from Retorno *used* gender programs to support an agenda of class equity. Their actions reflected the strategic importance of having a mass base on the ground, but also the democratic value of giving political voice not just to migrants and the poor, but to women as well.

As evidence of their ideological commitment to gender equity, the FIOB and its sympathizers codified women’s inclusion in Retorno’s government. Female participation became part and parcel of the dismantling of the old *Usos y Costumbres* structure and the equalization of class. Undoing the customary, hierarchical village political structure paved the way for breaking down the traditions of patriarchy to which it had been tied. When Martín Gonzalez and the “first government of the *pueblo* [people]” took office, dismantling many of the old structures, they also mandated that, from then on, women be included in assemblies, votes, and village committees. Martín’s government formally summoned all women in Retorno to community assemblies, informing them over the loudspeaker, “[Women] have a right to participate in the elections, too, to have a voice and vote.”

Women’s Political Activation: An Answer to the United States

Meanwhile, women accepted these new political roles as part of their own class-based fight, that is, their efforts to sustain a home in Retorno and avoid marginality in the United States. In North County San Diego, migrants’ undocumented status, political exclusion, and economic exploitation – which were particularly harsh for women (as described in Chapter 3) – had undermined their ability to lead tranquil, safe lives. Although we might expect women from patriarchal communities to benefit from emigrating, the poverty and fear of deportation that they experienced in North County compelled them to seek return. Every single woman who became a key political leader in Retorno, and/or the FIOB, had worked in the United States at least once. Of the returned migrant women I interviewed, 100% wanted to avoid migrating to the US again; Retorno represented freedom from the stress of life in the US. This compelled them to help reshape the village, and to realize that, under the circumstances, women might be the *only* ones who could carry out this fight. Like men, they pursued state resources in hopes of reconstituting the village, as a home.

While we might presume that the FIOB gave women a convenient excuse to take on political roles they had long coveted, women respondents themselves described participation as a burden and a shame. Rosa, for instance, tells me that that when she began to go to the village assembly – at Domingo Garcia’s insistence, – she felt, “For us [women], what a shame! We would have preferred to cover our heads and faces with our shawls, and we didn’t say anything. I didn’t even say if I’d accepted the position or not.” Adelina Juarez, who later became a prominent activist, was also hesitant to attend the assemblies or speak up. Nevertheless, she felt she had to endure this discomfort in order to defend her class politics. She reflects that when she began attending village assemblies, “I

didn't want to go to the assembly ... I felt out of place, but I said, 'It's for a just and noble cause that we're going [to the assembly], because it's not acceptable for just a few people to control us and put whoever they want in as president.' Adelina's husband encouraged her, hoping that she could access government funds and influence resource distribution, for the couple's mutual benefit. He told her, "Go! Go, because they're sending help. Support is going to arrive for the village, and for women!" Women's own investment in getting access to resources gave them the grit to endure this discomfort.

Women realized that in men's absence, if they did not step up politically, they would keep losing resources to the PRI elites – and with those resources, the chance of supporting themselves in Retorno. Mercedes, who became a prominent leader in the anti-PRI effort, remembers how she motivated other women to engage in civic affairs:

I used to tell the women, 'You have to go [participate]! How are we going to help Retorno advance if we don't say anything, if we don't speak, if there are meetings and we don't go? No. We have to go. We *can!*' ... I told the women they didn't have to let anyone take advantage of them. 'Stop being abused. You have to fight for what is yours. If you see that something is not working well in Retorno, you have the right – you know? – You have to go to the government, form a group, and ask about the corruption. You have the right to have the village be different ... Don't let yourselves be cheated by the people who are high up in [PRI] politics, because the only thing they do is just come to the village to trick people. And then in the end, the ones who benefit are those people, and our village remains the same.'

Mercedes's discourse of abuse shares some terms with Western feminist language. Yet her reason for urging women to participate was not *gender* abuse but instead the risk of economic stagnation at the hands of manipulative politicians. To her mind, clientelism deprived villagers of the only resources that might enable them to avoid migrating, and women had a key role to play in securing support for their families and themselves.

It was in the *practice* of struggle that these women began to feel empowered *as women* – and to extend their mobilization to women's rights. The resources that female members of FIOB obtained helped them overcome gender expectations, persuade other women to engage, and convince men to support the women's civic involvement. In 1997, the first female activists began going house to house to encourage others to join; they faced entrenched opposition to shifting gender roles. Rosa recounts:

We [first activists] were six women, and men of the village tried to bring us down, calling us whores, streetwalkers, a ton of things, and we stood for all of that in order to organize. It came to violence sometimes ... There were women that said they wouldn't participate, because their husbands hit them. And, there were women that got mad and told us, "No. Get out. You women are crazy and your husbands are jerks for giving you permission. Our husbands don't give us permission [to go out]." There were many houses in which the husbands threw us out with sticks. Yes!

However, as these women garnered state resources and began to change the community, they inspired others to join.⁸⁰ Tamara Ríos, another of the women activists, explained: “[The roofing project] gave us the basis to start organizing people, [telling people] that money had come, that it was a good project ... Once economic support started to come, that year, men set their women free to join.” Soon, more men urged their wives and daughters to join municipal committees and engage in civic affairs, in hopes that they, too, might get access to the concessions the FIOB had begun procuring from the state.

By 2007, women represented 62% of voters in Retorno (Cornelius et al. 2009); they were also key voices in public debates and a focus in local political campaigns, which spent large portions of their time and budgets targeting women. When I attend the village election in November 2010, women crowd the central plaza, demanding fair distribution of state resources and reprimanding men in village government posts for poor financial management. Adelina Juarez, planted at the center, grumbles when the emcee does not call on her, “It’s because I’m a woman; he’s ignoring me because I’m a woman.” By this time, women like Adelina had come to demand political voice *as women*, even when making demands that were not around traditionally “female” issues.

As women of Retorno secured political voice, they also helped dismantle practices that favored men in arenas like domestic violence, divorce, and rights to property and children, and they reported feeling greater self-esteem. Fighting for Retorno helped women defend themselves as women, too. Mercedes explains:

I was on the school committee, so when the school needed something I had to go ask for it – for instance, a delegate would come from Oaxaca and we would have to go ... and I started developing more as a person at that point. Like, I learned how to fight for things for Retorno. The people who were managing things badly – well, I would go and say to them, ‘No. This is not OK. You have to do it like this.’ So a lot of people told me – a lot of people started to respect me ... So when I was back in Retorno I was another person; I was no longer the same submissive Mercedes that bowed her head when they punished her, that just cried and cried and never said anything. No. At that moment, I changed.

Even though women in similar villages lacked recourse to report domestic violence (Barrera-Bassols 2006), as of 2010, those of Retorno regularly went to the district court to denounce abusive husbands. Maria Robledo, who ran a small store near the town square, quipped, “In the old days, almost all the men used to beat women. But now, no; now it’s the reverse. Women control the men! (*laughs*).” Despite the burden of serving the community, women who participated in politics also came to feel a stronger sense of their capacity as women. They described feeling an “awakening,” saying that they could now “see themselves” and would no longer tolerate abuse by men, employers, or outside political interests (Maldonado and Rodriguez 2004).

Yet, for respondents, prior household-level relationships were not the only point of

⁸⁰ See Maldonado and Rodriguez (2004) for a firsthand account of women’s incorporation into the FIOB region-wide.

comparison – or even the most important. Rather, women of Retorno measured their quality of life against their experiences in the United States. They felt “strong,” as they put it, not just because they gained influence over their husbands but also because they avoided exploitation, abuse, and discrimination, sustaining lives they had reason to value. In Retorno, they faced ongoing economic pressure, and they often took on great burdens to support village-level programs. Nevertheless, most echoed Rosa Delgado’s sentiment; after suffering in California, life in the village “felt great!” As in other developing countries (Ray 1998), these women became feminist activists in and through their struggles around class. Fighting against the degradations of migration gave meaning to their efforts as women.

The Long-Term Implications of Mobilization

Over time, migrants’ transnational, gendered struggle had complex implications for the Retorno’s relationships to political parties, development funds, and repressive US immigration control. On one hand, the FIOB helped to institutionalize more gender- and class-equitable practices, dismantling the old village structures, including new voices of women and migrants in local politics, and redistributing resources in ways that persist to this day. Furthermore they built unique insights into the interconnections between the abuses of migrant labor and the dispossession and deprivation of the hometowns from which these migrants come. This lens enabled the FIOB and its allies to obtain resources from the state and connect to a broader political struggle (of the PRD) within Mexico.

PRI Retaliation

Nevertheless, the positive turns within the village also hinged on the FIOB’s attachment to and advocacy for the PRD. Had the PRD won the national elections, their fate might have been different. But the PRI regrouped. In the late 1990s, the PRI faced challenges nationwide, leading to its defeat in the 2000 presidential election. While the PRI had once just *assumed* indigenous communities’ loyalty, it now had to intervene to maintain social control and mollify unrest, including the protests mobilized by the FIOB/PRD. At the apex of the FIOB’s ascendancy, just after Luis Perez had been elected as a PRD delegate to state senate, the PRI government in Oaxaca began to undermine the organization. First, the PRI-affiliated state governor, José Murat, known for manipulating social movements and their leaders, pushed both Domingo Garcia and Luis Perez to shift the FIOB’s alliances from the PRD to the PRI. When the leaders would not concede, the state accused both of corruption and arrested them, ostensibly for pilfering the state and NGO resources the FIOB had obtained. The corruption rumors were widely believed and may be true, particularly about Domingo.

Yet Domingo suggests that the state’s PRI-controlled government brought these accusations to light – or chose to expose corruption in this case – in order to beat back the FIOB and sow division between its leaders. In our interview, Domingo tells me that Governor Murat attempted to bribe him and, he suspects, bribed Luis as well. He recalls, “Murat plants the division between us and divides the Frente [FIOB] here, and for almost a year and a half we continue as two FIOBs, until most of us separate and form the FNIC [a new organization, founded by Domingo in light of the fragmentation]. And Retorno

was divided as well.” The accusations and arrests turned the FIOB’s core organizers against each other and left much of its activist base confused and disillusioned. Meanwhile, US foundations and the Mexican state froze funding to the organization, such that, Luis tells me later, it lost much of its capacity to obtain resources and effect change.

Meanwhile, within Retorno, elites aligned with the PRI returned from Mexico City to revitalize the party’s control. A woman named Esmeralda, who had grown up in one of Retorno’s ruling families before migrating to Mexico City in 1969, became the godmother of this “new” PRI. As of my fieldwork in 2011, Esmeralda presides over the grimy 20-cent public bathroom in a nearby town square. On our first meeting, she reclines back in a billowing pink poncho and dark lipstick – the polar opposite of steely Rosa, Retorno’s opposing “female boss.” Her voice smooth and educated, Esmeralda explains that by the early 2000s, the FIOB-led opposition had been so successful that “The PRI was dead in Retorno; they [the FIOB] had blocked the PRI.” In response, Esmeralda, deeply involved in PRI politics in Mexico City, returned to Retorno to confront what she calls “social degeneracy,” spread by the FIOB. There, she took it upon herself to resuscitate the power of the old ruling party. While the FIOB had a large popular base, Esmeralda was able to tap into a much bigger and financially stronger network that the PRI had built over decades, to supply patronage to affiliated groups (Eisenstadt 2007). Using her ties from Mexico City, Esmeralda obtained nearly endless “development projects” ranging from reforestation to beauty courses to cash handouts. These handouts gave Esmeralda and the PRI so much influence in Retorno that by 2007 she had restored its power in the town.

Esmeralda also contorted the gender transformation in Retorno and began to use her own version of “women’s empowerment” to mobilize women as well; yet this time, it was not for the egalitarian opposition, but for the PRI. She framed her efforts as a counter-weight to the disruptive FIOB, offering to help bring the old stability back. Gender (and generation) were central to this message. As Rosa Delgado and Tamara Ríos advocated for redistribution, Esmeralda encouraged older women – horrified by the “licentious” behavior of these young FIOB activists – to enter politics as well, on the side of the PRI. In particular, she targeted the “*Señoras*” – conservative, elder women who had never left the village and were most supportive of traditional gender roles. She describes:

The older ladies (*las señoras grandes*) ... would come to me crying that their daughters-in-law, had no...that they had problems, because their sons were in the US, and their daughters-in-law were headed down the wrong path. Soon more and more people came to me, and I started to have a ton of people. So I felt obligated to go find help- and I went wherever I could. First I went to the PRI – with the social action lawyer. And I told him, look, I have some people there – do you think you could give a talk? I got together 150 families, and ... I would give them talks, saying we don’t want that to happen here – that women go around whoring themselves, their husbands in the United States.

Esmeralda portrayed women’s activism as an issue of social degeneracy, even prostitution, suggesting that women like Rosa, Tamara, and Chavela were getting drunk and selling

themselves to men. Using this gendered *critique*, she convinced conservative women to join the PRI instead. She continues: “I just said, ‘For those that want to follow me, I’m in the PRI.’” By organizing the *señoras*, Esmeralda rebuilt the defeated party’s power. As she did, she converted once-male village politics into a fight among women.

Competition between FIOB sympathizers and the PRI paralyzed the village. After 2000, every single village election was contested, as the two sides fought for political control. During these post-electoral conflicts – which sometimes lasted for months and were common throughout the Mixteca region (Eisenstadt 2007) – the state froze all resource flows to the village, paralyzing the local government. Meanwhile, multiple groups squabbled over the same “development” projects, making it hard to get work off the ground. For example, when a group of migrants sympathetic to the FIOB / PRD sent funds and technical staff to support an irrigation program in Retorno in the late 2000s, the then-government, run by the PRI, not only disregarded its engineers but also hired its *own* engineers to find a separate source of water, duplicating the efforts in an attempt to secure recognition for themselves (Hall et al. 2013). When I meet with the migrant group, they are despondent, explaining that both in the United States and in the village, it has become harder and harder to mobilize people politically. As Javier, the leader of the FIOB in Retorno in 2011, puts it, “All the confusion and chaos means that many people prefer not to participate in any organization; they’d rather stay out of it.”

Repercussions of US Repression

Meanwhile, the repressive thrust of US immigration control, discussed in Chapter 3, also fueled social and political fragmentation, trapping community members on either side of the border and restricting the kinds of interconnections that had fueled democratization a decade before. Though nearly all migrants in North County San Diego longed to return, their inability to circulate gave them fewer chances for collaboration across borders. Meanwhile, young men in the village who would once have migrated remained in the village, unemployed, along with several more who had been deported. For women meanwhile, particularly migrants’ wives whose husbands were unwilling to bring them across the border, moving to the US looked like an ever more distant – and undesirable – possibility.

As North County San Diego deepened its persecution of undocumented migrants, several young men from Retorno were deported, some for criminal violations and others simply for “migration violations” (the act of crossing the border). By the time of my fieldwork in 2010 and 2011, young men are a constant presence in the village, drinking, blasting loud music, getting in violent fights that leave one in a serious coma, and purportedly robbing the homes of other villagers. The young men themselves feel ill at ease in the village. Julio, who was deported from Vista in 2009 when caught in a stolen car, provides an example. During my time in Retorno, I watch Julio get in increasing amounts of trouble, brutally beating up other young men and – rumor has it – prompting a string of robberies of old women’s homes. Yet, given that Julio went to the United States at the age of five, and grew up there, he constantly complains about being bored, saying he sees life in Retorno as “Shit.” He goes on, gesturing at his house at the bottom of Retorno’s hill, “This shit is dirt ... In the States, when are you going to have a house

like this?” When I ask Julio why he fights with the other young men, he spells it out for me (in English): “What I see? The main reason is alcohol – that’s basically it. Because they [we] got no life. They have nothing to do. So you drink, you drink, you get happy and you don’t feel so bad. Know what I mean? Like when you’re drunk, you drink, everything seems fine ... It makes you feel good for a certain amount of time.” So far, Julio hasn’t done much beyond beat people up. But as we talk he picks up a cartridge of a 22-caliber pistol from the ground outside his house, saying, “Know what this is?” Though he claims he won’t cause trouble, Julio has been in a gang before. He is accustomed to life in the United States, where, as he puts it “If you don’t get shamed, you get shot.”

Meanwhile, the women living in Retorno have been crippled by US immigration enforcement as well. Because men have long controlled migration, husbands tend to have the legal status and money that would – if the men wanted – enable their wives to cross the border. Yet in the 2000s, even though there were increasing opportunities for Mixtec women to work in the US service sector and growing networks of female migrants to help them cross, their previous *choice* to stay home fostered a new immobility. In the 1980s, after suffering in Culiacán, a generation of women had chosen to reject migration, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Yet now, if they changed their minds about the United States, or if they were part of a younger generation that had never experienced the tomato fields of Northern Mexico, they remained trapped at home, dependent on male relatives to sponsor their crossing. Under the new regime of undocumented migration, where border enforcement was stricter and crossing more dangerous, women who wanted to come to the US depended on male relatives to “bring them” through networks, coyote loans, or family visas. For instance, in 2010, Angela wanted to go to the United States to see her children who had migrated there. Yet, her husband, a legal resident, would not arrange the papers to make this possible. Afraid of the increasingly treacherous border, Angela remained stuck in the village. Others add that though they might want to go to the United States, nowadays, “It is little more than an illusion.”

The combination of jobless young men and immobilized women created further fragmentation in Retorno, so much that, in the words of one elderly woman, “This town is disintegrating fast.” Unable to make ends meet, the young men hardly appealed to the women. Rather, women under the age of 30 living in Retorno often describe their male counterparts as “slackers,” “scrubs,” or “slime-balls.” Instead, these women – several of whom are single mothers – often see the best prospects for their futures in building lives alone. For example, Carmen, a 29-year-old single mother who runs a hair salon and threw out her child’s father because she disapproved of his alcoholism, tells me, “Men are assholes ... I think some women are just meant to be alone.” Unmarried, with no husband to help fund a safe border crossing, women like Carmen have few prospects for getting by, besides whatever “productive projects” they can drum up in the village. Older women, meanwhile, remain lonely, separated from husbands and children who have migrated for work but can no longer cross the border to come back and visit from the United States. Whether this combination of residents may be able to revitalize the FIOB’s old demands for support from the state – or find better opportunities for their children within Mexico – remains to be seen.

Conclusion

While the criminalization of undocumented immigrants may silence them politically in the United States, this chapter shows, it can also spark politicization on the Mexican side. In Retorno, the pathway of migration created ongoing interdependencies and empathies across sites, enabling different groups of people – such as migrants and non-migrants, women and men – to collaborate with each other and link struggles for migrants’ rights to issues of resource deprivation and gender and class exclusion back home. The history highlights that gender transformations may come not only from the West but also from within indigenous communities. In Retorno, in particular, women gained leverage, strength, and voice through the process and practice of struggle, rather than through the new economic and cultural resources “flowing” from the United States. Furthermore, while migration had crucial development implications for Retorno, these did not come from migrants’ remittances (which were limited, due to their poverty), but instead from their *political* investment in rebuilding the village in order to escape the racial and class repression they experienced on the receiving side.

Nevertheless, the future of the FIOB, its ties to the PRD, and Retorno’s project of equity hinges on its ability to insulate itself from the power of political parties within Mexico, as well as the cross-border ramifications of harsh immigration control. With the village’s activists under attack from both sides, whether and how they will extend their multi-sited struggles for equity remains to be seen. To put Retorno in context, and to highlight the contingent history and local politics on which its politics hinge, I turn now to La Partida. As I have done here, I ask how local politics steered that village through the waters of structural change, forging, as they did, a very different course.

LA PARTIDA

Prologue

I arrive in the brilliantly clear, Zapotec village of La Partida, high in the mountains of Oaxaca's Sierra Norte, between downpours, the collective taxi weaving along the mountain pass through just-cleared boulders and heaps of red earth. The landslides tear at the mountain, spilling over the shoulder of the road to strip away the skin of the dense forest slopes. By the time I tumble out in front of La Partida's bright blue town hall, painted arches against the crystal sky, the village loudspeaker has already called the community out to slush mud and rocks off the road, taking advantage of the high clouds before the next deluge arrives. Machetes strapped to their waists, the men emerge one by one from their homes for *tequio* – communal labor – an obligation which the people of La Partida do in exchange for membership and access to the village's communally held land. Come nightfall, twenty or thirty men cluster in cowboy hats in the thick fog under the blurry streetlight, talking in low, clipped voices over the list of who'll work next, their hands thrust into their jean pockets for warmth.

Clinging to the steep slope of a mountain, La Partida is one of those towns that fog can blanket in an instant, closing out the world – or perhaps closing *this* world in. Around 9:30pm that first day, when my turn finally comes to meet the village government, it's been dark for hours. I climb towards them up the town hall stairs, clutching my papers to my chest, and perch on the edge of a bench, watching the gray of the night, and of the men who group in the backlit doorway. Before I am granted permission to stay, I'll face a lengthy interrogation with the eight men currently serving, unpaid, as village leaders, each one perched in a high-backed, swivel office chair. They ask my intentions, my religion, what I intend to take from them, and what, in return, I plan to give. The village's diligent, collective organization enables meticulous management of intruders like me.

La Partida's political life has long been organized around *cargos*, or, literally, burdens. As they finish secondary school, men face three duties: civic posts, assemblies, and collective work. Each year, the village appoints more than fifty men to civic posts in the village government, where they serve about five hours each per day for a year, unpaid. They rotate through these posts, starting at the bottom as guards and slowly working their way up to jobs like city councilman and town president. On top, all adult men must attend monthly assemblies, all day meetings where most village decisions are made. While assemblies are in session, a guard at the door blocks people from leaving and wakes them up if they fall asleep. Finally, for around six days a year (depending on village needs) each man must give unpaid labor, called *tequio*. Because all 3000 hectares in La Partida are communally held, public service earns people not only membership but also usufruct rights. As of 2011, no villager pays rent or taxes to use the land.

The *cargo* system, often known by its legal name of "*Usos y Costumbres*" (Ways and Customs) is not a politics of choice. Tomás, a 56-year-old teacher and musician who

fancies himself a sort of village spokesman, makes this clear to me on my very first visit. As the mist streams through the window of his adobe workshop, he looks out from under his thick black eyebrows, over the village below: “We have politics here, but they’re *real* politics.” He goes on:

For example, let’s say they [the assembly] tell me, ‘It’s your turn to do a *cargo*.’ They don’t say ‘Do you want to?’ They don’t ask me, ‘What’s your proposal?’ No. Like it or not, I am going to do a *cargo*. Once I’m leading the *pueblo*, out front, then I ask them, ‘What shall we do?’ I’m not going to announce to them, ‘Gentlemen, I think I would like to do X.’ If I say, ‘I plan to do X,’ they say, ‘No. You’re wrong.’ So, it’s real politics. No hidden agendas.

What Tomás means by “real politics” is that the village expects civil servants to respond to the assembly as a whole, rather than using their leadership positions for personal gain. So, if a man skips either *tequio* or an assembly, the village imposes a fine between two and four times a day’s wage (about US\$15 to 50), and if he refuses to perform a *cargo* when named, the village cuts off his rights to land and belonging in the town. Participation, another man tells me, is “a huge amount of work.”

Nevertheless, as men rotate through posts, they learn to live communally, and they become invested in the *pueblo*. Tomás goes on: “While you’re serving – at least this is how I felt in the six years I was glued to the town hall, I started to feel more love for my *pueblo*. It came to interest me more, and now I’m more concerned for the *pueblo*. I sat there thinking, ‘What are we going to do?’” Efrén, a villager of about the same age, sits on his stoop looking out at the mountains as he tells me, “A good president [is] a person who started by going through all of this ... starting with being a night watchman, then guarding the church. Then they guard the town hall and then the clinic. They go in order like that. Then, when they get to the top, they already know ... that’s how you come to understand the way of life here in the village.”

La Partida’s *cargos*, *tequios*, and assemblies, however, are considered the domain of men. Villagers explain that they divide duties by sex, with men conducting civic affairs while women do the *other* half of the work. Tomás, attending to business one day in the town hall, explains, “We believe the man has to lend his services [to the village], to do that heavy work, because if we were both called to serve, who would make the food? ... Here, women have their own world. They are in the house, they are with the animals, with the children, taking care of the children ... Those are women’s things.” Gabriel, who was village president in 2008, adds, “If us men don’t want to participate, the women want to less. It’s a burden. We can’t name women to posts because they’re our mothers. I would go on behalf of my daughters but not to take their rights from them.” Perhaps surprisingly, women often agree. In a survey of La Partida’s households, 39 of 70 women say they do not *want* to participate in civic affairs. They don’t have time, they say, and assemblies are “very tiring and boring.” Plus, politics are men’s domain.

Nevertheless, it only takes day for the doctor, teachers and nurses to tell me that La Partida is notorious for its ongoing domestic abuse, for perpetuating gender inequities even as villages like Retorno have changed. Historically, women were denied rights to

property and children and even jailed together with their husbands in cases of domestic abuse. Claudia, who is 75, remembers that when her husband died in 1959, she was thrown into jail for a week – along with her two little girls – for attempting to sustain property rights to their shared house. More recently, a man killed his wife by “*sillazos*” (big chair hits), and young men still reputedly gather to boast about how they beat their wives with a hose. “You’re not from La Partida,” they say, “Unless you go to Toby’s Bar [the village cantina] and unless you beat your wife.” In politics, women add that when they *do* attend town assemblies, “We have neither voice nor vote.” Rather, men mock women who speak, and tell them their words are worthless.⁸¹

By all appearances, La Partida – especially its women – remains immobilized in place and time. No women holler from their doorways about the trials of California, and no tattooed young men, like in Retorno, linger on their doorsteps in baggy jeans. But over time I see that La Partida’s story lies in the people who are not there, in the *departures*. As unchanging as the village may seem, I realize, its commune has been invented and reinvented *in contrast* to the individualism of migrants, most of whom live in Los Angeles. While members’ descriptions of participatory politics conjure a long, untouched history, the reality is more complex: the system of mutual obligations, as well as the deep understanding it builds, need members to be *present*. As La Partida’s migrants have embraced the United States, as they have left, “tradition” has had to be remade.

Even the predominance of men in the public spaces of the village – their stark visibility and women’s absence – has been forged by migration. While women in La Partida seem stagnant, in fact, they have led migration out of the village, finding jobs as housekeepers and garment sewers, and forging paths out of patriarchy. Many never looked back. Those who did sought to “modernize” their hometown. Thus, the communal cohesion I see when I arrive – and the gender exclusions with which that communalism is profoundly intertwined – are not, in fact, evidence of stagnation and isolation. On the contrary, they have been produced through La Partida’s interconnections with its migrants in the United States. These ties are defined not – as in Retorno – by members’ sympathy across borders, but instead by their tensions and contrasts.

The next three chapters explore how La Partida’s communal structure – at once equitable and repressive – set the stage for its migration, and how, through departures, it has been remade.

⁸¹ These issues came to a head in November 2007, when a woman named Eufrosina Cruz attempted to run for a *cargo* in her village and was prohibited by her community, sparking uproar among urban feminists (Worthen 2012).

Chapter 5

Of Equity and Elective Migration: How La Partida “Chose” the Urban Service Sector

In 1964, at the age of 12, Alma Muñoz became one of the first women to emigrate from La Partida, running away from home. Even though Alma was the eldest of eight children in a corn farming family, by her own account, she never wanted for anything. There was always food on the table. Nevertheless, her smile lines draw long behind her small, round glasses, as she recalls that she was a young rebel – “tremendous!” – so she started chasing the idea of a better life. These aspirations, she adds, lured her first to Oaxaca City, then to Mexico City, and finally, in 1974, to the United States. As one of the first people from La Partida to settle in Los Angeles, she anchored the community there, bringing sisters, friends, and female cousins, and helping them get settled into garment and housekeeping jobs. When I ask Alma why she left, she gathers her waist-length raven hair and sets her four-foot-ten frame beside me on the couch in South Central LA:

I always had in my head the idea that I wanted to get out of there – to have a better life than my mother had, because she had many children. I thought: I’m not going to have so many kids, like my mom. And I wanted to go to the city to see things, get to know it. So at 12 years old (1964) I went to Oaxaca to work. [A: All alone?]. Alone. ... Also because my mother suffered a lot of abuse from my father. He would drink. When he was home he went out drinking, and he would come back and beat my mother. So I decided that I didn’t want that kind of life ... I didn’t want to stay there; I had other dreams. I imagined myself living in a city. That was always my dream. Not to stay in the *pueblo*, because life is so difficult there, and you always have to work really hard to be able to have anything.

So, Alma hitched a ride to the city of Oaxaca. Like most migrants from La Partida, she looks back on her departure as a personal choice to build a better life. Her migration pathway, like that of the village as a whole, was structured around distinguishing herself, and the feeling of leaving.

As Alma’s story suggests, La Partida’s migration pattern defies existing stereotypes about Mexican migration. Common sense understandings of labor migration presume it is driven by economic concerns. In turn, Mexican women are typically seen as associational migrants, trapped in their home villages by the strong patriarchal culture (Cerrutti and Massey 2001; Massey, Fischer and Capoferro 2006). Finally, low-wage migrants from Mexico are often expected to begin their US careers in farm work, rather than moving directly on to urban jobs.

In comparison, La Partida’s pattern was extraordinary. First, though not “rich,” most migrants left La Partida for *social* reasons, particularly surrounding gender. Second, instead of being led by adult, married men, 86% of migrants from La Partida were

unmarried young people (median age 16), and more than half of them were women.⁸² Rather than being *immobilized* by their hometown's patriarchy as scholarly research predicts, these women built networks of their own, surpassed men in numbers, and became pioneer migrants to the United States. Breaking trends, they moved alone, expressly to get away from patriarchy. Third, where other Mexican migrant groups were snared into backbreaking agricultural labor, people from La Partida turned up their noses, 97% of them going to urban areas, with the goal of personal betterment. While it seems only natural that young people of rural Mexican communities might want education, access to the comforts of urban life, or escape from gendered abuse, the question remains: what made such pursuits possible in La Partida, when they were precluded in Retorno – and most other Mexican migrant communities?

In this chapter, I argue that La Partida's unusual communitarian political system, that is, its redistribution and participatory politics combined with its much more common, repressive patriarchal regime to foster elective, feminized migration like Alma's. The first part of my argument is that core features of La Partida's political structure mediated the emergence of migration. For one, the village held land in common and redistributed it among members, giving most of them enough resources to *reject* migration into farm labor jobs and choose to migrate only when the prospects were more appealing. Yet this class equity also made gender inequalities more salient, such that members' memories focus on gender oppression. In conjunction, all male members of the village served as civic leaders in the community government, on a rotating basis. Because these posts required them to read, write, and interface with state bureaucrats in the city, many families began to want more education, which would help them manage in the posts. Thus, in the 1940s and 1950s, they began sending their sons to Oaxaca City for education. Yet men's civic obligations also kept them tied to the village, while women were freer to move.

The second part of my argument is that once urban movements began, they sparked new *aspirations* in the village, especially for consumer goods and freedom from gender oppression. While La Partida's earliest migrants had sought education in order to *help* the village, during their urban sojourns they gained access to consumer goods, introducing greater stratification into the village. This stratification accelerated migration, as an increasing number of villagers sought the same urban comforts. Meanwhile, as women became exposed to urban life, they followed their brothers and male friends, using migration to escape male domination in the village. Yet women were able to migrate partially because their male counterparts had already begun working in household service, forming ties to a labor sector that was becoming increasingly feminized just as the women sought jobs.

The third part of the chapter shows that the skills and friendships that La Partida migrants developed in urban Mexico, particularly women, gave them *choices* among destinations when they moved to the United States, enabling them to reject the most strenuous, agricultural jobs. First, while working in Oaxaca and Mexico City, almost

⁸² This pattern is similar to those of nearby Sierra Norte communities studied by Young (1978) and Hirabayashi (1993).

always as servants, migrants from La Partida accumulated skills. Many learned Spanish in their employers' homes and even went to school at night. Others learned to operate machines for urban industry, particularly in the garment sector. While living in urban areas these migrants also built diverse social networks, particularly with employers and other migrants who provided a variety of links to jobs in the United States. Thus, even though men from La Partida had worked on farms during the Bracero Program and got recruited to work on US farms again in the 1970s and 1980s, women were able to tap into *other* migrant networks, getting housekeeping and garment factory work in Los Angeles. These alternate networks enabled both men and women to opt out of rural migration and choose to go to the more hospitable receiving site of Los Angeles instead.

Communitarianism and Elective Migration

Internal redistribution and political participation gave La Partida's migrants choices in the face of economic pressure. Throughout the 20th century, the village held land under a communal title,⁸³ which it observed scrupulously, granting each villager the right to use farm land and forest and river resources held by the community as a whole (Stephen 2002; Aquino 2009; Smith 2009). As of the early 1950s, thanks to this distribution, each family had use of about four of five parcels (nine acres) of land, just enough for an average family of that time – eight to ten people – to subsist (Rivera-Salgado 1999). Samuel, who was born in La Partida in 1942, sits in the little telephone booth he runs at the bottom of the hill, and remembers that when he was a child, every family had land: “There were one or two people that didn't have any, but yes, the majority had land – if even just a few parcels, but they had it.” In stark contrast to the Mixteca, where landlords monopolized land, in the Sierra Norte, there were no landholdings in the entire region larger than 100 hectares (250 acres) (Aquino 2009).

In conjunction with land distribution, families in La Partida worked according to a form of mutual aid that helped them produce enough crops to subsist. In Retorno, wealthy landowning families hired sharecroppers to do the hard labor. By contrast, in La Partida and the Sierra Norte, as of the mid 20th century more, than 80% of families farmed through labor exchanges, which they call *gozona*. For instance, Lane Hirabayashi (1993), who conducted research in a village near La Partida, reports that even as of the 1970s only 30% of families exchanged wage labor, 10% employing and 20% providing it. The remaining 70% exchanged work unpaid. Even though each family had a designated parcel, they collaborated in farming, rotating across several plots. Hirabayashi adds that during his research he was “repeatedly told that people of [the Sierra] simply don't sell labor to other villagers” (44). In our interview, Samuel suggests things were similar in La Partida:

Yes, my father had land, but the way he planted – well, here, in those days, there was what they call *gozona*, a kind of work that you do with several people. So, you come help plant my land, and in 10 or 20 days they would plant the land, and

⁸³ Communal holdings (*comunidades agrarias*), granted by the Spanish crown during the colonial era, are distinct from *ejidos*, collective landholdings created in the 1930s land reforms after the Mexican Revolution. While *ejidos* are more common nation-wide, communal holdings predominate in indigenous Oaxaca.

after that they would go plant someone else's ... So my father would go to help other people in order to bring his own work along ... We worked through reciprocal labor; that's how we all got corn.

Because people shared labor, Samuel insists, usufruct rights to a given plot did not bear as much weight as land ownership otherwise might.

These economic practices were also tied to participation in the village government. While contemporary Western political systems define citizenship in terms of rights, in La Partida, belonging – as well as landholding and social status – was tied to the fulfillment of public obligations (Wolf 1957; Aquino 2009). In particular, each adult male was expected to provide regular, unpaid service in village government *cargos*, labor for public works (*tequio*), and attendance at regular community assemblies. If he did not, he would lose his rights to land.

This communal structure was the product of centuries of struggle against colonial, state, and corporate cooptation. In the scholarly literature, villages of Oaxaca's Northern Sierra are famous for their unity vis-à-vis outsiders and the way they tenaciously cling to autonomy (Nader 1991; Guardino 2005). In this region, the process of Spanish colonization was brutal and bloody, lasting more than 35 years as the indigenous Zapotecs resisted the kind of land grabs and evangelization that befell the Mixteca. With few indigenous leaders willing to cooperate as *caciques* (political bosses, or intermediaries), Spanish colonists eventually slaughtered the Zapotec nobility, unable to coopt them through handouts and land titles (Chance 1989: 181). As a result, by the mid 18th century there was still little mestizo settlement in the area, and the population in La Partida remained 99.5% indigenous – with just “a tiny, impoverished group of Spanish colonists” (Chance 1989: 13). Instead of being implemented from within, colonial extraction was managed by external magistrates. Thus, the local version of *caciques* also had little influence, living like commoners and using their positions to promote populist projects such as infrastructure.

In the 19th century, as the Mexican state began seeking to incorporate Sierra Norte villages, the communities consolidated the participatory institutions described above, challenging internal hierarchies, demanding universal male suffrage, and ending hereditary position in the *cargo* system (Mallon 1995; Guardino 2005). In the early 1800s, some Sierra families had attempted to begin passing positions in the *cargo* ladder from fathers to sons, instead of working through the hierarchy themselves. But other villagers refused, solidifying the expectation of unpaid service in the *cargo* hierarchy and insisting that all villagers start at the bottom. So doing, they entrenched democratic practices and egalitarian principles (Guardino 2005: 17). Likewise, when individual villagers attempted to act as go-betweens to white or mestizo urban magistrates, as the leaders in Retorno had done, fellow villagers in the Sierra Norte dismissed them for “pimping.” Indeed, there were frequent village riots to hold leaders accountable for funds and take down individuals who accepted patronage or defied community decisions (Guardino 2005: 265). Some scholars argue that projecting divisions to inside versus outside, against those who would exploit them, helped the villages prevent divisions within (Stern 1983).

The Sierra villages' cohesion gave them social resources to manage 19th and 20th century Mexican state formation according to their aspirations. Thus, when the Mexican state began to formalize the municipal structure, primarily as a means to sell off land, Sierra communities invoked their colonial-era communal titles – long forgotten in other Oaxacan villages – to refuse privatization (Aquino 2009).⁸⁴ In the 1930s, as Lazaro Cárdenas sought to “integrate” indigenous people into the Mexican state, these villages used his interest to demand better schools and infrastructure. At the same time, frustrated with Catholic hierarchies and control, they waged an anti-clerical campaign to de-link their civil hierarchy from Catholic rituals and festivals, and to direct money away from the Catholic Church and into education instead (Smith 2005; 2007). This history of self-protection gave the villages not only material benefits, but also, perhaps more importantly, the egalitarian institutions that would help them weather changes to come.⁸⁵

In La Partida, communal land, mutual labor, and participatory politics mitigated wealth disparity. Although the people of La Partida were poor, as of the middle of the 20th century, nearly everyone had enough to subsist (see also Stephen 2005; Smith 2009). When I ask if there had been poor and rich people in the village when migration began, not one interviewee from La Partida remembers his or her parents facing debt. Rather, respondents tell me that the main divisions were those of effort: “The poor man is the one who doesn’t work; the rich are the people that work hard.” Claudia, for example, says that during her childhood in the 1940s, “Everyone was poor. There were no rich people here ... No, my father would say that if people suffer here, it’s because they don’t farm.” If a particular family did begin to accumulate more wealth than others, the village would nominate its head to *cargo* posts, taking up his time, curtailing his advantages, and helping to even out wealth disparities (see Stern 1983). As a result, not one migrant I interview says he or she left for lack of land. As Lane Hirabayashi (1993) says of a neighboring town, “By general agreement of both early and later migrants, [villagers] were not starving and did not flee the village out of dire necessity” (64).

Because people in La Partida were accustomed to reciprocal labor and un-pressed by debt or starvation, they repeatedly rejected opportunities to migrate into farm work. In the 1940s and 1950s, opportunities to work in Northern Mexico as farm laborers began to appear, with recruiters arriving in the village to seek out low-wage workers, just as they had in Retorno. For instance, recruiters from the sugarcane fields in Veracruz⁸⁶ went to the Sierra Norte to find workers as early as the 1940s; yet almost no one in La Partida was willing to undergo the trek, let alone the harsh conditions of agro-industrial work (Hirabayashi 1993: 48). In the 1960s and 70s, contractors from Sinaloa and Sonora – where Retorno’s migrants had become so embroiled – also attempted to recruit seasonal farm workers from the Sierra Norte region (Stephen 2007). Yet, as soon as one or two villagers brought back stories of the tomato fields of Culiacán (see Chapter 2), others rejected this choice (Hulshof 1991: 3). Thus, redistribution helped La Partida manage its relationship to the Mexican economy.

⁸⁴ To this day, people of La Partida know of and refer to a 1589 Spanish title proving the communal status of their land.

⁸⁵ One of the first things I notice when driving into the Sierra are large signs saying “In this community there is no private property; Purchase and sale of communal lands is prohibited.”

⁸⁶ The same recruiters that had gone to the Mixteca in the 1940s.

Finally, even though a few villagers went to the United States on agricultural contracts during the Bracero Program in the 1950s, they rejected future farm work. For instance, Alfonso, who went to Texas in the 1950s to pick cotton, says he couldn't stand the work: "I never got used to it there – because the work is really hard, really backbreaking." Edgardo, who is 72, had also been sent to pick vegetables in Stockton, California during the Bracero Program in 1955. He, too, refused to continue working on farms, returning to La Partida even though his employer offered him legal residency in the United States. He recalls:

I said, 'Enough.' I didn't like that work, so I came back. The work was really hard ... The employer told me there were opportunities to stay. 'Stay,' he said, 'stay.' He was encouraging me. 'Look,' he said, 'here's the agreement – you'll be here a year and a half on contract, and then after a year and a half we'll talk to the owner ... You do what the boss says, and if you work for this employer three years he'll give you your papers, and then you're free. You can stay here or you can go look elsewhere' ... But I told him, 'I'm leaving.' 'You're crazy,' he said, ... But it wasn't my destiny to stay.

Today, Edgardo's adult children complain about his persistence in begging them not to go to the United States and nagging them "Study, study, so you don't have to migrate as farm workers ... You get up at 5:00am, and they don't treat you well." Edgardo explains, "I always told my children, you're going to study; you're going to have a career." In short, because they had resources, people like Edgardo could reject these grueling forms of work.

How, then, did so villagers from La Partida come to leave? From the 1930s to 1970s, the village – which was several days walk from the city of Oaxaca – became increasingly tied to the city, both economically and politically. In the 1950s, roads were built into La Partida (unpaved), making villagers increasingly able to travel to and from the city in the backs of trucks. The roads opened markets for trade, so that enterprising villagers could buy things in the city and sell them to passing cars in La Partida, or as traveling merchants in more remote villages. Furthermore, in the middle of the 20th century, the Mexican federal and Oaxacan state governments began increasingly to seek to integrate indigenous villages into the national political structure, demanding greater accounting and interface from communities that had previously been left to their own devices. This political integration required leaders to read documents, travel to the city, and speak with urban bureaucrats in Spanish (their second language).⁸⁷ In Retorno, as described in Chapter 2, nearly all of this interface (and its benefits) had fallen to the few ruling families who knew how to read; in La Partida, where people took turns in the government, almost all members started having to go to Oaxaca City to conduct community business.

The experience motivated them to want to build greater reading, writing, and Spanish language skills, to facilitate their trading and political posts. In particular, starting

⁸⁷ Jobs that, in Retorno, were monopolized by elites who reaped benefits from their posts.

in the 1950s, fathers began to send their adolescent boys to the city so that they would be economically and politically “ready” when they came of age. Otilio, a 55-year-old teacher and former village president whose grandparents were traders, provides an example:

My grandparents didn’t study at all. Pure brains. But sadly, on the way to the city [Oaxaca], people would attack them, and they wouldn’t let them by with their animals. Since my grandparents didn’t know Spanish, they had no idea what people were saying to them, so that’s why my grandfather sent my uncle José, the eldest, to Oaxaca [around 1945. He told José], ‘You’re going to go to Oaxaca to learn – not to write, necessarily, but Spanish. So that when they are attacking us, you’ll be at the head.’

In 1962, Otilio’s father – whom the family had been too poor to provide an education – also sent eight-year-old Otilio to Oaxaca.⁸⁸ Though Otilio cried in protest, his father insisted, “Son, you’re not going to end up like me, ignorant, without knowing how to write and especially without knowing Spanish. You have to go to school. So they put my clothing in a little bag, and let’s go (*vámonos*).”

Because La Partida’s rotating political system required every villager to serve as civic leaders, even those who had never gone to school began to want more education. Samuel, who had described his father’s land, lack of debt, and reciprocal labor practices, provides an example. Although Samuel’s parents had never gone to school, when he was ten (1952), they sent him to Oaxaca City to learn Spanish. Like many parents from La Partida, they were able to afford this by seeking out a household where a child as young as eight or ten could work as a servant in exchange for room and board, attending primary school at night. When I ask what inspired his illiterate parents to do this, Samuel explains:

It was precisely because sometimes it’s our turn to carry out *cargos* in the town government. My father was a town councilman, policeman, and so on. He had to be on the education committee, to sponsor the village festival, to be the judge. He’s a farmer, but he never even went to school ... And because we spoke Zapotec here, we felt stunted in our language capacities. The teaching in the village school was really bad, so our parents felt an obligation to send us to Oaxaca City. With the goal of learning Spanish, they sent us to work as servants.

Although there was a primary school in the village, many families found it woefully inadequate due to teachers’ negligence, so Samuel he went to Oaxaca. After three or four years of repeat primary school, he returned to begin serving *cargos*. With political posts rotating among villagers and little stratification in the village, parents from a wide variety of families did the same. Thus, migration took its start as a tool for villagers to better manage the Mexican state’s growing incursion into rural villages.

⁸⁸ Although there was a primary school in the village in the 1950s and 1960s, it was so abysmal that in order to learn to read children often had to go to the city and repeat the grades they had already completed in the village.

La Partida's communal organization enabled members to opt *out* of migrating for need or debt; yet it also inspired them to "improve themselves" and opt *in* to urban migration. Whereas past scholars have speculated that "culture of education" pushed Sierra communities to seek out schooling (Stephen 2005; Worthen 2012),⁸⁹ this history suggests that the local political economy made this "culture" of education possible, laying the groundwork for aspirational migration.⁹⁰ Yet, the early migration was almost all boys, and girls to follow – as became so important to the local migration pathway – migration itself would have to shift.

Permanent Emigration and the Allure of Urban Life

While communalism helped incite migration, exposure to urban areas also changed the local social structure. As migrants came back – even from short stints in Oaxaca – they introduced stratification, making migration increasingly alluring as a path to greater material comforts. La Partida's first migrants returned home with new commodities and social standing, enticing others to move to the city as well. Thus, a growing number of young migrants, increasingly women, left not to *help* their families, but to *escape* them. These women were able to find jobs because their brothers were already connected to the service sector, where there were opportunities for women to work as well – indeed, while household work had once been considered appropriate for young boys, it became increasingly feminized. As those leaving the village made inroads into more stable urban jobs and homes and got used to having fun – and having "things" – in the cities, they wanted to go back to La Partida even less. Their establishment thus reinforced the permanent out-flow from La Partida to Oaxaca, and later on to Mexico City and eventually the United States.

Most of La Partida's first urban migrants began as live-in domestic servants, cleaning houses and running errands for the growing middle and upper classes in Mexico and Oaxaca Cities. As late as the 1960s, particularly in Oaxaca City, it was common for children, including boys, to do such tasks in exchange for food and lodging, without pay. Parents from rural villages like La Partida could take their children to Oaxaca and find signs on houses saying "Looking for a young boy [servant]." Samuel recalls that through this method, his parents found a middle class family, whom they promised they boy could do anything they wanted: "During the day, I swept the street,⁹¹ I would set the table, I would sweep, clean up, set the table, fetch the milk and coffee – everything that a little boy of 10, 11, 12 years old does." Nevertheless, this job allowed Samuel – and other children – to take a break from work in the evenings and attend night school, so that they might complete their primary education. As migration grew, it helped literacy rates in La Partida skyrocket, rising from 19% in 1930 to 80% in 1970 (the same time Retorno's literacy rates hovered around 45%) (INEGI 1930; 1970).

When the young men who had been La Partida's first migrants returned to the

⁸⁹ Some have gone so far as to suggest that Protestant missionaries cultivated this orientation towards education (Stephen 2007). I would argue that cultural argument developed *ex-post-facto* and that in fact their material conditions made the pursuit of education possible.

⁹⁰ Some have called this "social" migration (Hirabayashi 1993; Klaver 1997).

⁹¹ Well-off Mexican households typically clean the sidewalks in front of their homes.

village, they brought not only education but also social capital, which enabled them to expand into new economic activities, particularly as traders. As they did, the village economy shifted from almost entirely subsistence farming and reciprocal labor to greater stratification, with traders growing noticeably better off (Young 1978; Stephen 2005). By the 1980s, La Partida would transform into what members call “a town of traders.” Feliciano, who is 75, bald, and moves slowly these days, remembers how his connections in Oaxaca helped fuel this transition. Spending most days sitting in the sunshine outside his three story clothing shop on La Partida’s main road, Feliciano glows in the story of how he – a farmer’s son – built the resources to put all seven of his (now grown) children through university. He describes:

I had gone to Oaxaca City to finish primary school. At that time there was no road, so I went on foot, it took a whole day. We would carry our tortillas, our food and several of us would go together ... just primary school because it was also costly to pay rent. From there I came ... back to work the fields. But I had a friend in primary school who helped me. I talked with my friend, who sold clothing, and he told me, ‘You’re in a good location; you should sell clothing there in the *pueblos*.’ But I told him that I knew clothing was an investment. It required investing money, and I didn’t have anything. And he told me, ‘I’ll help you out with the first merchandise.’ So I took it and started selling clothing here and in all the *pueblos* further ahead.

The loan helped Feliciano build a thriving business. Esteban, who was town treasurer during my fieldwork in 2010, is himself a child of connections to Oaxaca. As I sit talking with Esteban at his desk one afternoon, he explains that urban migration brought increased integration with the capitalist economy – and its inequities. One by one he names off each of the wealthier families in the town – a group whom villagers call “the eight.” He explains that in the 1940s and 50s each of these families sent a son to Oaxaca as a boy servant. Though the boys’ time there was brief, it gave them a chance to buy pigs, household tools, clothing, or other commodities, which they brought back and traded in nearby towns, letting them leave farming and get ahead of other villagers economically. As a result, while 90% of adult men in La Partida had been farmers as of 1930, by 1970 35% of them had found other jobs (INEGI 1930; 1970). By 1986, in a nearby community, only 11% were full time farmers (Stephen 2005). Even for people who stayed in the village, urban migration offered a road off the farm. Once migration was underway, differences emerged that accelerated its pace. Seeing the material goods their brothers brought back – and the availability of similar jobs to women – girls began to seek out service jobs as well, often running away from their families to follow in the boys’ footsteps. In short, egalitarian participation sparked migration, but stratification gave it legs.

Producing Permanence

Soon, a *second* wave of internal migrants began leaving La Partida in search of such comforts; in contrast to the first group, they were primarily young women. These migrants left not to bring things back, but to learn about and experience urban life, escape patriarchy, and get an education that would lead to a more easeful existence.

Learning more about the city made them feel “bored” and “tired” of the harsh agricultural life of their “backward” village. By contrast, they saw the city as “fun” and “fantastic,” a place where they could “get ahead, seek another future – better than what we live [in La Partida].” Estrella, who ultimately left for the US, remembers seeing others return: “They came to visit well dressed, well groomed, filled out, whiter, and I said, ‘Wow. I think they live the dream of paradise.’” By contrast, Estrella felt her own father was “backward”: “He never went out to become more civilized, to take the wool out of his eyes, to stop being so limited in his thinking.” Many migrants I interviewed from La Partida – particularly women, prohibited by their parents from leaving home – ran away. In their words, leaving the village was, literally, an escape.

Even though people in La Partida had enough to subsist, there was little money economy in the village, let alone the capacity to buy things like clothes and processed food. These things drew people to the city, especially women. For instance, in 1968, Maria left La Partida for Oaxaca City for the first time. She was thirteen. She recalls, “I had seen my female cousin come back with pretty clothes and shoes and a purse, and I wanted to experience that, too, because I had always been poor and I had no changes of clothes, no shoes ... and for me all of that was like a shop window, filled with things I longed for.” Adelita felt similarly. Running away from home at the age of twelve, she told her parents: “I want to buy clothing. I need shoes and that. I’m bigger now; I need to buy things. I like dresses.” Juan, 36, added that he left less out of necessity than out of envy:

Economically, we were fine; I can’t say I needed a job ... but I wanted to see things, to experience things ... My 17 year old friends would come back here [to La Partida] well dressed, with their sneakers, and they talked differently. So all of that dazzled me ... I said, I don’t think this is my future, just to be trapped here in these mountains ... Also, a lot of the girls from my generation went to Oaxaca to study, and I saw them, right? A little more educated and all that, and I said, what am I doing? I have to do something with myself, right? Something, something.

Epifanio, who left in 1978, also recalls, “I wanted to work, I wanted to have money – I think I was 13 or 14 and you need money ... So I trailed along with some family members to the city of Oaxaca.” Though his parents protested, Epifanio told them, “You know what? I’m leaving, because I have nothing here, I am not going to do anything here.” He explains, “A family member comes back from there [the city] and you get tempted; [you ask] ‘Where are you coming from?’ [You think] ‘I’d like to go see that’ ... not for pleasure or vacation, but to go stay there, because what am I going to come back here for? ... In my mind it was all about making money, having money.”

Once in the city, many of La Partida’s migrants earned wages, built connections, and had personal experiences that made them want to stay. On one hand, their work was demanding, especially in the early years. Domestic servants had to be at their employers’ beck and call from the wee hours of the morning until late at night without rest breaks – and to perform a range of chores, from cleaning to childcare to errands. Adelita, who is 58 and returned to La Partida due to her struggle with diabetes, sits on a little stool in the patio among her chickens, worked as a live-in servant throughout her teenage years. She remembers the demands:

It was a wood floor, and I would wash it with a mop, get down on my knees to mop. After that I would wax, wash the sheets, wash the clothing, and I would iron. I would be on the roof⁹² ironing, ironing until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, and then I went to sleep around 2:00 or 3:00, and the next day at around 5:00 am I got up, I swept the street and washed it, and I started making juice for the *Señor*, putting out the coffee, setting the table until the parents got up, and the children, to have their breakfast.

Despite the litany of tasks (just a fragment of which I quote above), Adelita adds that her employer encouraged Adelita to develop language abilities: “The *Señora* would take me somewhere and say, ‘Listen, listen, do you understand Spanish? I don’t want to hear any more of your dialect;⁹³ I want you to learn. Now, go to the store, and buy garlic. Say in your head to yourself as you walk, ‘*Ajo, ajo, ajo* [garlic].’” Indeed, many respondents felt their employers supported them, offering them material goods and opportunities to grow. Furthermore, meeting a variety of people gave migrants rapid job mobility, so that as they began to learn Spanish, most were able to find better-paid work elsewhere. Therefore, Adelita concluded, “I liked the work; I liked it. The *señora* liked how I worked; she said I cleaned well and all. And she really cared for me. She would even take my baby in her bed and buy him Clavel milk – pure Clavel milk, just a huge box of it – and chocolate milk.” As Adelita hints, living in the city with well-off families exposed migrants to a wealth of consumer products they had never before experienced.

When thinking back on the period, numerous respondents remember feeling awe-struck at the commodities available in the city. To this day, interviewees’ eyes twinkle with wonder at all of the things that were suddenly within their reach – not just wages, but milk, bread, shoes, underwear! (and, of course, fun!) Marcela, who is 67 and cleaned houses in Mexico City from the age of 13 to 18 (1956-1961), looks a bit sheepish as she explains, “I had never had underwear! Just imagine – and suddenly I could have underwear, shoes, dresses.” Similarly, Alma, quoted in the opening of the chapter, remembers that as hard as her first job in Oaxaca was – and even though it did not pay a wage, “I really liked it, and I was happy there.” When I ask why, she replies, “I would work at the food stand, and lots of Americans came – and they would give me tips ... and then in the afternoon, since I had my money, I would go eat anything I wanted. So, I was really happy. Then at night when there were no more clients, all of us children would get together and play.” A year later, in 1969, Alma moved to Mexico City with a female cousin, in search of better-paid work. Though she was still a live-in servant, Alma took Sundays to explore, remembering, “Sundays we [my brother and I] would go out together. We went to the movies, the two of us ... I liked the city! ... Because we went to the movies and the park, and I liked that, and there is no movie theater in La Partida. And buying myself clothing, buying shoes. I ate what I wanted – and well, like any young girl, I wanted my fun!”

Although early migrants from La Partida had come to the cities with the intent of

⁹² In Mexican homes laundry is often done on the roof.

⁹³ Zapotec is a distinct language unrelated to Spanish, but locals often refer to it as a “dialect.”

bringing human resources back to their village, as they got used to urban conditions – and particularly as women found respite from exclusion and domestic abuse – many began to want to stay. Alma remembers that after she had been in Mexico City a year her mother fell ill, and her family called her back to the village. “Oh, how it hurt me,” she reflects, “because I didn’t want to be in the *pueblo* anymore.” Not only were there few commodities and forms of entertainment (“there was nothing there for me” one says). Maria remembers that after a short stint selling goods in the market in Oaxaca when she was twelve, her family brought her back to the village. She cried:

No! Why do you want me to go there? I don’t want to go, I told them, I don’t want to go – I already have my little business here’ – because for me it was a business – ‘No, I will not go.’ I refused, and I grabbed my things and ran into the market ... but my father found me and threw me over his shoulder and into the back of the truck. And he said, ‘I’m the one who has the authority here, and if I tell you, you’re going’ but I was kicking and screaming.

Therefore, both migrants and those who have stayed in the village often talk about how migrants leave and never come back – recounting stories of migrants who climbed to the top of the nearby mountain, threw their leather sandals down at the village and said, “I will never set foot here again.” Emigration was for good.

(Re) Gendering Migration

As I have hinted above, urban areas offered women, in particular, a means of escape, fueling an explosion of female migration and re-gendering the process of migration from masculine – as it had been in the 1950s, when the village sent out its boys – to feminine. While it seems logical that women might want to avoid male domination, most research suggests that in highly patriarchal villages, women are trapped and their migration rates low (Massey, Fischer and Capoferro 2006; Cerrutti and Gaudio 2010). As predicted, the first migrants to leave La Partida were almost all men; the public sphere was considered a masculine domain, and parents often prohibited their daughters from going to the city. Claudia, a tiny and outspoken seventy-year old woman, remembers bitterly how her father prevented her studying in Oaxaca City to be a teacher. He told her, “Get rid of that idea! That’s a stupid idea you have. Women were made for *el metate* (to grind corn). Your husband will go out to work in the fields and you will follow behind. Your brother, since he’s a man, will go to study in Oaxaca.” However, while women from Retorno – as well as most Mexican villages – have almost all migrated as dependents of husbands or fathers (Cerrutti and Massey 2001), in the Sierra Norte, girls left their hometowns alone (Young 1978; Klaver 1997; Stephen 2005). By the 1970s, female migration from La Partida outpaced male.

Among in depth interviewees (including men), many cite gender reasons for leaving the village, such as domestic violence, arranged marriage, and paternal domination and abuse. A number of women explain that as they came of age, their parents wanted them to marry, but, like Alma in the opening, they had other plans. Others attributed their departures to domestic violence. For instance, Paula, a 36-year-old garment worker in Los Angeles, remembers, “My father would hit me ... so, when

the opportunity arose, though I was very young, I liberated myself from all of that.” Ana, one of the first migrants to the US from La Partida, likewise explains that she wanted to study, instead of getting married. She left, she tells me, because “I didn’t want to be in the *pueblo*; I wanted to get ahead. My mother had so many children, and I spent all my time working with them, taking care of the kids, and my mom – if one of her boys fell she came to hit me, and I said, I have to be different.”

Even some men attribute their departures to gender abuse. Epifanio, who is 45 and adores Los Angeles, talks softly as he remembers:

My father sought refuge in alcohol ... He would arrive home intoxicated, completely destroyed, screaming. Seeing him hit my mother made me desperate ... Often I came back [to my house] in the school lunch break. After the problems of the night before, my mother lost the spirit to say ‘My children are in school, and I’m going to cook something.’ So I came home, then I turned right around and went back to school with an empty stomach ... So migration caught my attention because of the poverty and because of the violence ... I told my mother, ‘You know what? I’m leaving, because I don’t have anything here; I am not going to be anything here ... It was a mix: poverty, violence, vice [alcoholism].’

Finally, several mothers, who had not been able to escape themselves, pushed their daughters to leave. The day Claudia’s father barred her from going to Oaxaca and being a teacher, she vowed to educate any daughters of her own: “I said, ‘When I have daughters, female children, they will be teachers.’” Although Claudia’s life was hard – her first husband died and left her alone with two toddlers when she was 22, she later had another five daughters with her second husband (seven girls!), and she never left La Partida herself – she would not give up. Before her eldest girl was ten, Claudia personally escorted her to school in Mexico City. She worked as a seamstress to pay the girl’s room and board. From there, she would help urge dozens of other girls from the village to go off to school as well. She goes on:

I dedicated myself to this idea that ‘We have to study, we have to study.’ I told the girls, ‘You have to study. You will go to a boarding school so that you don’t suffer, because here in the village you suffer too much ... I used to tell them, ‘Go study, all of you’ – my cousins – ‘Go study, girls; don’t stay here’ ... and I sent other girls from La Partida there [to Mexico City], too – young women, to go study.

Other mothers did the same. Raquel, who moved to Los Angeles in 1980, remembers that her mother pushed her to go:

My mother suffered a lot of domestic violence, so she didn’t want that for me. She didn’t want that for her daughter – so she said, ‘You know what? If these girls [other migrants from La Partida] went to the United States and they’re telling you they work sewing jeans and there are people sewing on buttons.’ ... Well, having no idea of the reality, she said, ‘Sewing buttons is nothing you can’t do.’

It is noteworthy is how salient respondents made this violence – and gender more broadly

– in accounting for their migration decisions. Even though gender violence is widespread throughout Oaxacan and Mexican villages, in most accounts of Mexican migration, it plays only a background role. What made gender so salient here?

I argue that the pattern reflected La Partida’s particular interface with important, gendered shifts in the broader political economy. Between the 1960s and 1980s, the service sector in Mexico City expanded dramatically, so that single women working as maids (usually live-in) did well economically compared to men in manual jobs (Hirabayashi 1993: 38). Even with nothing lined up, Hirabayashi suggests, it was easier for a woman to find work than a man, and while men struggled to find stable or long-term employment in construction or the informal economy, women from villages like La Partida quickly established themselves as servants – an increasingly feminized sector – in middle and upper class homes. Meanwhile, some scholars suggest that women were increasingly superfluous to the economy of Sierra villages, where machines replaced several once manual household tasks, such as grinding corn for tortillas (Young 1980). Nevertheless, many villages in Mexico were exposed to the same shifts, yet of them, like Retorno, continued to follow a pattern of male-led migration, in which women migrated as dependents of fathers and husbands and found little chance for escape.

I suggest that three historical factors were important in La Partida: first, the structure of the village. In the absence of class inequalities, in the early 20th century, gender inequalities became more salient. Therefore, respondents often say they experienced “poverty” in the village, and then, like Alma in the opening of the chapter, go on to describe that poverty in terms of gender abuse. They also talk about how widows and single mothers were deeply marginalized, since women were not considered full citizens, driving the out-migration of their children.

Second, *Usos y Costumbres* was tied to men. Ironically, the fact that women were excluded from political participation ultimately made the opportunity costs of migration lower for them than for men. Maria, for instance, tells me, “Men have more obligations [in the village government] than us women . . . in *Usos y Costumbres*, it’s the man who has to do community service and all the hard labor . . . so we [migrants] were more women than men.” In some cases, women’s migration could even be complementary to men’s role as civil servants. For example, Tomás explains that when the village named him as councilman of finance, the responsibility of breadwinning fell to his wife: “When I started to have to serve in public posts, I said to my wife, ‘Learn to sew blouses.’ That’s how she started to sell, sell, sell—to support us. Because who is going to pay when we [men] do civil service? And I had to serve in a lot of full-time public posts.”

The third factor was the existing pattern of migration. Women from La Partida were able to enter household labor partly because their male predecessors *already* had links in the service sector, having opted out of farm work (where women were decidedly *not* liberated, as shown in Chapter 2) and into service jobs. In addition, young people had already begun leaving as adolescents, before marrying, so young girls saw their brothers and friends depart at an age when they, too, could easily run away, because they were still un-tethered by husbands or children. The girls used these connections and opportunities to escape their families, the first to leave, like Alma from the opening to this chapter,

almost all running away from home without their parents' consent.

Once a few young women had left, they built female networks that enabled more women to leave the village on their own and normalized the path of female migration. As has been shown in past studies (Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003), women tend to migrate through sisters, female cousins, aunts, or other female contacts. This was also true for almost all female migrants I interviewed. They lent each other money, provided housing and jobs, and encouraged each other to leave the village. Alma remembers how female networks shaped her own story. She ran away from La Partida to Oaxaca on her own. Once she was there, a female cousin convinced her to go to Mexico City:

After a year, I saw some girls from La Partida on the way back from Mexico City for the annual village festival, and they said 'How much do you earn there?' [I told them], 'Well, I don't earn anything, just my food and my clothing, and I go to school.' And they said, 'Let's go to Mexico City to work; they'll pay us there.' So I got excited. Since I was really bold and mischievous ... I ran away [from the food stall] in the night. My [female] cousin and I said, 'Let's go to work in Mexico; let's go with the other girls from our village who've already been.' So we waited until the lady was asleep, and we ran away.

Later, when Alma went to the United States, she provided lodging for other women arriving from the village. She returned to La Partida only once, in 1978, to pull her younger sister out. She recalls, "I went back to bring my other sister ... I said, don't stay here [in the village]. Because that sister was really nervous, I said, 'Don't be afraid. You're going to go with me. You have to find another life, not the life you have here.'" Even in the 2000s, similar patterns were repeating themselves. One day during my fieldwork, for instance, I am waiting for a collective taxi from La Partida back to Oaxaca City, and I watch a long conversation between Julia, a young mother in tight jeans and flip-flops who is being beaten by her husband, and her aunt Grecia, who lives in the United States. Again and again, Grecia tells the girl, "You can get out, you have a right to live better." As we drive away, she turns to me. She laments La Partida's ongoing mistreatment of women, she says, and hopes that like her, the girl will escape.

From Urban Mexico to Los Angeles

Beginning in the 1970s, urban women migrants played a central role in securing the garment and housekeeping jobs that would establish the community of La Partida in Los Angeles. Of US migrants from the village, 58.3% came step-wise, through cities within Mexico. In these intermediate destinations, they built networks and skills that enabled them to opt out of farm work, once again, when they arrived in California. Meanwhile, on the US side, the women's liberation movement of the 1970s drew elite women into paid work, creating a growing market for domestic servants, as the former sought employees to take over household chores. The garment industry in Los Angeles also expanded dramatically, employing nearly 80,000 workers as of the early 1980s.

These two sectors opened opportunities for feminized work in the United States,

often specifically advertising “*se busca muchacha*” (seeking young women).⁹⁴ They also offered women significantly higher pay than they had made in Oaxaca City, or even in Mexico City. Therefore, in 1971, Maria’s mother and two cousins became the first migrants from La Partida to move to Los Angeles. Maria explains why her mother – and not her father – decided to come to the United States:

There was work for women, to work cleaning houses ... and it was a good thing that there were jobs where they could earn good money compared with what they earned there [in Mexico] – to come here [to the US] and earn two or three times that ... There wasn’t much for men and that’s how they decided my mother would go meet up with my (female) cousin in the USA and my father would go to work in Mexico City.

Likewise, Alma explains that she decided to go to the United States instead of staying in Mexico because: “I knew that here you earned dollars, and I thought, I’m going to earn dollars and I’m going to be able to help my parents.” These opportunities gave a gender dimension to migrant space, marking LA as feminine. Today, even people who have never left La Partida often make comments like “there are a lot of opportunities for women in Los Angeles,” or “in Los Angeles, women make more money than men.” Gloria, who has never been to the US, puts it this way, “Men [from La Partida] don’t want to go to the US because women make more money than them there.” When they do go to the US, she perceives, “The men get lazy, and they don’t want to do anything. ‘Let her support me,’ they start to think.” Given women’s opportunities in the US, people of La Partida began to see it as a place where traditional gender roles got reversed.

While the political economy of the 1970s provided new, feminized jobs, pioneer migrants’ ability to *access* these jobs relied on the social networks they had built within Mexico. Particularly important were networks *outside* the community, which they developed while working in Oaxaca and Mexico Cities. While in these urban areas, both men and women got to know an array of people, outside the community and across class. Ultimately, it was women’s networks that linked the community into United States. The earliest women migrants from La Partida had made friends in Mexico City from a nearby village – fellow housekeepers – who already had connections in LA and encouraged those from La Partida to follow suit.⁹⁵ In 1969, through these women, Maria’s mother and two cousins moved to the United States. A contractor named “Mrs. Gomez,” whom they met through the neighbor women, found them household jobs. Maria describes, “They gave my mother the opportunity to find work quickly, because they already knew the person that helped women find work.” [A: but just women?] “Yes.” In the mid 1970s, Mrs. Gomez helped several women from La Partida find work within days of their arrival, often placing them in homes where they would remain for a decade or more.

As a result, despite the fact that men from La Partida had contacts in US farm

⁹⁴ For a discussion of how these sectors are feminized see Parreñas (2001), Tyner (2004), and Yinger (2006).

⁹⁵ The Mexican employers of these other women had American friends who invited them to work in Los Angeles (Worthen 2012). The women from the neighboring village, therefore, began moving to Los Angeles the end of the 1950s.

work, they, too, were able to use women's contacts to get better jobs. For instance, Alma's brother Vicente moved to LA a few years after she did, and she helped him and his wife find jobs at garment factories. Likewise, by the time Epifanio arrived in 1980, two of his sisters had been in the United States since he was a boy (~ 1970), one working in housekeeping and another in factories, where she got him a job. Thus he ended up, as he put it, a fifteen-year-old boy "living among these women." Bruno, likewise, came through female relatives, who got him a job washing dishes.

In addition, a few migrants also used know-how and skills from urban Mexico to find employment in Los Angeles. For instance, Bernardo, who had worked in Mexico City starting in 1964, when he was 13, brought experience from a textile factory there. He remembers that when he moved to the United States in 1979, he had no job, but he used his skills to find one:

From Mexico City I learned the skills of working big machines to make clothing ... I brought my skills from Mexico in working the circular machines that make cloth, so when I got here I said, well, somehow there's got to be the same thing here, right? ... So I walked around the area where people sew garments, there near downtown Los Angeles – on La Partida, Stanford – all those streets. It's filled with garment factories still. So I went there and I started walking down Stanford and I crossed Route 7 and there it was ... I saw a branch of the same company I'd worked in. Wow! ... So I went around to the entrance and put in an application for work on the textile machines. But they wanted to put me to the test, to see if I knew those machines – and I did, so by about mid-day I asked the man, 'What do you think? Can you give me work or not?' He said, 'Oh, you do know this – so they'll give you work. Come tomorrow to work.'

Although Bernardo credits divine intervention, in fact it was his own ability to "read" the urban landscape and his knowledge of the textile machines that got him a job. Similarly, Regina, who moved to LA in 1971, found Mrs. Gomez – who placed women as housekeepers – in a phone book. Had she been unable to read, she would never have gotten the job.

So, even though a few men from the Sierra dabbled in farm work, the variety of their networks made it possible for them to quickly find better jobs. By the mid 1970s, nearly all Sierra Zapotecs working in US agriculture had moved to urban service and industry (see Hulshof 1991; Stephen 2007; Worthen 2012). Farm work, they explained, was too demanding. Without driving debt, migrants from La Partida were also more selective than those from Retorno about moving north, choosing to come to the United States only when the work offered a significant improvement on their urban Mexican jobs. In short, within the limits of undocumented, low-wage workers, they could "choose" their paths into the United States.

Conclusion

Often, scholars make Mexican migrants' path into farm work seem inevitable – along with the predominance of men in that migration stream. La Partida shows that

other roads were possible. By tracing the roots of this extraordinary, elective, feminized stream, this chapter illustrates how local-level political arrangements mediate apparently “inevitable” patterns. Like Retorno, in the second half of the 20th century, La Partida faced increasing integration with Mexican state and society. Like Retorno, its members were recruited into farm labor. Yet, in the face of these shifts, economic egalitarianism enabled the village to avoid debt-driven migration and to migrate for social reasons instead. What’s more, its participatory political system also motivated people to seek out further education, rooting them in urban service jobs.

These dimensions of La Partida’s migration articulated with gender in very concrete ways: economic equity gave voice to gender inequity; political participation kept men obligated while releasing women; and urban service provided feminized options for “escape” in ways that farm work could not. Thus, while scholars have almost universally presumed that patriarchy keeps women “trapped” – and patriarchal domination was certainly as important to La Partida’s story as to Retorno’s – this chapter shows that when patriarchy coincides with equity and urban jobs, women may be able to escape. Meanwhile, the chapter also illustrates the central role women can play in building networks outside of the community, which then afford them options as they move further north. Even in the 1980s and 1990s, as La Partida faced downward economic pressure on its farm economy, the variation in its migrants’ networks gave members *choice* (within limits) in where they went and what jobs they were willing to accept.

The ability to choose destinations led the way to more opportunities in the United States. Upon arrival in California, almost all migrants from La Partida went to Los Angeles; 64% of them working in industry, primarily in the garment sector, and another 31% in domestic service. By the time of my fieldwork in 2010, most migrants from La Partida had relatively stable jobs; not one had ever worked as a day laborer, and no one I interviewed had worked on farms. While most were still undocumented and hardly prosperous, compared to their peers from Retorno they had more long-term jobs, faced less harassment, and built more enduring civic ties to the United States (Lopez and Runsten 2004; Stephen 2007). In addition, nearly half of all migrants were women, and family division was almost nonexistent, with only 3% of La Partida’s families dividing across borders. Once in Los Angeles, I will argue in the next chapter, the political context combined with these economic sectors to *reconstruct* permanent migration, as well as the divisions between migrants and the communal village from which they had come.

Chapter 6

Making “Good Immigrants” Los Angeles County and the Moralizing Migration Regime

When migrants from La Partida arrived in Los Angeles, a third worked in the service sector while the rest raced the clock in the long, windowless, gray garment factories that stretch out below the city’s traffic-mazed downtown. Even though these jobs were relatively stable, compared to those in farm work, the workers still fought to eke out a living, piling into small apartments in notoriously run down and dangerous LA neighborhoods, such as South Central Los Angeles. By the time of my fieldwork in 2010-2011, 70% remained undocumented, and many had been living in that partially excluded status since they arrived, often somewhere between 15 and 20 years. As among Retorno’s migrants, their unauthorized status stopped them from voting, accessing services, and advocating for their own rights.

Nevertheless, many respondents from La Partida insisted that they saw the United States as their home. In the same breath in which they described the filth, underpayment, and labor violations at their jobs, they espoused the idea that migrating to the United States represented a form of progress, of “moving up in the world.” Thus, they adopted the same ideology of “assimilation” that has dominated much scholarship on immigration. The effect was that while disenfranchised people typically feel persecuted – especially in the context of the contemporary US hostility towards undocumented immigrants, – many migrants from La Partida viewed the nation’s existing laws and economic structures as fair. Some even went so far as to affirm that undocumented migrants should not protest, or that they did not deserve government services or higher wages. Often, the most vocal proponents of this attitude were women. As they escaped hometown patriarchy, their feelings of “empowerment” in the domestic sphere came to coincide with consent for the economic and political system that now kept them on its margins.

In light of existing research on undocumented migrants, this attitude seems unexpected. Most scholars agree that being undocumented compels migrants to submit to a legal and economic system in which they are treated as an “underclass,” undeserving of rights (Menjívar and Abrego 2012).⁹⁶ However, they believe that “illegal immigrant” status has this effect through a *coercive* mechanism: as among Retorno’s migrants in North County San Diego, it marks migrants as “Other,” persecutes them, and thereby instills fear. Scholars suggest that like other disenfranchised groups, undocumented migrants tend to feel trapped by authority, distrustful of the law, and suspicious of its capricious implementation, if not downright afraid (Calavita 1998; Chavez 2007), an attitude that some have described as “against the law” (Ewick and Silbey 1998). Yet, migrants from La Partida expressed different feelings, their attitudes aligning better with what similar scholars call “with” the law, which is to say they saw existing US norms as just and fair. Their outlook suggests a *different* mechanism of migrant exclusion.

⁹⁶ Some refer to this status itself as a “mode of incorporation;” others as a mechanism by which the state *excludes* migrants socially and politically, while still making it possible to *include* them economically, as workers in the nation’s worst-paid jobs.

In this chapter, I examine the logic of immigration control at work in Los Angeles. On one hand, as Chapter 5 suggests, La Partida's pattern of migration predisposed its members to appreciate the United States: most had chosen to migrate, and they had been able to opt into Los Angeles, a more hospitable receiving context than rural alternatives. In this chapter, however, I argue that Los Angeles's particular practices towards undocumented migrants – especially by the police, but also among employers – reconstructed respondents' appreciation for the United States and their desire to settle permanently.

While North County San Diego took a criminalizing approach to immigration control, institutions in LA exercised power over undocumented migrants through a *moralizing* logic. This logic relied on separating migrants into “good immigrants,” who ostensibly worked hard and obeyed the law, and “bad immigrants,” who supposedly were lazy, caused trouble, or committed crimes.⁹⁷ Despite the notorious brutality of LA police, their practices towards undocumented migrants revolved around these good/bad binaries. Instead of expanding policing to all migrants, LA primarily targeted criminals. Therefore, respondents perceived policing as a form of (deserved) punishment for “bad immigrants” who broke the law. Meanwhile, garment factories and domestic service jobs also rewarded “good workers” who were dedicated and kept their heads down. Thus LA police and employers appeared as if they were judging migrants' character. Respondents, in turn, believed “good” immigrants reaped the rewards of economic opportunities, social services, and police tolerance, while “bad” ones suffered exclusion or even deportation.

This binary gave migrants a sense of control over how they were treated, making them feel that they were *subjects* of their own fates. They assumed that exploitation and deportation (or other police harassment) were responses to “bad” behavior, and that as long as a migrant was “good,” the US offered opportunities and even rewards. The division made it appear that migrants were targeted for deportation not based on race or US exclusion, but instead based on their own behavior, legitimating the “deportation regime.” As long as they were willing to perform as “good immigrants,” respondents suggested, they had control over the way police and employers treated them. This feeling of personal capability – or “freedom” – encouraged settlement.

The feeling of agency reinforced respondents' perceptions that the United States offered them opportunities. As migrants acted like “good immigrants,” they began to appreciate and identify with the United States. Therefore, though immigration enforcement has largely been considered a tool of exclusion, through the good/bad comparison, it gave migrants terms to carve out a sense of belonging in Los Angeles. Here, assimilation became an *ideology*, in which migrants *believed* that being in the United States represented “progress.” As evidence of this ideology, some went so far as to adopt a racialized idea of progress, in which they aspired to leave their indigeneity and

⁹⁷ These binary classifications reverberate in growing national discourses, such as those promoted by the Obama administration, that separate “deserving” undocumented immigrants like college students (“DREAMers”) and those with US family members from “criminal” immigrants, a term which invokes terrorism, gang activity, and drug trafficking but can in practice include any immigrant guilty of the “crime” of crossing the border.

Mexicanness “behind” and instead “become white.” Because many migrants from La Partida operated within the logic comparing “good” and “bad” – or played the moralizing “game” – they often saw the “rules” of this game as legitimate. Identifying as good immigrants, they took pride in hard work and deference to US laws.

Ironically, however, the logic of assimilation helped to *obscure* their ongoing marginality. Perversely, the “good immigrant game” convinced respondents in LA not only to appreciate the US but also to *consent* to their own political exclusion and the low wages they received. Several suggested that existing wage structures were fair and that it was improper to protest – either for political inclusion or for higher wages. Linking protest to “bad” behavior, they argued that migrants should work through “proper” channels, that is, the (few) services already available to them. Perversely, their acceptance of the existing “good”/“bad” system helped justify wage inequalities and political exclusion. Thus, *consent* in the US system of migrant “illegality” – rather than fear - kept them disenfranchised.

Finally, the “good immigrant” / “bad immigrant” contrast took on strong gender terms, with these categories mapping, respectively, onto female and male. Thus, its moralizing effects were especially pronounced and contradictory for women. We might assume that Los Angeles “empowered” women thanks to its feminized labor sectors and the protection it offered women from male abuse. I argue that these “resources” also worked through a gendered, moralizing logic. Women, in particular, were often marked as “good immigrants,” so their consent for US laws and exploitative workplaces became particularly pronounced. Furthermore, in protecting women, the police framed female migrants as “victims” of aggressive, male “criminals,” even when those men were their brothers and husbands. Likewise, foremen in “feminized” garment factories and domestic employers encouraged women’s docility at work. These material resources encouraged women from La Partida, especially to appreciate the United States. Among migrants from La Partida, not a single woman I knew of returned home. Men, by contrast, tended to face more hostility from police and, in turn, to express more ambivalent attitudes about the United States.

The Moralizing Logic of LA’s Migration Regime

Dividing “Good” and “Bad”

In Los Angeles, police and public officials differentiated “good” (submissive) immigrants – to whom they offered public services and support – from “bad” (criminal) immigrants, who deserve deportation. Often, officials in the area publicly embraced “good immigrants,” touting the migrants’ “values” and opposing the ways they were targeted for deportation in “other” locales.⁹⁸ For example, in 2002, the Manager of Huntington Park, a city in LA County where many migrants from La Partida reside, stated, “These are good people. They pay their bills. They are respectful. They want to make this a better city. Who doesn’t want that?” Meanwhile, bureaucrats in LA institutions such as universities and hospitals also reached out to immigrants, promoting a

⁹⁸ For instance, officials in Los Angeles often directly critique the restrictive regimes in states like Arizona.

“good immigrant” narrative that ran counter to the defamation of “illegals” in other states and regions (Cady-Hallett and Jones-Correa 2012). In conjunction, most city institutions accepted and encouraged the use of Mexican consular identifications in lieu of driver’s licenses, allowing migrants to obtain library cards, enter public buildings, obtain business licenses, register children for school, and access public services – notably English language schools. These politics reflect a social environment in which immigrants are a demographic majority and have comparatively strong political power.⁹⁹ They also reflect LA’s powerful immigrant rights movement and numerous pro-immigrant NGOs.

In conjunction, the area took a targeted approach to immigration control. In cities around Los Angeles County, police focused on detaining and deporting convicted criminal immigrants. In 1979, Los Angeles was the first US city to declare itself a “sanctuary city,”¹⁰⁰ becoming a prototype for similar policies nationwide (Tramonte 2011). Still in effect as of 2013, the policy prohibited local police from asking migrants’ legal status or reporting undocumented migrants to federal officials, unless already convicted of crimes. On top, in the late 2000s, numerous cities in LA County declared their opposition to the criminalization of immigration. For instance, then LA Police Chief Charlie Beck advocated restraint in enforcing immigration law, and then LA County Sheriff Lee Baca opted out of the Secure Communities Program. Although LA did participate in 287(g) and Secure Communities, it only signed on to 287(g) on the condition that police hold immigrants for ICE *after* criminal conviction, rather than upon detention, as was common in places like North County San Diego. As a result, non-criminal immigrants made up a much lower percentage of deportees in LA than in other cities (Capps et al. 2011). Also, while California allowed police to impound the vehicles of unlicensed drivers, those in LA County took a lax approach to this policy, ultimately refusing to enforce it altogether. LA police also reached out to immigrants, publicly distinguishing their protective functions from their capacity as immigration control; promoting consular identifications for undocumented migrants as an alternative to driver’s licenses; and disseminating information on migrants’ rights.

Finally, in the workplace, LA provided unusual protections for undocumented migrants. In 1997, the city passed a living wage ordinance. In the garment sector, in particular, legislation arose in the late 1990s holding manufacturers liable for wage and overtime violations by subcontractors (1999), persecuting factories that were out of compliance with US labor law (2000-2001), and creating an expedited process to help workers recover unpaid minimum and overtime wages (Cummings 2008; Light 2008; Archer et al. 2009; Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010). Meanwhile, among domestic workers, LA was home to several organizations providing orientation and support. The Los Angeles Labor Commissioner was one of the few in the country that directly protected the rights of undocumented workers, inhibiting employers from using immigration control as a threat.

⁹⁹ For instance, Huntington Park, where a large fraction of migrants from La Partida live, is 97% Latino, 90% Spanish-speaking, and somewhere between 20 and 40% undocumented (Sterngold 2006).

¹⁰⁰ Sanctuary city is not a legal designation. Usually, it represents a refusal to use municipal resources for immigration enforcement.

Perceptions of the Police as Moralizing

Respondents' experiences in Los Angeles reflected this environment. Migrants from La Partida regularly described campaigns informing them that immigration control was targeted at criminals and separate from regular law enforcement. They also noted radio announcements encouraging them to seek out the Labor Commissioner if they experienced wage violations, and they described Spanish-language flyers in their workplaces informing them about their rights to meals and rest breaks. Finally, respondents suggested that LA service providers reinforced the distinction between immigration control and other government institutions, explaining, as the dean of a local college told one respondent, "We don't have anything to do with immigration [control]."

Because the police focused on deporting convicted criminals, nearly 90% of respondents believed that immigration enforcement was at least partly conditional on "bad" behavior. Even though 70% of migrants from La Partida were undocumented, every deportee they mentioned during my 2010-2011 fieldwork (totaling 18) had been expelled in association with a criminal conviction, typically substance abuse, domestic violence, or gang activity. They were also all men. Noting that all of the deportees they knew had committed crimes, several respondents portrayed deportation as punishment. Even deportees themselves, including all five of those with whom I became acquainted back in the hometown, linked their expulsions to bad behavior. For instance, Mario, who was deported for drug abuse in 2009 after living in LA for 20 years, reflected, "I can never go back there. I did something really bad."

Meanwhile, in defining which behaviors fell into the categories of "good" or "bad," respondents often conflated criminality with judgments of an *economic* character; specifically, they linked being "good" to a willingness to work hard. Extrapolating the criminal/law-abiding distinction to a distinction between *workers*, they suggested that "good" immigrants practiced hard work, humility, and self-sufficiency while "bad" ones were lazy. It is unclear whether or not they heard such judgments from police and foremen or projected their own views onto the good/bad binary. Regardless, respondents in LA *believed* that local institutions, including the police, judged their merits as workers in a private marketplace, making both belonging and protection contingent on dutiful service to employers. Mariela, a 36-year-old undocumented garment worker who has lived in LA for 15 years when I interview her, reflects:

I think it [not having papers] is fine as long as we do what the law asks, follow the speed limits, the steps they ask for, not go faster or slower, not drink, not do drugs. I say that as long as one is following the law, everything is fine. But if you go around messing here, messing there, not paying tickets ... If they [the police] see someone is going to work, well, [they say], 'How good, go ahead' – maybe a ticket and that's it. But if they see people drunk, or drugged, if they see them making a mess and a half, then let them take them [out of the country] as they should. That doesn't bother me ... I'm not afraid of the police, because they're doing their jobs. No, I'm not uncomfortable. On the contrary, we know we're protected by someone when we need it. I don't avoid them either. No, I feel free; I feel calm.

Mariela's statement illustrates the logic LA respondents attributed to the moralizing state. They associated police sanctions with breaking the law, while linking tolerance and protection to obedience and work.

Economic Context: The "Good Worker" Game

In combination with the political environment, the sectors in which most migrants from La Partida worked also appeared to reward "good immigrants" and punish bad ones, like a "game."¹⁰¹ When migrants from La Partida arrived in the United States, 64% of them worked in the garment sector, mostly sewing jeans for subcontractors of brands like Guess, Levis, JenCo, Lucky, and American Apparel.¹⁰² The factories used modified assembly lines, where a worker was assigned a certain procedure and got paid piece rate to repeat the same steps over and over. For instance, she might earn three cents each to sew the "hidden pocket" on jeans, or 12 cents to attach a fly. Another 31%, meanwhile, were employed as domestic workers, where, in a haphazard and unregulated sector, a simple request to come back could affirm or condemn their "good work."

Garment factories and domestic employment were notorious for their substandard conditions and pay. At garment factories, closed into rooms with no windows, workers often came in at 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning and left twelve or fifteen hours later with no overtime, leave, or sick pay. The factories tended to be sweltering and lack proper lighting, protective gear, clean water, or toilet paper in the bathrooms. Because workers were paid piece rate, they hesitated to take breaks, even to use the rest room or eat lunch. As of 2004, they earned as little as \$5.18 per hour (compared to California's \$6.75 minimum wage), and many took home less as little as \$10,000 per year, with no benefits (Garment Worker Center 2004). Respondents remember the misery of these conditions. For instance, Juan, now 35, moved to Los Angeles when he was seventeen and worked in garment factories for nearly a decade. He describes, "Where we worked it was really deplorable – awful conditions. There were no windows or ventilation, nothing, so the dust off the jean [fabric] covered you, filling your ears, your throat. The bathrooms were even worse; you couldn't even go in there. They were situations that were really not worth a human being." Others say they felt like robots, sweating as they repeated a task over and over and their noses filled with foul-smelling dust in the factories.

Domestic workers, meanwhile, faced arduous conditions as well, lacking the labor rights even of the garment sector. They were often expected by their employers to conduct a litany of household tasks without meals, rest breaks, or guaranteed minimum wage. In the early years of La Partida's migration, most of its migrant domestic workers lived in their employers' homes and paid a significant portion of their earnings in room and board, netting just \$50 or \$100 per week. Like in the garment sector, domestic workers received no overtime; rather, they were expected to be available to serve day and

¹⁰¹ Burawoy (1979) famously describes how similar games of "making out" produce consent on the shop floor in a Chicago factory.

¹⁰² LA is the capital of California's \$24.3 billion apparel industry, and garment factories make up 14% of the city's manufacturing. At the time of the first migrants' arrival 1980s, more than 3,000 apparel manufacturers were employing 80,000 workers (Cummings 2009; Light 2008; Archer et al. 2009; Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010).

night. While some employers were friendly, respondents tell stories of being screamed at, underpaid, made to work ten or twelve hours in a day, and asked to do work that went above and beyond their job descriptions, such as caring for children when they'd been hired to clean, or having to clean far more than they were promised.

Nevertheless, perhaps surprisingly, the “good immigrant” / “bad immigrant” binary also extended to the workplace, giving workers in both sectors a sense of personal capability. Many told me that in Los Angeles – if a migrant was willing to “play the game” in the factory or the home – she could earn decent compensation and take pride in demonstrating her skills. For instance, Alejandro, who is 36, worked in garment factories from 1993 until 2006. He remembers how the piece rate production and the excitement of working quickly lured him to compete both against other workers and against himself:

At first I thought, ‘Oh, how am I going to do this?’ But I’ve always liked to see how much I can produce, because I have a skill, right? ... Since I saw that they pay you by how much you do, I said, ‘I can increase this; I can do better.’ And that made me study the people who had more experience ... I watched the style in which they produced a lot. Then I worked at it, and I tried to find ways to save a second. That made the difference in beating them. What’s more, that was the motivation that made me earn more, breaking my own records ... Then the next week I made \$750, and I said ‘Wow.’ Then every hour I wanted to break my record. I started counting everything, and from there I was happy.

Alejandro’s description illustrates how the effort to “beat” rates made the job into a game, motivating workers not only to compete against each other but also to demonstrate their own skills. For some workers, even the guarantee of a minimum wage¹⁰³ fueled the feeling of competition, by offering a benchmark they strove to surpass. Thus, the “good immigrant game” operated as a mechanism of control in the workplace as well.

Respondents who worked as housekeepers or nannies *also* got a sense that they were being rewarded for hard work. Although domestic labor was not paid piece rate, employers’ encouragement or disapproval did foster a sense of skill, self worth, and accomplishment, giving a similar appearance of rewards. Domestic employers often explicitly told migrants that their value, commitment, and hard work had “earned” them employers’ kindness or generosity (to the extent employers showed such characteristics). For instance, Maria Ramírez, who was described in the Preface and was one of the very first migrants from La Partida to arrive in the United States, worked as a housekeeper and nanny with the same family for 28 years. Her employers encouraged her to learn English, paid her \$25,000 per year, and invited her to eat and go on vacations with them as if she were “part of the family.” At a few points in her life, Maria considered moving on to new jobs, but the family begged her to return, telling her that her “good work” had earned their affection. Consuelo, a 34-year-old housekeeper, adds that her employers often say they call her back *because of* her strong work ethic and capability. Renata, who had worked as a nanny for seven years, affirms this idea, telling me, “I get along really

¹⁰³ Legally, factories are required to guarantee a minimum wage, even if workers do not produce fast enough at the piece rate to make up to this baseline.

well with the family where I work, because I've tried to respect their rules and their ways of doing things." Having jobs and getting along with people, they implied, resulted *from* "good immigrant" behavior.

At times, respondents even added a racial logic to their interest in "taking advantage of opportunities." If you worked hard and took advantage of opportunities, they told me, you would "get ahead" (*avanzar*), "make progress" (*progress*), and even "overcome yourself" (*superarse*). Getting ahead and overcoming, however, sometimes meant leaving your indigenous roots behind. For instance, feeling rewarded and encouraged for her efforts to learn, Maria tells me, "If you don't try to learn things you're just going to be a submissive little Indian that doesn't know anything, that doesn't learn – just enclosed in yourself. But with so many opportunities in life, if you don't know how to take advantage of them, they years pass you by." Her employers affirmed her, she felt, for *not* being "a submissive little Indian."

Mapping Gender Divisions onto "Good" and "Bad"

"Saving Brown Women from Brown Men"¹⁰⁴

The moralizing logic was also gendered: both police and employers associated feminine and masculine with "good" and "bad." Mapping the good immigrant / bad immigrant logic onto gender, women interviewees often described deported male family members as "bad immigrants," blaming them especially for their use of alcohol. For instance, Corina attributed her brother's deportation to the fact that "He just came and drank and didn't do anything." Similarly, Ines, a 52-year-old garment worker, hinted that her brother "brought it [deportation] upon himself." Even though he had legal residency, she added, "All he did was drink ... Then, the government arrested him. He was drinking, so he got deported." These differences encouraged women to differentiate themselves from men, whom they defined as lazy and drunk – and even to portray themselves as victims of these "bad immigrants" – literally so, in the realm of domestic violence.

Police, on the one hand, linked the "good immigrant" category to feminized behavior. For instance, police enforcement of domestic violence laws divided undocumented migrants by gender, protecting female undocumented "victims," from male undocumented "abusers." On one hand, this had important material implications for women. Alma, for instance, remembers that even though she had come to California to escape the domestic violence her mother suffered, when she got married in the US, her husband would not let her leave the house and attempted to beat her. She describes:

He wanted to hit me one time, but I didn't let him; I called the police. I said, 'I told you that I can't be a submissive, silly woman like the ones that let men hit them, that let men manipulate them. No,' I said. Then they took him to jail ... and he changed; he realized I couldn't be a woman like the ones from the *pueblo* ... I also told him I didn't like him to be drunk, and if he wanted to be a

¹⁰⁴ The quote refers to a phrase used by Gayatri Spivak (1988) to refer to the use of the logic of "saving women" in Western imperial intervention in India.

womanizer I would not allow it. He did do those things at the beginning [of our relationship], ... and I ran him out, but then he came back, he changed.

Not only wages but also recourse to the police gave women the leverage to set boundaries with men and insist on better treatment. LA's commitment to protecting women was critical to the women's ability to avoid the kind of violence that those from Retorno had suffered in North County San Diego. Indeed, several women in LA were able to obtain U visas (asylum for undocumented victims of domestic violence) or use the police as leverage to leave their abusers. Nevertheless, this protection came at the cost of marking Latina women as "victims" while labeling their male counterparts as "criminal" – or as Gayatri Spivak (1988) put it, acidly, "Saving brown women from brown men."

Feminized Employment

LA workplaces also reinforced gender divisions. Garment sewing and domestic service jobs were often more open to women, advertising "*necesitamos muchachas*" (we need young women) on the factory doors or in household service ads. Women also felt especially talented in these environments, and respondents both in the village and in LA emphasized how their new wages gave them personal autonomy and leverage at home.¹⁰⁵ When I ask Mariela about the rumor that women are better at sewing, she tells me:

Yes, yes it's true that we women can do it a lot better than men. When I sewed [she now operates machines], we used to have competitions with the men. For example, we might be ten workers, five men and five women, and we would say to each other, 'Look at that guy, they brought him a cart with five bands of cloth. Let's see what time they finish it, and we're going to see what time we ladies finish,' and it would make the men so mad, seeing that we finished first.

Not only did Mariela see the workplace as a "game," but she also explicitly considered it gendered, as men and women competed to demonstrate how fast they could produce, and women "won."

Materially, the new income also gave women leverage in the household, further reinforcing their feeling that their jobs offered "rewards." Their new sway encouraged their belief that living in the United States helped them escape patriarchy. Mariela, for instance, says that her wages gave her financial independence that enabled her to separate from her abusive husband:

For me, it was better to be here [in the US], because here I had my job – I worked, and I had my own money. If I wanted something I bought it for myself, and in the *pueblo* I didn't know how to work [have work]. There, I depended on my husband. There, if he gave me money to spend it was OK, and if not, I had to deal with what I could ... when I found out that I could have what I wanted by my own sweat, that's when I started to change ... [I told him] 'I paid the rent, I paid the

¹⁰⁵ Menjivar (1999) likewise notes that women often had more economic opportunities in urban areas than men.

grocery store, I paid my bills, and I bought this without you; now I've proven that I can.' That's how I stopped letting him treat me that way.

Several female respondents used their new income to do the same. Andrea adds that after years of being beaten by her husband and saying nothing, when he finally decided to return to Mexico she refused to come along. Instead, she told him, "Up to here, no more. I can support my children ... I can get ahead without a man's help. A woman can do it alone." Thus, feminized employment – within the particular, moralizing context that affirmed women in LA – helped reinforce women's feelings that coming to America represented "progress."

As a result, 84% of female respondents from La Partida felt liberated in Los Angeles, portraying their hometown as machista and stuck in the past. They insisted, as Grecia says, "No more men from there!" – joking about whether she should marry me off to one of her fellow migrants. Estrella, a 33-year-old nanny, adds, "In the United States, I feel like a bird with wings; I spread my wings and I'm free." Valentina, a migrant who still did all the household chores, on top of working 10-hour night shifts cleaning movie theaters with her husband, directly ties the feeling of *gender* empowerment to an appreciation for the United States as a whole:

Here [in the US], I could say that women are worth a lot – a whole lot. Back in the *pueblo* there is machismo, but not here. There, women don't get to decide; the man does that more, he can do more and women can't. I don't like that about my *pueblo*. For example, if you're a woman, you can't speak in the town meetings. Sometimes a woman wants to speak, but they ignore what she says ... So, I'm very grateful for this country; it's given me the little I have.

However, whereas scholars have noted such feelings of empowerment and left it at that, I contend that these feelings made women feel beholden to – and less willing to criticize – the United States. Even if women were undocumented, if the alternative was to go "back" to patriarchy, they wanted to stay. To my knowledge, not one female migrant from La Partida returned to the village, unless she had a responsibility to care for family members such as aging parents.

Masculinity as the Vehicle for Dissent

Men, however, felt more ambivalent. Although men made up half the workforce in the factories, they were often *treated* as "third world women" – cheap, docile, and malleable (Salzinger 2003). Men tended to dislike this feminization, and they felt more frustrated than women with their economic positions. Alejandro, who began working in the garment sector in 1991, when he was 16, resented the feminized work. He recalls, "When I saw the sewing machine, I thought, I'm not going to do *this*. 'Sewing – that's for women. It was a struggle; it hurt my back, my waist, because I was used to running around here and there, working as a carpenter, and I wanted to do construction, to lift heavy things.'" Similarly, Juan says that the feminization of sewing made it feel more arduous. When I ask what the work was like, he replies, "It was a kick in the butt (*laughs*). I said, 'No, I'm not going to sweep like this, if I don't even sweep in my own house, if at

home I don't even wash dishes. How am I going to do this here?' They made me wash the bathrooms, and it made me furious ... [I thought] 'No, no, no, no I won't do it. Only for right now, but I don't want to do this; this isn't for me.'" For men like Juan, the feminization of work made them feel denigrated *as men*, diminishing the power of the good / bad "game" and making them feel mistreated – similar, that is, to those from Retorno.

Meanwhile, men were far more likely than women to be marked "bad immigrants" and face detention and deportation. Police enforcement often *masculinized* the immigrants it painted as "criminals," and men represented approximately 90% of those deported nationwide (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013). Male respondents thus felt more targeted by the police, resenting women's ability to use the state against them – to, in their words, "call 911." For instance, Pancho, who had worked in the US for several years as a young man, quips, "Women win in LA. You know – they just call 911 and the dude goes straight to jail. Men are no longer men there." Though he had never been to the United States himself, Samuel adds, "They tell me that there women have – that the government really respects women, that you can't put a hand on them, or give a woman a pinch, because she sues you, and the punishment is bad ... And a lot of women abuse the system thanks to the rules they have there. Because they know they defend them a lot, so maybe they get together with another man – and of course, well, the man – it's his honor, right?" As Samuel suggests, men in Los Angeles associated policing not necessarily with racial discrimination – as in North County San Diego, – but with the loss of masculinity.

Masculinity became an important lens for dissent. For instance, Alejandro tells me that the police impounded his car multiple times, for driving without a license. This, he explains, made him feel that he was targeted arbitrarily, *as an immigrant* (much more like in North County San Diego), rather than based on good or bad behavior. He reflects, "You can do a lot here [in LA], but you get sick of the treatment. Just for driving, what happens? They take your car. Though you drive carefully, you never drink, you never do that, and suddenly you hit a checkpoint and 'boom,' you're out." These traffic stops undermined Alejandro's belief enforcement was conditional on "bad" behavior and made him feel unfairly targeted. In contrast to the women, he underscored the *illegitimacy* of car impoundment and its *separation* from "good behavior." In other words, the breakdown in the good / bad logic undermined his consent.

Embracing the *Idea* of "Assimilation"

For many migrants from La Partida, particularly women, the gendered, moralizing logic of LA made the *idea* of "assimilation" seem legitimate – even appealing. Because good / bad binaries made migrants feel they had choices (even "freedom") in the United States, they associated living in California with control over their fates. To the extent they made active efforts to be "good" or took a sense of pride in these efforts, they also affirmed the legitimacy of the existing "rules." In turn, they identified the United States as a "second homeland," producing permanent settlement.

The “Freedom” to Be Good or Bad

The apparent “choice” between acting good or bad gave migrants the impression that they had options. Without prompting, two thirds of LA interviewees described feeling “free” in the United States. For example, Maria says, “This is the country of opportunity, the country where if you come to work and you work hard, you can accomplish your dreams, if you learn and you put in effort, because people also come who don’t try, who don’t fight for it. They don’t look for ways to get ahead.” Ricardo, a 53-year-old man who worked as a parking attendant, agrees, telling me, “I like the United States for its democracy.” When I ask what that means to him, he goes on:

Here, there’s freedom – you can do what you want. You want to work? Work. You want to stay in the street? Stay in the street! Ask for charity, ask for what you can, but don’t [complain] – and now you’re in the street like a vagrant. But if you want to study, the schools are right there ... it gives you the opportunity to be the person you want. For instance, if I want to improve, I can take classes, make my mind work and all that.

Thus, respondents *credited* the USA with providing them opportunities to flourish.

Many respondents linked economic opportunity to the image of a “free country,” praising, ironically, the “freedom *to work*.” For example, Bernardo tells me:

I came here to find freedom. This country has offered and continues offering freedom of expression, freedom to work ... Or that as a worker you earn what you deserve; you’re free to ask for what your effort is worth ... Here, as an immigrant, God gave me – or the government gave me – the freedom to have what I hadn’t had either in Mexico City or in my *pueblo*. Thank God for this freedom to earn for my effort, for my work.

Bernardo directly credited the US *government* with granting him the “freedom to work” and earn money. Gloria, a mother of five, agrees, saying, “There is freedom here – this is a country where there is freedom.” When I ask, “What does that mean? Freedom to do what? Of what?” she replies, “The freedom to progress. Anyone who wants to can progress. There is also freedom here to work in what you want.” Migrants’ faith that they controlled their own destinies implied an assumption: that the United States *provided* opportunities, as long as one was a “good” enough worker and a “good” enough immigrant to take advantage. Their sense of agency made even exploitation look like a choice.

A Sense of Agency

The apparent option to either “be good” and reap rewards or “be bad” and suffer made many respondents, particularly women, feel a sense of control over their fates. They believed that “good” behavior would spare them from deportation and police persecution and earn them police protection and rewards at work. Whereas most undocumented migrants *avoid* the police, including those from Retorno, several La Partida respondents

interacted directly with police officers. Rather than being afraid, they were confident their “good behavior” would protect them. For example, whereas respondents in North County San Diego feared the police too much to report domestic violence, in LA at least four undocumented female respondents actively called police into their homes. Likewise, one day in 2010 when 22-year-old Luis was driving his mother Andrea to work, an LA police officer stopped him for running a stop sign. Despite the fact that both were undocumented, Andrea leaned out and explained that her son was a law-abiding, hard-working (read “good”) immigrant, convincing the officer not to detain him. As long as they were not criminals, they did not feel afraid.

Respondents felt especially agentic as workers, despite the miserable conditions in garment factories and domestic service. Often, they suggested that one could earn “good” or “bad” wages based on effort. Rather than describing the *salaries* as good or bad, respondents often told me that *they*, as *workers*, “earned well.” Santiago, who worked in garment factories for more than a decade when he arrived in the US, puts it this way: “I was able to earn a ton of money when I wanted, and when I didn’t, I didn’t do it.” Earnings, in his eyes, reflected how much one “wanted” to earn. He saw being a “good worker” as a personal accomplishment.

Identifying as “Good” and Blaming the “Bad”

By taking pride in being “good immigrants” and blaming “bad immigrants” for any hurdles they faced, migrants from La Partida legitimized the moralizing regime. Many respondents felt proud that they were willing to do work other immigrants would not and that they refused to complain. For instance, when I ask about her work in garment sewing, Andrea, 49, describes labor abuses, locked bathrooms, nonpayment of wages, and summary firings, all of which she knows violated labor laws. Nevertheless, she insists that she sees her work as a craft:

I like doing my work well. There are people that, no matter what, just pass it through and throw it down; they don’t pay attention to if it’s well done. They just want to earn money. But I’ve always thought that’s bad; I undo mistakes even if it takes me a little while. I’m proud of my work. I tell my children that when I go out it’s like it were a party; I dress up, I’m happy, and nothing about going and being angry ... Sometimes people say, ‘Why are you so dressed up? If you’re coming to work in the dust, and you’re coming to do work.’ But I tell them, ‘My work is like I were at a party, and I love my work because that feeds me.’ ... That’s what I tell my kids: you have to be like that; you have to love your work.

For Andrea, “good” performance fostered a sense of ownership and even “love” for her job. Santiago, meanwhile, boasts, “We were like a generation of robots from La Partida in sewing, those guys – we would earn minimum \$150, \$200, \$250 dollars a day sewing. We were animals – all young people about the same age, and people would say ‘the Oaxacan guys just got here, the ones from La Partida.’” Performing as “good immigrants” / “good workers” helped people identify with – rather than question – the speed at which they were expected to produce.

Other respondents demonstrated that they were “good” by refusing to complain. For example, Paula, a garment worker in her mid 30s, speaks softly in the clip of native Zapotec, as we meet in a deserted Jamba Juice in the row of cement factories south of downtown. She takes great pride in forbearance, she tells me, and she feels it has “earned” her stable job:

I try hard, and I learn what they teach me, and I’m responsible in my work ... I don’t like to cause problem. For example, a lot of people, when they tell them ‘You’re going to do this’ say ‘Aw, I don’t want to do that; I don’t like doing that. I don’t like that. I won’t do that. I don’t know how to do that.’ I never say that. I always like to learn more. That’s why they’ve always given me more work than other people – to this day, always. I don’t like to reject work. If it’s a hard job, I like other people to see that yes, I can do it ... It doesn’t matter, sometimes I’m sick, I have a cold, I don’t feel well, but I don’t like to stay home. I would rather be at work.

Paula identified so much with her commitment to her job that she sacrificed her health, refusing to take sick days because that would tarnish her own self-image as a dedicated worker. Others, like Alejandro, said they sewed 800 pairs of pants a day, and “By 6pm your arms were burning, gone.” Yet, out of pride, they would work on.

Meanwhile, respondents differentiated their actions from “bad” behavior, such as relying on government services. While some saw government services as a “reward” for merit, in most cases, the good immigrant / bad immigrant binary encouraged them to deplore government dependence. For instance, Ramona, who has worked in garment factories for nearly 20 years, also boasts of her self-sufficiency, explaining, “We [my husband and I] work hard. We never asked for Medi-Cal [state health insurance] for our children, nothing from the government, no type of help. We always worked. Some migrants just come to take advantage of the government – and then the workers are the ones that pay.” Instead of criticizing the US government’s exclusion, such respondents criticized their fellow migrants’ “dependency” instead.

This attitude also turned them *against* fellow migrants: the “lazy,” “criminal” counterparts whom they felt were making things harder for those who behaved. Santiago, for instance, proclaims, “I am an enemy of the people that screw with the system. I am an enemy of the people who live off food stamps when they don’t need it.” Similarly, instead of blaming the government for mistreating immigrants, Julia blames the migrants who have failed to work hard, as if they had *provoked* the discrimination. When I ask how she thinks the US government treats undocumented migrants, she replies, “As long as we work, I think they [the government] are going to treat us well. But if someone depends on the government, then they blame us, saying that Latinos just feed off the government and all that. But, we’re not all like that. Not all of us; there are people like us [my husband and I] that work hard.” Thus, rather than seeing mistreatment as inherent in the “illegalization” of migrants, Julia felt their own behavior brought it on.

Several respondents blamed “bad” immigrants for “messing up” the United States and inviting further criminalization, at the “good” immigrants’ expense. When I ask

Maria, a great admirer of the United States, how she feels the US government treats migrants, she tells me that things have “gotten bad” recently, explaining, “That’s because bad people come here with other intentions, with another way – the evildoers who have arrived ... just as some people come to work and have achieved a lot through work, other people have come with bad intentions and another style ... So it makes me sad, because this country has been so generous in accommodating us.” Even as she watches things “get bad,” Maria blames her fellow migrants for the shift, while continuing to credit the United States with “generosity.”

Producing Permanence

Respondents’ feelings of capability and pride – as well as the material benefits they gained in LA jobs – made them appreciate the United States. Five interviewees called LA their “second homeland,” and several others said the US had “adopted” them, that they “loved it,” or that they “felt at home.” Valentina, for instance, tells me “I’m very grateful for this country; it has given me the little I have.” Maria agrees, saying, “Maybe others achieve bigger things, but for me, compared to the poverty in which I lived before, I thank this country for what I have,” and Gloria adds, “I really liked coming to this country, really, there’s a way to move up in the world here, there’s something for the future.” Indeed, living in LA meant concrete changes in material circumstances. Even though most migrants made less than \$20,000 per year, access to consumer goods allowed them, especially women, to have amenities like refrigerators and washing machines they had not had in the village, making life easier in the day to day. Nevertheless, these material benefits may have also helped reinforce their consent.

Respondents’ appreciation for the United States led them to accept and agree with the idea that migration represented a form of advancement. According to this modernization narrative, assimilation was desirable, since – to use migrants’ words – life in the United States was more “advanced,” and “civilized.” Respondents often differentiated themselves from those remaining in their hometown on these terms, disparaging their village as backward or behind. Estrella, for instance, tells me that she came to Los Angeles, “To be more civilized, to take the blindfold off my eyes, to not be around people like my father who are so stuck in the mind – that’s why I want to leave my *pueblo*.” These attitudes reinforced the notion that historical progress maps onto the geographic divide between Mexico (behind) and the United States (ahead).

The *idea* of progress then reinforced the linearity – and permanence – of the migration stream. Identifying with the United States, 90% of respondents in LA planned to stay. Andrea, for example, tells me that although she is undocumented, “It doesn’t affect me much. I like it here, and I want to stay here for the rest of my life. My mother says, ‘you have to come back.’ But I wouldn’t go. I’d go, but only when I have papers to visit my daughter. Just to visit; not to live.” Gloria agrees. Though her husband wants to buy land in Mexico, she tells him “No, I came here to stay ... I am not going with you. The door is open if you want to go back to Mexico, but I’m not going back there anymore ... I’ve been living here for so many years that now I feel like it’s my second home. When I go back to my *pueblo*, it’s pretty, for a week or two, to see my family, but once that’s over, I have to come back here.”

In some cases, the progress narrative mapped onto race. For Bruno, for instance, this identification with the United States meant seeing himself as a “coconut” – a Latino person who thought of himself as white. He muses:

I think I’m one of those people they call ‘coconuts’ – white on the inside, brown on the outside. [A: Why?] Because that’s how I like to be. [A: Which are the white parts of you?] Well, for example, I don’t like to make noise in my neighborhood here, because of my neighbors ... When we go out to a restaurant to eat, I tell them [my children] don’t make noise, because other people aren’t going to like it ... I always ‘found myself’ (*me hallé*) here [in the US], because I worked here, and I like life here – work, the city, and everything.

Seeing themselves as Mexicans-cum-Americans, respondents like Bruno could not imagine going “back.”

Political Subjects under the Mantle of Assimilation

Respondents’ activism reflected their views that the “rules of the game” were fair. When migrants did challenge existing working conditions, they drew on legal protections like the labor commissioner, working within “the law.” Similarly, in politics, they often endorsed reform through formal electoral means. However, many felt that it was “bad” to protest, even going so far as to suggest that they did not deserve higher wages or equal treatment.

Seeking Reform within the Law

Seeing the existing system as fair, many respondents who advocated for reform did so within what they called “proper channels.” When respondents experienced labor abuses, several used LA’s strong labor enforcement apparatus for support. For instance, as we are sitting in her narrow kitchen boiling chiles for a soup, Andrea pulls the Labor Commissioner’s card out of her pocket, telling me, “They even gave me a little card in case someone mistreats me at work, so I can call and complain ... then the foremen stay quiet. They don’t say anything to me now, because I don’t let them yell at me any more.” Ramona, similarly, says, “Sometimes they want to fire us and find someone new, and we don’t let them – we tell them that we can go file a complaint there in the Labor Commissioner, and they back down.” Nevertheless, such respondents linked these labor protections to hard work, or, as one young mother who works in garment factories tells me, “I would go to the Labor Commissioner if I had bad problems – because that’s what’s it’s for, right? To help hard working people, because really, we are hard working.” In other words, labor rights were not human rights, but the reward for working hard.

In politics, several respondents took a similar mindset, suggesting that instead of protesting they should participate in more formal ways. Ramona, for instance, argues, “I don’t think we need so many marches. We could call the politicians on the phone, send them letters, emails. I think that’s all better than marching, because in marches there are always clashes and that sort of thing. So the politicians end up seeing us badly – as if the

people who don't have papers are causing problems." Fighting "against the law," she felt, was an inappropriate approach to social change. Similarly, when I ask Andrea what she thought of the 2006 immigrants' rights marches in LA, she replies, "Well, I don't think that [marching] is the right way to ask for things. We [immigrants] demand a lot, and I think it's better to do it other ways. That's why nothing happened [after the marches], because that was not the proper way to ask the government and senators for something, right? ... I don't think it's a good idea to march. It's better to call the senators on the phone. Better to write letters." Perhaps surprisingly given their own disenfranchisement, a few respondents even took part in electoral politics, such as helping to canvass for local congressional candidates (see Varsanyi (2005) for another example). For instance, in the mid 2000s, Alejandro regularly skipped work to go door-to-door to campaign for state senator Gil Cedillo, who promised to promote driver's licenses for undocumented migrants. Although rare, the existence of such formal engagement speaks to migrants' desire to work within the existing system.

Political Silence

Despite the fact that LA was ground zero of the nation's growing immigration war and the site of its most massive immigration protests in 2006, two thirds of the people I interviewed from La Partida refused to protest, out of what Albert Hirschman (1970) might call "loyalty" to the United States. While scholars have been enthusiastic about the political mobilization of immigrants, much of their research has focused on those who are already politically active, often recruiting respondents *through* political organizations and NGOs. While such activists are crucial to change, looking at those who remain silent may also shed light on the hurdles they face to greater politicization.

In many cases, consent blocked respondents from protesting. Such quiescent respondents, I find, felt that "good" immigrants should contribute to the United States rather than making demands. For instance, Bernardo, a 55-year-old construction worker, explains:

I don't like to go to protests, because being a protestor in a place you don't belong – I don't like that. Why am I going to go make a lot of noise where it's not my home? It's not my city ... As an immigrant I start thinking, and I ask myself, 'What am I contributing to this nation?' What am I contributing? Well, being a good worker, paying my taxes, not owing the government anything, and obeying – respecting the laws. That's all for me.

Accepting the moralizing logic, Bernardo suggests that immigrants like him should respect their status and not complain. Pablo, a 37-year-old warehouse worker, adds, "People scream and go out to the streets. But, I think it's a lot of noise – and for what? No, I think the most important thing is to be humble." While fear is a major hurdle to protests, in LA another hurdle was at work as well: respondents labeled marches as "bad."

Similarly, all but one of the migrants I interviewed in LA refused to participate in labor unions. Studies such as Milkman (2006) have suggested that immigrant participation in unions is growing, thanks to workers' sense of stigma and marginalization,

and that it may even represent the future of US labor organizing. Indeed, thanks to the high level of union activity in LA, about half of my respondents had encountered labor organizers, particularly while working at large factories like Guess Jeans, where there were major union campaigns in the late 1990s. This was far more exposure to organizing than respondents saw in North County San Diego. Yet in LA only one – a documented man who had arrived in the mid 1980s and worked as a trucker since the 1990s – had joined a union. In this arena, once again, it was not fear or withdrawal that inhibited them – like in North County San Diego. Instead, in Los Angeles, what fostered ambivalence or even hostility towards unions was respondents’ pride in their quiescence, and their belief in the fairness of the existing US wage system. Here, consent led to self-denigration.

Self-Denigration

While intended to protect immigrants, the “good immigrant” logic also legitimized exclusion and exploitation. At work, the feeling that they were being justly rewarded made many respondents see their low wages as fair. As the competition for work became increasingly tight, several felt that simply having a job – or being paid at minimum wage – was compensation enough. Respondents saw employers as particularly “kind” when they guaranteed a minimum wage in a piece rate environment – as if they were going above and beyond the “rules of the game.” For example, Mariela, who operates garment factory machines, suggests that her hard, fast work has been “compensated” by her employer’s observance of labor laws. When I ask if she has ever been mistreated at work, she replies:

My boss – he was honest with me when he hired me. He said, I’m going to give you the minimum, and let’s see how you work, what you’re good at. And then we’ll see about your pay. I can’t tell you I’m going to pay you \$15 or 20 dollars an hour if you don’t know how to do the work or if you can’t produce a certain amount for me. That day I arrived I told my boss, ‘Well, the minimum is good for me.’ Because to be honest, for someone to pay you by the hour [instead of piece rate] in any factory right now, they don’t do that ... So I felt grateful to him, because the truth is that when I arrived at his factory I didn’t have enough experience to demand more.

Mariela felt that the rules were fair; when employers followed the rules, this, in itself, was a reward.

At least five respondents explicitly said they did not like unions, because their wage demands were overly entitled. For example, Felipe, a 34-year-old restaurant worker, suggests that “good” immigrants should seek raises through merit rather than struggle. When a union attempted to organize at his workplace, he refused to join, telling the organizers, “There is no reason to force the owners. If you want to work hard, and if you think you deserve a raise, well, show it with your actions ... This boss gave me an opportunity, and I feel really thankful. ... That, to me, is a privilege. I can’t betray this person, because he gave me something great.” Having a job at all, Felipe suggests, was a reward earned through hard work. Unions undermined the rules of the moralizing game.

Mariela also contrasts union members' "bad" sense of entitlement with her own compliance, telling me, "[The unions] come to get us fired for going on strike, or lose our jobs – or demand wages that are higher than what we deserve to be paid. Because there are people that come and say they want to earn a lot more than what they really need." Such attitudes suggest that if organizers want to expand migrants' role in the labor movement, they must consider how consent – as well as fear – impede mobilization.

Even in LA, where public institutions often reach out to migrants, pride in being "good immigrants" could inhibit respondents from accessing necessary services. Maria, for instance, rejected welfare – and the accompanying state health insurance – even when her young son was injured and would be denied medical treatment unless he had the insurance. She recalls, "Even though I didn't have money, I had a strong sense of dignity and I didn't want to abuse the government ... and, well, it made me happy, because I didn't need it." Similarly, when I accompanied respondents to the hospital during fieldwork, they would sit for hours – even a full day – in the waiting room, without asking if their names had been called. By way of explanation, they suggested that "good immigrants" should honor their status as "guests in the house" rather than demand "undue" entitlements such as medical care.

At the extreme, some respondents even consented to "illegality" itself – accepting the legal exclusion of undocumented migrants. For example, 56-year-old Isidro tells me he favors legalization only for "good" immigrants who demonstrate hard work and self-sufficiency. He reflects, "[Work] is what people need, and the government should give us migration reform so we have an opportunity to work. But, they shouldn't give papers to the people that don't deserve it." Mariela, herself undocumented, adds, "They say that if you have papers there are better jobs, better wages, but I accept what I have as long as they pay me what it's worth and I have work. Sometimes there are people that earn a lot but their work isn't stable, or they have other needs and can't – but for me, I'm OK." Others went so far as to argue, "[Undocumented immigrants] suffer a lot because they *think* that's the case. It's only the way you see it, the way you believe" and suggest that therefore, "The more difficult they make the laws for illegal immigrants, the better."

Upending Consent

Nevertheless, the reach of the moralizing system was incomplete, and at various moments respondents gave up on consent, turning, instead, to protest or return. As US immigration control became increasingly repressive nationwide, it touched LA as well, such that respondents started to see fissures in the links between good behavior and rewards. In answer, about a third of respondents joined the massive immigrants' rights marches in Los Angeles in 2006. Those who participated explained that since migrants had been so good – such hard workers – they deserved not just tolerance but the full set of opportunities available to US citizens. For instance, Felipe, the restaurant worker who had refused to join a union, did attend the 2006 march. He described the scope of participation among his migrant networks, "Yes, I went – we all went – my cousin Rafael, Sonia, my uncle – and my other cousin Yazmin, her brother Arvin. My cousin Tomás went ... *Everyone* woke up [politically], and everyone wanted to participate." When I ask why he marched, Felipe explains, "Because – I am an [undocumented] immigrant, too,

and I would like to have a [driver's] license.” Julia, similarly, says she participated, because, “I got excited for all the people that can't have papers, because there are a lot of really hard working people that deserve to have papers.” In a system of punishment and rewards, Julia believed that hard working people were *not* fully getting their due. Still, the logic of good/bad binaries persisted.

In other exceptions to the rule, a few respondents – particularly men – developed more profound, structural critiques of “the system,” eventually driving them to give up on the United States and return to La Partida. Such men explained that while they might *believe* the US offered opportunities to migrants who worked hard, in the end, these opportunities remained blocked. Like many of the DREAMers, who have tried to go to college only to find they cannot get jobs when they get out, 34-year-old Juan bought into the logic of opportunity. Yet, as he began to move up in the workforce, even getting an education in international business, he found he was unable to secure anything but manual work. The experience undermined his belief that migrants in the US could make progress. By the time of my fieldwork in 2010, Juan had given up and returned to Mexico. When I ask why, he sums up his story:

I saw migration reform die, saw the DREAM act die ... and then I lost hope. I said ‘I need to leave here [the US] forever’ ... I realized I was working with this system that was manipulating me, using me ... Then I started to learn how international business works, and I came to the conclusion that I didn't want to work for those companies, that I don't want to get into that ... I'm not going to play the game that they are playing, because a game functions because we play it.' We are into that game ... So, I don't like the United States. I don't like the system. Why? Because there is no freedom there.

As Juan faced limits to his aspirations, he realized that the “freedom” he had long been promised was a mirage.

Alejandro, who advocated for senator Gil Cedillo, agrees. By 2011, he felt that his advocacy had come to naught, and he, too, had given up. As I sit with him on the couch, watching him pack to return to La Partida after 18 years in California, he tells me, “If you want material things, you can have the best here [in the US], if you don't mind sacrificing family, if you don't mind sacrificing things, if nothing matters to you except the material. I can have a new car, I can have the best technology, the best house of my dreams, all that, but at the cost of sacrifice ... but on the other side [Mexico], you're happy wherever you are. You don't have luxuries, but you're happy, you're free.” While the moralizing “game” produced aspirations, when people actually accomplished what it promised, they came face to face with limits and constraints. Then, US “freedom” seemed a broken promise. So while women stayed in California, grateful to have escaped patriarchal domination, men – on occasion – went home.

Conclusion

In recent years, scholars and the media have paid much attention to the immigration protests that wracked Los Angeles in the late 2000s, as well as to the

potential for “sanctuary” cities like LA to protect undocumented immigrants from the racism and abuse of restrictionist areas like North County San Diego. On the surface, the “good immigrant” logic these cities promote helps protect immigrants and oppose their subordination nationwide, delivering them from fear. In this chapter, however, I have suggested that something darker may be at work.

While “tolerant” cities like Los Angeles do not instill the kind of terror at work in North County San Diego, inasmuch as they divide undocumented migrants into “good” and “bad,” they exercise their own, moralizing form of political control. When migrants lived by this good / bad binary, they came to see deportation and wage exploitation as fair. The effect was particularly strong for women, who were often marked as “good” and who got material benefits and physical protection from the move to the United States. Yet here, in marked contrast to dual subordination of female migrants in North County, women’s appreciation for the United States tied gender emancipation to consent for the US government and employers. In turn, this consent helped to limit their political voice. Mobilization, meanwhile, required migrants to realize that the promised link between “good behavior” and “rewards” was in fact a mirage.

The ideology of the United States as a “second home,” or a place of “freedom” also created an uneasy relationship between migrants and their home village. Seeing themselves as having made “progress” – an attitude particularly common among women – migrants in LA hoped to help their village do the same. Yet those in the village, along with a few returnees like Alejandro and Juan who had rejected “the system,” refused to accept this notion of progress. In the next chapter, I explore how their investment in such “modernization” clashed with the communal values, obligations, and sense of equity that people remaining in La Partida hoped to sustain.

Chapter 7

The Politics of Departure “Improving” La Partida from Outside and Within

Given the material benefits that migrants from La Partida enjoyed in the United States, their sense of “progress,” and their disdain for much of what they left behind, we might expect migration to play little positive role in promoting social change in their home town. Rather, one might assume that as its people funneled into Los Angeles, the village of La Partida would drain itself dry, dissolving the communalism that gave the village advantages in the first place (Davis 2006). Indeed, most studies of development suggest that as cohesive communities are deterritorialized and exposed to individualistic ideas and class stratification, they begin to disintegrate. Social movement scholars, meanwhile, label communalism as a “passive,” historical form of resistance, rather than a dynamic politics that rural communities may mobilize, in answer to contemporary concerns (Kearney 1998).

Nevertheless, La Partida *reconstituted* its communitarian practices and identity in the face of emigration. Despite its migrants’ identification with the United States and even their sense of progress, a subset continued to support the village. With this spirit, they built one of California’s strongest hometown associations, which would become central to sustaining their community of origin. Second, even more surprisingly, the very women who had left the village to escape patriarchy became central to this hometown association. As they did, they not only confronted their male counterparts in the United States but also gained leverage over goings on in the village, insisting on redirecting funds in ways they believed would help women back home.

Meanwhile, those remaining in La Partida took a *reactive* stance. Studies typically suggest that migration Westernizes sending communities and that migrants use their influence to make their home villages more like what they have seen in the United States. One might think this would be particularly true in La Partida, as migrants’ ability to “get ahead” (*superarse*) convinced others of the value of migration and urban life. Yet, even though migrants attempted to influence La Partida and dismantle its communal obligations, those on the Mexican side actively and aggressively resisted their US-style individualism. Instead, the hometown painted migrants in ideological terms of their own, as selfish, egotistical, and remiss. They responded by re-defining and codifying the meaning of “community” and “*comunero*” (community member). Therefore, even though we tend to think of communalism as a historical tradition inherited from the past, here, it became an active, contemporary politics in the face of migration. As it did, it also reinforced La Partida’s defensive stance towards Mexican state efforts to privatize land, and promote “entrepreneurial” (individual) development. Gender relations often got caught in this clash, as migrants promoted women’s needs, but the village painted women’s rights as a Western framework, imposed from “outside” at the expense of communal values.

What explains this unusual relationship between migration and “development”? In this chapter, I argue that the core features of La Partida’s migration path – elective,

assimilationist, and permanent – fueled a politics of reconstructing the community. First, although moving to the United States helped La Partida migrants escape the village’s communal obligations and male domination, it did not always entail rejecting their hometown outright. Rather, migrants’ idea that they had “progressed” fostered a “charitable” kind of engagement, in which they showed “love” for their hometown as they *wanted* it to be. By working to “improve” (*mejorar*) the village, these migrants showed off their own “advancement.” Women were particular invested in this process, using the hometown association to demonstrate that “we women can do it” (*nosotras sí podemos*), and highlight the gender benefits of Westernization.

However, those remaining in the sending village responded by defending the values of communal life and the participatory practices it implied. For them, permanent emigration provoked feelings of envy, anger, sadness, and abandonment. They felt they had been left to shoulder the burdens of sustaining the community on their own, undermining the close interplay between community membership and the fulfillment of obligations. At stake was the very meaning of community. Therefore, the village responded by codifying the meaning of membership – and with it, equality – and then demanding that migrants play their part. Threatening to cut migrants off from the community gave them leverage to impose this definition on migrants. Reinforcing community cohesion helped them continue to be selective about their relationship to state development projects as well as to capitalist development in the village (Hart 2002) – just as they had been prior to the rise of US migration – and even to take what some might call an “anti-development” stance (Escobar 1995). Nevertheless, the resuscitation of tradition also kept them ambivalent about gender, marking women’s rights as a Western ideology and an assault on communal life.

Ironically, migrants’ contributions helped forestall the process by which scholars have suggested that migration becomes a generalized norm and sending communities begin to dissolve (Massey, Goldring and Durand 1994; Kandell and Massey 2002). In remitting money collectively to the village, migrants not only provided crucial resources to help it survive, but they also provided the material basis on which this reactive, anti-migration, and anti-development stance could exist.

La Organización Pro-Mejoramiento (OPM)

Paradoxically, migrants’ embrace of “assimilation” laid the groundwork on which they build a hometown association (HTA). While HTAs are generally seen as nests for migrants’ nostalgia about a lost past (Guarnizo et al. 2003; Orozco 2003; Smith 2006), in this case, the organization gave migrants a vehicle to display the “progress” they felt they had achieved socially and economically in the United States, as well as to promote similar transformations among those “left behind.” In 1977, ten or fifteen of La Partida’s first US migrants got together for companionship and began to muse that they should take advantage of their relative economic success in the United States to help their “needy” village back home. They began meeting bimonthly, making monthly contributions of \$5 each, and holding raffles, selling tamales, and inviting people to barbecues to raise money for the village. As more migrants arrived and joined the group, they named the organization the “Organization for the Improvement of La Partida” (*Organización Pro-*

Mejoramiento, OPM), underscoring its core mission of “improving” the village, as well as the fact that it was La Partida-specific. Like many similar Mexican hometown associations, the OPM raised funds for the village and also provided solidarity to those living in the United States (Fitzgerald 2009; Iskander 2010).

Over the following decades, the OPM would become one of the strongest, most cohesive, and most economically robust Mexican migrant hometown associations in the state of California (Rivera-Salgado 1999). For instance, during my fieldwork in 2011 and 2012, the OPM fundraised 582,186 pesos (about \$42,000 dollars), more than 20% of the village’s entire annual operating budget. Then, it used the Mexican Government’s 3x1 Program, through the Secretary of Social Development, to solicit matching grants from the federal, state, and municipal governments (see Fitzgerald 2009; Iskander 2010), nearly as much as the town spent in a year. The contribution enabled La Partida to rebuild its primary school, expanding the multimedia classroom, putting a roof over the gym, and reconstructing the bathrooms. While this amount topped all past donations, in prior years the OPM had raised as much as \$30,000 per year to sponsor projects to rebuild La Partida’s potable water tank, fix its public bathrooms, pave roads, and support the reconstruction of the church and town hall – as well as to provide annual contributions to the village festival, a multi-day affair each February in celebration of La Partida’s patron saint.¹⁰⁶

However, the OPM also played a second role, less common in other HTAs: it managed migrants. When it started in the 1970s, the OPM was voluntary; however, in the late 1980s the village of La Partida began to demand that each male migrant pay what I call a “migrant tax” of \$100 per year on behalf of himself and his spouse, and each female migrant, if not married to someone from La Partida, pay \$50. On top, the hometown made a series of other demands about how it expected migrants to support the village from afar, if they wished to keep a house there or visit. While I will explain the reasons for these demands shortly, for now I simply note that the village relied on the OPM to be its proxy in LA, supervising and keeping track of each migrant’s contributions not only of the yearly “migrant taxes” but also of volunteer time, contributions to fundraisers, and participation on the OPM’s governing board. During my fieldwork, the village government spoke on the phone with this board at least weekly. From the time a migrant arrived in the United States, his friends from La Partida instilled in him the idea that he had a duty to participate in the OPM. Alejandro, for instance, remembers that when he got to LA, “My cousin told me, you have to attend; you have to join the OPM so that they [the village] don’t go bugging your father back in the *pueblo* to say you haven’t contributed ... and we always give a \$100 contribution every year ... so he inculcated that in me as well.”

For migrants, participating in the OPM was hard work. Echoing the communitarian practices of La Partida, the HTA institutionalized its own version of “*cargos*,” including a governing board of president, secretary, and treasurer, as well as various smaller posts to help with cooking, cleanup, and other logistics, in which migrants served without pay. As in the village, these positions rotated among migrants each year,

¹⁰⁶ Parallel OPM branches in Mexico City and Oaxaca City also helped support the latter.

and migrants were expected to serve when named. On at least four major holidays a year, such as mother's day, Valentine's Day, and the annual village festival, this board ran major fundraisers. Generally, each even entailed a dance and feast for several thousand people, each of whom would buy tickets. In between, the *cargo* holders in OPM also ran smaller fundraisers, attended to internal business, and conducted bimonthly Sunday meetings that – echoing La Partida's community assemblies – often lasted all day. For fundraisers, women prepared immense quantities of Oaxacan food, spending several days beforehand rolling and frying tacos, or shredding cheese imported from Mexico. Maria, a long-time OPM leader and founding member, recalls how draining this was:

We would all get blisters on our hands from grinding cacao beans, making the *champurrado* [traditional hot chocolate], and making bread to donate on the day of the dead when we would hold dances. Making *mole*, making *tamales*, making *tlayudas* (Oaxacan dishes); it was so much work ... Everyone that has been on the [OPM] governing board and has carried out a *cargo* knows how hard it is to work for the organization.

Similarly, Renata, a 36-year-old nanny who served as OPM president during my fieldwork, seems to be perpetually on the run, speaking at a rapid clip each time we speak on the phone, and clicking her high black heels around village events as she attends to business. “Oh, Abigail,” she sighs, lamenting her neglect of her four teenaged children, “Serving in the organization is a real burden ... I don't have any time left for my own life!”

Even a member serving a smaller post would often have to spend all day Sunday, three or four Sundays a month, working on organizational business. For example, in 2010 Luz was named as a cook for the HTA. When I interview her in May, she explains that for the past three Sundays she has left her apartment in Echo Park at 7:30am to go buy things, help prepare food, and then sell it all day, finishing the cleanup after 9:00pm – thought it sometimes goes as late as 11:00 or even require coming back again Monday morning. Since Luz is a single mother, her sixteen year old daughter suffers as well, complaining, “Oh, Mom, you don't spend any time with me anymore!” Nevertheless, Luz agreed to take the post, thinking, “I knew this day would come ... and if not they would just come to get me the next year.” On a few occasions, I lend a hand with such fundraisers. I remember Mother's Day 2011. As a seemingly endless, hungry river of people pours into the dance hall, I think to myself:

Making and flipping *tlayudas* (a traditional dish) is deathly! It's been a long week and a late night, and after driving seven hours from San Francisco I stand at the grill with Luz and Maria and Sergio for three or four more, my back burning as the muscles spasm and beg me to stop. But then I look at Luz. She's built like a twig, but she just smiles next to me, chopping up beans and cheese and cabbage in her little white striped T-shirt and apron, and making almost nothing of the fact that the buses were stopped for the day and she's walked ten miles to get to her post on time. Or Sergio, who's just done eight hours at the UCLA cafeteria, and streams sweat from his cropped black hair as he tries to quiet his infant daughter and deals a thousand pieces of pizza like playing cards off a deck.

I suppose this is what *tequio* (communal labor) means: the effort to keep going, to stand in front of the community and do its work after a long day of your own, regardless of what your body says. It's physical, being a *comunero*; it exhausts you. It causes pain. But it also makes you part of something, visible, as you greet each person who comes through the door. Later, Santiago, the evening's smiling DJ, snaps a picture of me over the biggest pot. He posts it on Facebook the next day, adding a caption: "As long as we still practice *tequio*, we cannot dissolve. You're a Zapotec wherever you may be." Still I wonder: what inspires people to do so much hard work?

In fact, most of them don't. Somewhere between 80 and 90% of La Partida migrants in Los Angeles are what the OPM calls "*renuentes*" (literally "reluctants"), or black-listers, who do not participate at all in the organization (at least according to the OPM's records). Rather, all of this work is done by somewhere between 35 and 80 active families, from among 300 to 400 La Partida migrant families who live in LA. The "reluctants," meanwhile, resent the organization's demands, link it to a place in their *past*, and do not contribute. As Santiago says, "It's really difficult to organize them."¹⁰⁷ While these non-participants know that refusing to help may mean excommunication from La Partida, many see the United States as their adopted home, saying things like "I'd be insane to go back there." Describing themselves as discouraged, they add, "I don't have anything there anymore; why am I going to contribute?"

Others refuse to participate because they see the *cargo* structure, imported from La Partida to the United States – and enforced by the OPM on La Partida's behalf – as "backward" and unfair, and they volunteer a litany of complaints about how stubborn and rigid (*necio*) and even "uncivilized" the village is. Lingered outside an Echo Park Café, I ask 45-year-old Epifanio, who works fixing computers, why he is not a member of the OPM. He clutches a manila folder filled with essays he wrote for his adult English school and tells me that although he was once in the OPM, after a while in California, "I started realizing that we must end that custom of giving service, of giving *tequio* each year. I tell them, 'At this day in age, who wants to give a year of service for free?' ... And then donate money, just to throw it away on the *fiesta*. It [participation] is just a waste of time." Others simply excuse themselves, with nearly two thirds of interviewees explaining that they just don't have the time. Given this reluctance, what makes the other third of the migrants willing to work so hard?

For the Love of My Pueblo

Ironically, I argue, those who *do* invest time and money in the OPM are also driven by a mentality that embraces "assimilation" into the United States. Initially, early migrants from La Partida established the organization to provide each other with support and solidarity in the strange US context. Esperanza remembers that getting together made them feel like part of something: "Back in the day we were lonely. There were very few of us, and we used to get together to eat and hang out. That's how we formed the

¹⁰⁷ Likewise, in the OPM branch in Oaxaca, there are as many as 500 families from La Partida but only about 70 active members, 20 of whom participate directly – by returning to the village to serve in the *cargos* and attend assemblies, and 50 of whom participate through the organization.

organization.” Similarly, Juan says that he joined the OPM because “It’s the tie you have with the community, with your friends – and they have parties. So you would see everyone there ... and you’d do it because you felt like part of the community again, right? And that’s a community that’s there [in the US], too.” As migrants began to arrive in larger numbers, the organization also gave them material support, helping them to get established. Maria explains:

We had the idea that we had to support each other, because people were going to keep arriving and [we thought] ‘we have to give them a chance in the first few months ... so they can work, pay off their debt, and contribute (*cooperar*) afterwards.’ And that’s how we started to give each other mutual aid, to help each other ... in case someone got sick, and to help each other in case someone died we would send them back home to their parents ... It’s good to be united, because if you have an emergency or something, the organization helps.

Echoing practices of mutual aid from the village, OPM members provided each other with economic aid and logistical support in case of sickness, death, or family emergencies. For instance, migrants recall that when one member was diagnosed with cancer, the OPM hosted a series of dances, raising \$10,000 to help with his medical bills. Likewise, when a recently arrived migrant was shot, the group gathered each Saturday to pass a hat, contributing five or six dollars each so that the victim could send someone to buy him food. Where few migrants could obtain formal insurance, the OPM filled in.

By the time of my fieldwork, although the organization continued to provide mutual aid and a sort of insurance for migrants involved, most members’ primary reason to participate was, as they put it “the love of my *pueblo*.” We might assume that this “love” reflected ongoing ties to family members in the village, or migrants’ own nostalgia and desire to return (as most HTA literature suggests). Yet, few members I interviewed wanted to return, and many had no immediate family members left in the village. Rather, among OPM members I interviewed, the romantic vision of the “*pueblo*” was characterized by the same ideology of modernization described in Chapter 5. They took a “social investment” vision of the HTA, as a form of charity work through which they could remake the community for the benefit of those left “behind.” This approach affirmed the superiority of US ways of doing things, and it also put on display the “progress” that migrants had made themselves. Those who took this view were often the most economically successful of La Partida’s LA community.¹⁰⁸ By “improving” the village, they could demonstrate their own advancement.

Santiago and Maria, the two key figureheads of the OPM, are particularly illustrative. Santiago, whom I meet one evening while he’s emceeding one of the organization’s large fundraisers, has smooth skin and an impish smile. His black hair, slicked as though he just came out of the shower and not at all gray, belies his 46 years. This evening – and every time I see him over the next two years – Santiago spends hours

¹⁰⁸ Their qualitative reasoning helps shed light on quantitative findings by Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller (2003) showing that HTA participants tend to be the *most* well off and best “integrated” into the US of migrants from a given village.

reminiscing about his home village, where I have just been living. As we flip through photos of La Partida on his iPhone, Santiago pauses at one of the new, cement houses in the town center, lamenting the loss of the “good old days”:

For me, it’s sad. I wish the whole town were *adobe* (mud houses), had dirt roads, like they used to ... For me, the pavement is a great shame, because it privileges cars. I’d like to have it all be stones. Because an old man might be coming along with his donkeys, and he *is* the community. He built the community, and then he has to move to the side so a car can pass. And it’s harder to stop the donkeys than to stop the car ... I would like to still see that when a young person meets an elder in the street they take off their hat and say hello. It’s fine if they don’t kiss the elder’s hand anymore, because we’re already living in the sixth era of the computer – or if he [the kid] goes on Facebook, it’s fine. But respect your elder, jerk!

As we continue talking, it becomes clear that just as he wants some things in La Partida to “stay” just as he imagines them, he also wants to “modernize.” He adds, “I want to strengthen the legacy of our forebears, to improve it – not to take it away, just to improve it.” Swiping to a picture of plastic bags on La Partida’s hillside, he explains, “The problem with the community is ... the people there don’t know how to value what they have. I went to pick up trash in the mountains with them, and the first thing that caught my attention was that there is no sign prohibiting litter. I tell them, ‘Damn Indians [he uses the word facetiously, but also in a way that emphasizes the racialization of this “progress” narrative] you have to write a sign.’ You have to tell people in a way they understand.” He wants to educate the *pueblo*, he tells me: “I want my people to wake up.”

Maria is similar. She often speaks of the “love” that motivates her participation in the OPM, sighing, “Despite all the years and the fact that you live here [in the US], you feel your roots, and they call to you ... in September it’ll be 40 years since I got here, and I still have in me that love for the *pueblo*, for the customs, the people, the language ... I love it, and that’s why I also don’t want the customs and traditions to be lost.” Like Santiago, however, Maria loves the idea of an *improved* version of La Partida. Indeed, she was inspired to establish the organization when she went back to visit La Partida after her first four years in the United States. When she did, she felt that the village was behind (*atrasado*):

I went to visit my *pueblo*, and all the tragedy, the need there is in the *pueblo* for many things made me think, ‘We have to do something. I want to do something in the village. There are so many needs, and look at how the paths are all dirt, filled with mud ... The church is the most urgent: the walls are falling down, and something has to be done there.’ ... I told my brother in law, even though you’re poor, even though it’s a dirt floor, throw some water on it, sweep it, pick up the trash, clean the plates and this will be a paradise, if you know how to care for it. But they leave everything a mess, they let the animals make a mess, and they could have the animals locked up and clean where they live ... I said, I’ve been poor, too, and I like to keep things neat and clean.’

While Maria felt sad for the “tragedy” and poverty in the village, she also tied it to the remaining villagers’ habits. So, she took on the project of raising money for repairs, along with teaching other villagers “new ways to work.” She goes on, “It’s a question of talking with people, giving them classes. Teach them and they’ll learn. That is what I’d love to do – work to the people ... especially because people say that you shouldn’t give people a fish but teach them how to fish, so that’s why when there are cultural classes in the *pueblo* I like to help people to learn things, trades.” For Maria, the OPM was a means not only to remit money but also to inculcate some of the US-style habits she saw as desirable. Thus, it was an assimilationist impulse that drove her to want to “improve” La Partida.

Expressing a sense of noblesse oblige towards their non-migrant counterparts also affirmed migrants’ views of *themselves* as having made economic and cultural progress. Santiago explains that while the OPM replicated some practices from La Partida, such as *cargos*, it also made them better. When we talk about mutual aid within the organization, he calls the work “noble,” saying that members are “blood brothers” who want to help each other. However, he adds, “Once we get here, we break free of all the evil. The negative things that come from the *pueblo* get buried, and we grow strong (*se hace una fuerza*.)” Having rid themselves of the “bad ways” of the village, migrants could improve upon what they had – and bring back the “new and improved” ways of doing things.

Migrants also used the HTA to demonstrate their economic success. Santiago added that on a personal level, “Thanks to the career I chose – my work lets me play that role.” Maria also “felt good” sharing the money she’d made with those she saw as less fortunate, telling me:

Through all these years I’ve been really blessed ... There are people who have to work from sunrise to sunset, and it’s a blessing not to have to work so hard, so maybe that’s why we [her husband and herself] let our selves go more than people who have to work harder for their money ... Little by little I’ve convinced my husband that you feel good helping and that the person who gives gets as much happiness as the person who receives. So I think that helping people is giving back a little bit of what life has given me.

Whereas for migrants from Retorno, HTA participation was a practical measure to prepare for their own return home, among those from La Partida, it had a qualitatively different tone. For the latter, who never planned to return, participating from afar reinforce their assimilationist notions and helped them feel good about themselves.

Over time, OPM members increasingly insisted on donating only to *visible* projects – often infrastructure – so that the whole village could see what they had contributed. Originally, most money raised by the OPM had gone to La Partida’s annual festivals. Yet, Alejandro, who served as OPM president in 2008, explains that migrants began to feel that this contribution was poorly recognized:

When I was serving my year [as president], we said, OK, we always give \$5,000, \$10,000 dollars for the annual festival, but no one reports it, and where does that money go? Let’s not give money to the *fiestas* anymore. No one even knows that

we contributed ... Instead let's gather all our money together and do big works that we can see the benefit of ... Since then, we [the OPM] haven't sent money for the *fiestas*, only for public works – a water tank, and now the school.

Starting in 2008, the OPM also placed a plaque on each of project it sponsored, venerating the organization's contribution and hard work. For instance, the village's potable water tank, which the OPM donated to La Partida in 2009, bears a large sign reading: "Utopia is achieved when you work for the common good, for works that impact the lives of all. This project was done thanks to the devotion and dedication of the people who make up and support the Organization of La Partida [OPM] living in Los Angeles California." In 2010, when I asked Santiago if the OPM has influence in the hometown, he replies, "If we're successful at getting this program [3x1 funding to repair the school], I think we'll turn ourselves into the most important motor of La Partida. That's my objective." Santiago hopes that the visibility of the school will give migrants leverage. When I ask if the people back home have had control to date, he goes on, "Well, somewhat. Because they have been really effective at manipulating the concept and the meaning of being a *comunero* [community member]." Indeed, in the face of emigration, those remaining in the hometown used the idea of "*comunero*" to exert their own interests and values.

Politicizing Community Belonging: The Village Responds

Despite the advantages its migrants enjoyed, the village of La Partida reacted *against* their attempts at modernization and instead vigorously worked to defend and reconstruct their communitarian practices. Their actions were counter intuitive in three ways: first, while one might assume that migrants' economic mobility and social influence would foster Westernization in the village, in fact those remaining rebelled against migrants. Second, whereas accounts of migration and development tend to frame *migrants* as active, considering how they intervene in hometown politics, here, the home village took a role that was even more assertive and agentic than theirs (see Mutersbaugh 2002). Third, scholars have tended to portray the indigenous commune as legacy of the past, assume it degenerates in the face of migration, and argue that an "active" politics in migrant communities entails shifting to broader class- or race-based claims (Kearney 1998). La Partida, however, insisted on the dynamism of its communal structure and (re) *created* the "local cultural practices" of the *cargo* system, along with its associated insularity and cohesion. How do we explain the village's response?

In La Partida, despite the OPM's economic support, many saw its pro-modernization attitudes as a threat to the functioning and moral fabric of the community, particularly its core principle of equity based in service and mutual obligations. For one, those remaining in the village felt abandoned. When respondents in La Partida discuss migration, one after another tells me, "They never return." Parents beg their children not to leave, worrying they might lose them forever. And migrants recount that when they left, and then failed to return as promised, their parents would call them on the phone sobbing and implore, "Why did you abandon me?" Some parents went so far as to deny the existence of sons and daughters who emigrated, telling family members, "That one is not going to come back anymore; don't even mention him to me."

People living in La Partida often say that the migrants' attitudes have changed; as migrants get "Americanized," respondents feel, they grow selfish, individualistic, and apathetic. They also begin prioritizing their own personal gain over service and mutual support. During my fieldwork, when I linger around the taco stand beside La Partida's town square, I often hear drawn out laments of how "selfish" (*egoista*) migrants are, thinking only of themselves. Tomás, sitting with me one afternoon at the top of the hill, musing over the soft rhythm of people and animals below, tells me, "People sometimes get very apathetic when they emigrate. They forget. They leave and they don't send money; they don't participate ... It pains us that they don't want to contribute." Naila, a fiery young mother in her mid 30s, likewise laments at length:

People [who migrate] get used to those comforts, and they don't want to come back here anymore. They start to think they come from Los Angeles. And they come to show off and to say how pretty Los Angeles is ... Even though people in the city [LA] come from *pueblos*, too, they don't accept it anymore. 'I'm from Los Angeles,' they say. Instead of thinking about the common good, about our children, people start to think about why that guy has money and not me. Then they lose the ideology and the habit of mutual aid ... Those people start thinking they can have everything easy, and they come back with very hard hearts.

Through such complaints, those behind underscored their own communal commitments and distinguished it from the apathy and selfishness they attributed to migrants.

The divide also probably reflects the selectivity of La Partida's elective emigration: migrants tended to be more individualistic, while those with more communal and gender-traditional attitudes remained in the village. Reinforcing this division, several who found US attitudes distasteful also chose to return. For example, Efrén, a 55-year-old who returned to La Partida in the late 1990s after living in Mexico City for fifteen years, explains, "The thing I like best about living here is the *Usos y Costumbres* [collective structure]. Here, we organize ourselves at the level of the *pueblo* to make sure the *pueblo* develops, progresses." Perhaps surprisingly, some of the most critical attacks on "North American" attitudes came from returned migrants, who had forsaken the US "system" (see the end of Chapter 5). Their own negative experiences of migration helped crystallize their vision of the *pueblo* as an ideological alternative.

People in La Partida also resented migrants for leaving them to shoulder the weight of community service. Not only did migrant *attitudes* undermine La Partida's collective values, but also, as the numbers of men in the village dwindled, those who remained began to face growing burdens to staff the village. One long, cold evening, as we eat yellow mole at his plastic kitchen table, Leonel – himself a returned migrant – complains that migrants don't appreciate the hard work those in the village pour into communal life:

The migrants say we don't appreciate their support, but they have houses [in La Partida]; they come to relax. They even rent out their houses, and that's where people get angry. I'm working so that they can have running water, so that the

roads are well maintained, and they're profiting from that ... [In the communal system] we have obligations, and we have rights ... When you do *tequios* you see all the work that needs to be done. Being the person who manages the *tequios*, for instance, is a huge amount of work, because you're responsible for the water system and if that breaks you have to go in the middle of the night and fix it ... or right now that we have to [do *tequios* to] plant all these trees ... and when you're there [in the US], you don't even know what's going on.

Likewise, Aldo tells me, "We attend to the interests [belongings] of the people who go there [to the US] and then build their houses [in the village]. We are the ones who are serving and we're killing ourselves to serve the *pueblo*." Non-migrants considered the inequities not only ideological but also practical and concrete. (Indeed, another reason the OPM wanted to do *visible* projects, beyond self-affirmation, was to stave off accusations that migrants were not contributing their fair share). Yet, the conflicts went beyond just sniping or envy between migrants and the villagers remaining. Rather, the tensions reflected a deeper political divide – and the tension sparked political action on the part of those remaining "behind."

Reconstructing Comunalidad

The village responded – as Santiago hints above – by defending communalism – and, with it, the duties of membership. From 2003 to 2005, with the support of a local NGO that advises indigenous groups, La Partida wrote a community statute to enshrine the links between self-governance, participation, and communal land. The statute – worth quoting at length – reads as follows:

The community of La Partida, District of Villa Alta, agrees to continue enjoying its land and natural resources in a *communal* manner, given that this is the way nearest to our way of life and form of community organization ... By communal landholding and a shared life, we understand:

1. Holding and benefitting in common from land and natural resources, of those that are communal property, while respecting the possessions [use rights] of each member and excluding smallholdings and private property.
2. Commitment to and care for the earth and natural resources.
3. Resolving problems in keeping with our own community norms, to seek or re-establish community harmony.
4. The participation of all members, in order to maintain the institutions that are central to this community, including *tequio*, the *cargo* system, *cooperaciones* (monetary contributions), the *fiestas*, the assembly, the way of life, and the heritage of the community.

By codifying its communal values, La Partida reasserted mutual obligations as an *active* politics, in direct answer to its perceptions of migrants in the United States.

Re-asserting communalism required redefining what equality meant, now that the community, which had once been defined by its land and borders, was dispersed into the United States. At stake was not simply a conflict between what La Partida residents

wanted and what their migrant counterparts thought they needed, but rather a systematic set of values about what membership means, and what is owed to a community. Ignacio, an urban lawyer who counseled La Partida in developing the statute, describes the clash the village faced in trying to define the meaning and value of “community”:

One thing that goes deep down in the community [of La Partida] is the idea of equality. So everyone says, ‘You’re from here – do you have land here? Then you [migrants] have to be treated equally to us’ ... But then when you want to make equality concrete, you realize it’s not possible. The community of La Partida is much broader than its own borders. So there were many discussions. They said, ‘Let’s see, lots of people have family in the US. But those of us who are here, we benefit from the services in the community, so we can’t demand the same obligations from those who are elsewhere ... So should we give them equal treatment or what should we do?’

If the village wanted migrants to continue to be able to be members (and indeed, it *needed* them to!), it had to consider what an equal contribution would mean, from afar. How would they sustain the *cargo* system, when people were not around to serve?¹⁰⁹ Could they expect such sacrifices, even from those who no longer benefitted from local land rights and mutual aid? Yet, changing the structure of communal obligations, or allowing for different members to make uneven contributions, threatened participatory governance at its core.

The village assembly resolved these quandaries by deciding that community membership *did* extend across borders and that migrants would therefore be required to participate. Its specific demands of migrants started in 1988 and evolved over time. In 1986, several of the village’s first US migrants received legalization through the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, and the village realized they would probably settle in the United States. Therefore, the village made membership in the OPM – which had to that point been voluntary – mandatory. Any migrant who wished to continue considering himself a member of La Partida would now be expected to “participate” via the organization. At various points, La Partida also attempted to insist that migrants return to serve *cargos* back in the village, on the premise that paying others to do so would commodify the public posts and cheapen the meaning of community service. Nevertheless, as I discuss further on, they ultimately accepted payment in lieu of personal services.

To enforce these demands, the village began implementing a series of sanctions on the *renuentes* (black-listers). First, leaders harass family members left behind. When migrants return for visits, they also call them to the town hall and demand fines of US\$100 per year for each year not paid. If they refuse, migrants are thrown in jail (a fate

¹⁰⁹ Across Oaxaca, different communities have adapted their participatory structures in various ways, setting up hometown associations; obliging migrants to serve as political appointees, either from afar or by returning; and imposing fees, fines, and taxes on migrants (Kearney and Besserer 2004; Stephen 2007; Ventura Luna 2009). Like La Partida, several have tied opportunities for transnational participation to sanctions that threaten to revoke migrants’ citizenship rights and symbolically “expel” migrants who fail to contribute to community life (Mutersbaugh 2002).

I witnessed on numerous occasions) and in some cases asked to do *tequios* to make up for their negligence. Finally, if the non-contributing migrants do not return, the village may cut off electricity, water, and sewage to their houses in the village, and ultimately expropriate their remaining properties – even if contributing family members still occupy the residence. One afternoon during my fieldwork, for instance, 30 men in La Partida marched out with their machetes to the home of a *renuente* to start fencing of his property for return to the collective. Likewise, Rosalia, a migrant living in LA who rarely participated in the OPM recounts that when she went back to La Partida to build a house, the village refused her access to running water and threw her in the town jail. They told her, “Here, only the people who have worked and contributed have rights, but you don’t contribute, you don’t help, and you [migrants] just come to help yourselves to what’s already here ... You won’t answer as a citizen of the *pueblo*.” Tomás, who still lives in La Partida, explains, “If people haven’t done community service or contributed, they can’t be in the *pueblo*.”¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, logistically, La Partida relied on its counterpart in Los Angeles: the OPM. The migrant organization, ironically, enforced the very policies intended to bring migrants in line. Thus, the OPM had a large say in defining “participation,” monitoring whether migrants contributed their annual fees, attended fundraisers, participated in bimonthly meetings, and served on the organization’s governing board. To do this, the OPM developed a statute of its own, codifying similar communal practices in Los Angeles, despite migrants’ ambivalence about participation. This “Statute of the Organization for the Improvement of La Partida” lists at length every obligation expected of a member of the OPM, as described earlier in the chapter. While migrants do not always follow this statute to the letter, it does act as a guideline. During my Los Angeles fieldwork, I regularly saw members of the organization knocking on other migrants’ doors, checking off their list whether each family has purchased its allotted number of tickets to the upcoming dance. Then, they report back to the village. As one resident of La Partida explains, “Since they have the organization in Los Angeles, we just call and we ask, ‘This guy, what has he done? Has he lent a hand with you?’

Because they play this mediating role, OPM leaders wield significant power over other migrants. Maria, for instance, retains nearly 30 years worth of event tickets meeting invitations, and other proof of her own and others’ work. She uses this evidence to intervene with the village on others’ behalf, when she sees fit. She tells me:

I have helped people when I have seen that the *pueblo* treats them unfairly. Once I went to protest to the village government for a friend, because she had even lent us [the OPM] her house when we had to cook, let us use her gas, her stove, and she helped us, and then when she went back to the *pueblo*, sick with diabetes, they wanted to make her work ... But [when I intervened] they told me, ‘OK, and it’s good to know that’ [and then said to her], ‘You are free, woman, you can go.’ But if she hadn’t had proof that she’d helped out and that she was current with her contributions and all that, well, they might have forced her to work, because those are the obligations of a citizen.

¹¹⁰ They face what Tad Mutersbaugh (2002) has called “civic death.”

By contrast, when the village incarcerated someone Maria felt had not contributed adequately, she told the person, “What do you want me to do for you? When I invited you to participate in the organization, you refused. So now I can’t help you at all.” Likewise, despite their initial spirit of mutual aid, OPM leaders were wary to offer help for migrants who had not contributed, including, during my fieldwork, a single mother diagnosed with an aggressive form of sinus cancer.

While some in OPM served as enforcers, the organization also mediated La Partida’s transnational communalism in a second way: advocating *against* having so many demands placed on migrants. When the village insisted that membership entailed obligations, migrants fought back about what equity meant, arguing that they were not receiving equivalent benefits to those back home, and that – especially given the difficulty of returning to serve *cargos* – the hometown demands and sanctions were unfair. Migrants told the hometown assembly, “It’s not possible. We leave [the village] out of necessity. We can’t leave our [US] jobs from one day to the next, and it’s really expensive to cross the border. If we come back, how are we going to get back into the US if we don’t have papers?” Others added that while the people living in the *pueblo* benefitted on a daily basis, migrants only came to visit two or three times a year.

Furthermore, several migrants considered *cargos* a “backward” politics and encouraged the village to “modernize” the system as a whole. Alejandro tells me, “We [migrants] have been fighting, because we don’t want to accept *cargos* ... We contribute, we give money to all of them, and we’re in good standing – but then when we get back, when we return to the village, to have to return to the level of their *cargos* and all that, we lose a lot.” Therefore, migrants encouraged leaders in La Partida to replace *cargos* with technology and paid public service. When I ask Santiago what that might look like, he announces:

There are ways! ... There are like five or six people who go to sleep outside the church [as guards], because that’s what history says ... and I say, ‘Why the devil do those poor Christians have to go sleep there! Let’s put a camera and an alarm on the church, and who the hell is going to enter?’ and they say, ‘Damn Santiago is really Americanized (*norteamericanizado*), that maniac.’ But it’s not a stupid idea. Same thing in the schools: camera and alarm, and if something happens we’ll all leap up when we hear the alarm. And you’re eliminating *cargos*, right? ... And why the devil do I have to be on the school committee if I don’t have a child there? Finally, they took away that *cargo*. A round of applause; we’re advancing! Everyone used to have to be on the school committee for the preschool, the primary school, and the secondary, but I say if your kid is there, you do it. We’re advancing, but then there are lots of *cargos* that they could still get rid of, with no disrespect to our *forebears*.

For people like Santiago, changing the *cargo* system represented not degradation but progress.

With this attitude, in 2004, migrants froze the portion of the community statute

demanding they serve *cargos*. Incensed with the village's rigidity, representatives from each hometown association (the OPM as well as its sisters in Mexico City and Oaxaca City) gathered in Oaxaca, took a bus together to the village, and protested, proposing that instead of having migrants come back to serve themselves, as the village had proposed, each organization contribute funds to *hire* people for two or three *cargos* per year. While the village wanted people to sustain the *practice* and *value* of public service, in migrants' eyes, hiring others would serve two purposes: it would allow them to fulfill their civic duties without leaving the United States, and it would help to provide income to those remaining in the village. Santiago, who led this mobilization, explained:

This politics [when the village demanded that migrants return to serve *cargos*] is what has held them back. Why? It doesn't allow us to advance ... People have to leave their work here [in the US], their family here, their reason for being, their trucks, their horses, their donkeys, their fleas – everything. And then they leave for 12 months to do a *cargo* ... That's turning backward! ... If they [the villagers] do that, they themselves will force the OPM to disappear.

For Santiago, the statute's demands were backward.

Migrants understood this leverage, and they used it – along with the village's discourse of “one *pueblo*” – to their advantage. For instance, Guillermo, an elderly migrant in Oaxaca incensed at the village's sanctions on “reluctant” migrants, tells me:

They're crazy. They might do it, but they're exposing themselves. They're exposing themselves, because ... They need things from us, the people who are outside; when there is need, the *pueblo* sends – the town leaders come and say, ‘We're one single *pueblo*; it doesn't matter if you're in Mexico City, if you're in Los Angeles; it doesn't matter if you're in Oaxaca. It doesn't matter to me where you are; it's one single *pueblo* and because we're one community, we want you to support us’ (*laughs*).

The village's ability to manipulate the concept of “community member” only went so far; its dependence on migrants made it susceptible to their influence. Ultimately, the village found itself in a Catch-22: although it wanted to “re-communalize” migrants, it depended on them for resources, and they had different interests.

To resolve this conflict, the village had no choice but moderate its demand that the traditional *cargo* structure remain intact. Thus, while extending the system to those in the United States, the village also changed it. First, La Partida reduced the total number of *cargos* by about half and lowered the number of years spent in each *cargo* from three to one. Second, as migrants had proposed, it financialized. In the 1990s, when the state government began providing money for civil servant stipends, the village insisted that its tradition was unpaid service, and redirected the money into public works. Yet, over time it acquiesced in paying stipends, distributing the government funds among those who served. La Partida also agreed to commodify public participation, allowing members to hire paid substitutes in *tequios*, for a cost of about US\$15 per day, and in most *cargos*, for about \$3000 to \$5000 a year. Third, La Partida accepted the OPM's demands that the

organization as a whole fund substitute *cargos* instead of having members return themselves. This monetization meant *cargos*, which had historically been given to the most well off villagers to equalize wealth, would now fall primarily on the poorer members of the village, because they were unable to employ hired hands to serve their *cargos* for them. Indeed, if they needed extra money, the poorest might end up *being* those hired hands, serving even more *cargos* than they otherwise might, had the system rotated among villagers. Ironically, the commodification also meant that migrants would literally been funding the ongoing functioning of the village government. To sustain communalism, La Partida had to change it. In the next section, I explain how the other biggest change, in addition to commodification, was the inclusion of women.

Redefining Gender from Afar

Migrant women's central role in the OPM hometown association gave a complex gender dimension to these political struggles. Surprisingly, women migrants served as the founders, key leaders, and most active members in La Partida's HTA. In doing so, women like Maria and Alma defied expectations. They had left La Partida to escape patriarchy, felt empowered in the United States, and never wanted to return, so it seems only logical that they might distance themselves from the home village (Jones-Correa 1998; Goldring 2001). Likewise, the literature suggests that *men*, who face a relative decline in social status upon arrival in LA, more often join hometown associations to regain lost status and wax nostalgic about their return (Jones-Correa 1998; Goldring 2003; Fox and Bada 2008; Smith 2006). Nevertheless, on my very first visit to an OPM event, I instantly notice that the whole organization is abuzz with women, who race around setting up plates and drinks, and checking that members are in their posts. Readily acknowledging they're more willing to contribute than men; the women, like me, wonder why.

Becoming leaders in the OPM, I came to realize, gave women a way to demonstrate their independence from men in the United States, as well as to share their ideas about "modern" gender roles with the village. In the late 1970s, when perhaps ten women and three men founded the OPM, all aspects of government back in the village – including all public works and "development" projects – were run exclusively by men. Many of La Partida's first migrant women elected to leave the village as young teenagers precisely to escape this control and gain independence. When I meet Raquel, one of these first migrants and a founding member of the OPM, she is wearing a gleaming red dress and barbequing heaps of meat in the wide alleyway beside her home in Huntington Park. From the start, she explains, the women of the OPM avoided sending their money to the formal village government, because it was all men:

Our first project was to restore the church, because the people there [in the OPM] were women. And we said, 'We don't want it [the money] to go to the village political leaders, because that's all men. Better it goes to the church.' ... The intention was never just for women, but for the *pueblo*. But when those first people said 'for the *pueblo*' they said 'No, we do not want to support the village government, because the government in the *pueblo* uses the men – and the single mothers, the single women, the widows – for *tequio*.' Instead they said, 'OK, the

church needs help and we are going to form this organization, but helping the church. And when they raised money it was only for the church.”

Given that the women wanted to support “their *pueblo*,” the church provided virtually the only institutional alternative to the all-male government. By sending money to the church, the women demonstrate their objections.

However, as increasing numbers of men migrants arrived in the United States, women had to struggle to sustain this vision – as well as female control of the HTA. Raquel adds that in the late 1980s, men migrants announced that the church fundraising was “for women” and that instead, La Partida’s government had requested money for the annual village festival. At first, women agreed to help the men raise this money, in addition to their own ongoing activities. Ultimately, however, as Raquel puts it, “We come from a *pueblo* where *machismo* has triumphed. So if [women] propose ideas here, the men don’t want to accept it. [They say], ‘No. Just because we’re here [in the US], women aren’t going to tell us what to do.’” Intimidating the women by saying their dreams of church restoration would never come to fruition, the men insisted that they hand over nearly \$21,000 they had raised and saved. The women refused. Maria recalls:

We were willing to help them work for the town government, but not with all that [our] money. Through thick and thin, we had worked hard for that money. The sleepless nights when there was a dance, and we had to go wash a mountain of dishes afterwards, or having to go around selling tickets, holding raffles ... It was as if someone had made a beautiful cake, and the cake has gotten so big, and someone else comes and says ‘I want that cake.’ ... So all the women who didn’t want to give up the money signed a statement saying we would not keep working with them ... There were 18 of us who signed, I think – basically those of us who started all of this, who were always the ones who worked the hardest.

When they refused, Raquel adds, the women told the men, “You men don’t contribute; you don’t do much. Instead we women are just going to send this money for the church. ... We don’t want to work with you if you’re going to try to control things.” The women felt that their own dedication to the village gave them the right to control the funds. They also refused to let the men “tell them what to do.” Therefore, for a few years, they formed a separate, female-only organization.¹¹¹

Surprisingly, women’s active contributions convinced leaders in the village government back in La Partida to *encourage* them to serve as leaders in the HTA. As migrant men refused to contribute, migrant women and the village leaders reached out to each other for help. After the church project, Maria remembers, “We [the OPM] started coming up with more and more ideas to help the *pueblo*, and that’s when the village government found out and they started to ask for help.” Thus, despite their initial

¹¹¹ The fate of the \$21,000-plus dollars remains a mystery. Maria insists that behind her back, the men withdrew it and sent it to the village government in their own names. Santiago, on the contrary, suggests that Maria (and perhaps a few other women), kept it for herself. The resulting conflict left the women bitter and disillusioned.

orientation, the women agreed to begin aiding the village government as well. When I asked Maria whether she faced discrimination from the male leaders back in the village, she explained that, on the contrary, they had been her allies in putting pressure on migrant men. Twice, she recounted, she went to the village president in La Partida to complain about migrant men's failure to participate:

I had to go talk to the presidents a couple times to tell them that just as they asked for our [OPM women's] support, well, we wanted their support, too, with the people who didn't want to contribute. To tell them it's an obligation. I think that [migrant] men have more obligation than us women¹¹² ... and I told him [the president], us women are contributing more than the men. It's as if it's harder for [migrant] men to submit to us women. What can we do with them? If you want support, then help us make them do their part. [The village leaders replied], 'You women should rule, because you wear the pants more than us men. Just take a hard rod and make them do it.' 'But how?' I asked them. 'They [the US men] say that we have no authority to make them contribute, and it's hard to fight with people that are like that and don't want to help. I don't know what's in their heads. They think they're going to stay here their whole lives and they won't need any help from the *pueblo* ... but it's hard for us women that the men rebel against us and protest' ... The village leaders said that we women have more pants than the men, and we should stay firm and not let the men control these issues, because men are like that. 'You [women] are right.'

Realizing that they needed all the help they could get, the village leaders made gender concessions, not only accepting but even encouraging women to be involved in the OPM.

In the 1980s and 1990s, as more female migrants arrived, they joined the organization precisely because of this insistence that women contribute, too. As Mariela puts it, "My fellow villagers started insisting that I go. They said, 'Come on, because you have to contribute (*cooperar*) and you have to help out (*ayudar*) ... People count on you.'" Invoking terms associated with the *cargo* system, the village convinced women to join. Mariela adds that once she was in the organization, "I understood that we women had to go too, that women can do it. Like right now we're three women that are in the *cargos*! [the OPM leadership positions] (*laughs*)."

In June 2011, while I was doing fieldwork in Los Angeles, an upstart group of younger, migrant women, including Mariela, "took over power," convincing the OPM to oust its male leadership and install an all-female cast in its place. The women denounced the men who had previously been leading the OPM as incompetent, framing the event in explicitly gendered terms. Renata the new 33-year-old president, calls me on the phone the next day, railing against her male predecessor's attempts to blame her for mishandling collective remittances:

Don't think I'm going to accept this because I'm a woman! Don't think that

¹¹² When I ask why, she explains "In *Usos y Costumbres*, it's the man who has more obligations in the village government, to carry out *cargos* and all the hard work."

because I'm a woman I'm going to let him blame me for his mistakes. I'm not just going to lie down and let him walk all over me! He doesn't know me! I am a household head. I am the one that supports my family; that's me. ... He made me so angry, Abigail! I said, 'Look, Eduardo, you're a man. You should get some pants and tell the truth ... Just because I'm a woman, I'm not going to say OK it's my fault. I did it.' Imagine accepting, or letting him do that to me – blame me for something he did. How would I look in front of everyone? Bad!

Renata brought her influence in the household to bear in the organization, to refuse ongoing gendered biases and demand gender equity in the HTA.

This second wave of women used their fundraising ability to demonstrate their influence and “prove themselves” both to their male counterparts in the United States and to men back home. One afternoon during my fieldwork, I meet Mariela, now serving as OPM treasurer, and Renata, as president, on the pristine white floors of the Mexican consulate. When I walk in, there is Mariela, high heels clicking and fifth grade education level be damned, as she and her three, female compatriots meticulously write down details about a \$50,000 grant they hope to win, to rebuild the primary school back home. Mariela says that when she first arrived in the US, she avoided participating in the OPM because of “the men's machismo.” But, when I ask if she still faces sexism from fellow migrants, she replies:

No, not so far, because we know how to defend ourselves. We're demonstrating that we can do it. Even more with this 3x1 project, though it's taken a ton of time and it's broken our heads into pieces trying to fill out that paperwork that we don't know how to do. But we're getting there. Imagine, Abigail, if we get this 3x1 [program] money – if we prove that we're going to do this project, to rebuild the primary school. It's 50 years old, and then it gets rebuilt? It's a luxury we're going to give ourselves, if we achieve this project (*laughs*), a great luxury. To show that we women are capable, first. Second, that you can reach new heights when you want to, when you struggle for it – because there's always help; it's just a question of going after it. As always, there are men that think that women can't speak up, that women can't express their opinions. But no; there we are.

By 2012, the women had raised more than US\$50,000 to rebuild the primary school and obtain matching government grants. As he watches the school open, Santiago reflects, “La Partida is living the height of its own democracy, of its own history – it's at the summit thanks to the fact that it's had women ... you don't see machismo any more.” While this is likely an overstatement, the women's leadership was indeed beginning to change things.

The migrant women's new leverage over programs, however, made some men feel they had lost their masculinity. Male migrants often grumbled, calling Renata – the new president – “that damn old lady” or criticizing her for unseating her male predecessor. Back in La Partida, some men were bitter as well. Otilio, who had served as La Partida mayor in 2000, describes:

What you see now, I think, is that the men are afraid of women, afraid that at some point one of the women is going to take charge here [in the village] ... The men of La Partida are really defeated, because they got a woman [as OPM president]. They say, ‘*How* can it be that this damn old lady is telling us what to do?’ They’re waiting for her to make mistakes so they can take her down.

Migrants’ interventions threatened not only collectivism but also masculinity. The traditional political structures were tied to an understanding of gender where being a *man* meant serving public duties, while women remained at home.

On the other hand, women’s efforts in LA helped inspire male migrants who had returned to La Partida – including Alejandro and Juan, the disillusioned migrants I described at the end of Chapter 6 – to advocate for gender change in the village. Even though these men chose to go back to La Partida as a way to reject the United States, they took an idea of gender equity along with them. While they believed the village promised an *alternative* to the US system in general, they felt that one lesson it *could* take from the United States was about gender equity. Alejandro ponders this goal as he packs up his LA apartment to return to La Partida, reflecting, “One of the things I really want to go fight – if I ever get to have a *cargo* in my *pueblo*, I’m really going to fight for it – is [gender] equality. I am really going to struggle against domestic violence, because there has been so much machismo there, right? And here [in the US] I learned to live with a different vision.”

While few activist women remained in the village, the actions of Renata, Mariela and their colleagues in the US inspired sympathetic men in La Partida to fight for similar changes back home. Esteban, another former migrant in his 40s who had returned from Oaxaca City to serve as village treasurer, provides an example. One day, he beckons me over to the town hall to tell me:

I’d like to talk with you about the participation of the migrants’ club [in LA], because there you talk about gender equality, and they are almost all women. Something beautiful happened in the United States: the women took power ... What really gets my attention is that when there were men [in those positions] they never took advantage of the program [3x1], and now that three women head the group, they’re doing it ... I’ve told my *pueblo* that we have to advance equality between men and women. We just had the assembly to elect new leaders for 2012 and they told me ‘We want you to be president.’ I told them ‘Yes, but only that I’m not going to want male councilmen; I am going to want women.’ ... They think that women still are not capable of being town leaders, and I tell them that’s not true, and that the clearest example is what Renata and her *compañeras* did [in LA], that women can do it as well as us – or better.

The example of the women in LA helped lay the groundwork for gender changes back home. Yet in the village – with most of the community’s more actively “feminist” women living in LA -the shifts would be driven by men.

In summer 2012, after my fieldwork had concluded, a small set of returned male

migrants began to demand gender equity in the village assembly, citing the example of the women in LA and convincing those back home to restructure La Partida's electoral system so that women could vote, for the first time in history. They were led by returnees from the US like Alejandro and Juan from Chapter 6, as well as others like Esteban, quoted above, who had returned from within Mexico – men who disliked the unfairness of the US, but also the inequity of gender in the village. When the votes were counted, the person elected president turned out to be a woman: Isabel Vega. In a twist literary enough only for real life, Isabel was the seventh daughter of long-time, outspoken village feminist, Claudia. The next time I visit Claudia, though she is now at least 75, she bounds around her small cement patio, her gray braids bouncing as she madly swats flies from her faded blue dress, telling me, "It's high time that women ruled! How we have fought for this!" Leonel, another returned migrant, more soberly pronounces, "We have made history here in La Partida, Abigail."

Nevertheless, some villagers – including the elected president herself – remained ambivalent. For one, women's participation in *cargos* had long been associated with the imposition of a Liberal, individual rights frameworks "from the outside" onto a context of collective obligations.¹¹³ Therefore, even though migrants and returnees saw women's inclusion as a symbol of equity, for several women, political participation was an unwanted imposition. In surveys, 55% of women in the village said they would prefer not to attend the assembly.¹¹⁴ Indeed, even when given the choice to participate, I never saw one woman attend. Ignacio, the advisor to the village, explains that the Oaxaca state government's efforts to mandate women's participation in indigenous politics had "had no effect" in La Partida. In 2004, during the process of formalizing the community statute, Ignacio encouraged the village assembly – its primary decision making body – to include women. The men agreed. Yet, he tells me:

The *women* said it was not the moment, that there was too much to do and they couldn't have the whole family in the assembly ... After lunch the women said, 'No, we'd rather not return. We don't want this to be an obligation or a right to come to the assemblies, because coming the whole day – no, we'd prefer not to. Let it be optional. Or have women come in the morning and if we want we can come back in the afternoon ... So, it was the women themselves who, later, said, 'No, we'd rather not – because it's too much time and too much work to be coming to assemblies.'

Women refused, they tell to me, because they believed women and men should have separate and complementary duties, and the didn't want the burdens of work in a whole new sphere. As Victoria puts it, "I don't go [to the assembly], because my husband goes. No, we [women] don't go. That's the custom: the woman doesn't go. If she doesn't go, it's because it's our way that men go, not women. Us women only participate in women's things." Others explain that making women participate felt like an insult, and that to

¹¹³ Scholars in the 1990s and 2000s heavily debated whether individual women's rights and indigenous collective rights are contradictory (see Danielson and Eisenstadt (2009) for a review).

¹¹⁴ Women who stayed may have been selected on such "traditional" attitudes, as women with more feminist views elected to leave the village.

demand that women do *tequio* was failing to protect them, or “treating us like we’re worthless.”¹¹⁵ Isabel Vega was one of those who dreaded this triple burden. When Claudia called her daughter to advise her that she had been elected as village president, Isabel cried. She wouldn’t do it, she said, though her mother insisted. The “right” to participate would sit uncertainly, still, with the burdens of La Partida’s communal life.

Communalism and the Refusal of “Development”

Despite this gender ambivalence, sustaining communal practices gave La Partida tools to manage not only migrants’ abandonment but also its ongoing relationship to the Mexican state. If we consider politics to be the means by which groups retain value and resist exploitation (Kearney 1998), La Partida’s communalism provided an “active” politics on several fronts. Ideologically, its direct democracy and mutual aid provided a concrete set of political and economic practices “outside” capitalism. Practically, the communal structure also gave the village tools to confront efforts by migrants, the Mexican state, and corporations to marketize and individualize collective life.

Those remaining in La Partida took what many have called an “anti-development”¹¹⁶ stance, seeking to protect themselves from the ideological project symbolized by migration. Symbolically, they drew lines demarcating their attitudes and distancing themselves from migrant “gringos.” While we might expect migrants’ interest in individualism, consumption, and money to appeal to those in the village, respondents in La Partida defined their own values through contrast. Naila, a traditional healer in her 30s still living in La Partida, delineates what she sees as the differences between indigenous people in the *pueblo* and “gringos” (whom she conflates with “migrants” and “people in the city”):

Gringos dedicate their lives to money, and we don’t. It’s different; gringos just want lots of money, lots of money ... that’s why the gringo advances. You guys raise them that way from the time they are small. To be – to have money ... The city is just – well, there are a lot of advanced things, everything in bags, everything packaged and all, but the gringo comes to inculcate that in the indigenous people. He comes to tell us that these are good things, that you have to eat [processed] foods made in the United States.

Tomás, who has worked to revitalize Zapotec language and culture in the village, likewise suggests that “the system” – primarily in the form of the Mexican government, but also in consumer media, is undermining indigenous values, reflecting, “They’re training our children to consume, not to produce. That everything they know is worthless. ‘All that you are is worthless,’ that’s what they say ... They’re finishing us off because of our customs, because of our ways of thinking. Through the television, through the Internet,

¹¹⁵ Holly Worthen (2012) describes a similar reaction in a nearby town, where, when the state government sent a mandate insisting that women participate in village politics, women themselves wrote a letter back refusing and saying that the government did not understand the indigenous political system.

¹¹⁶ In line with scholar/activists such as Arturo Escobar (1995) and Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash (1998), who suggest that development is a project of ideological domination by the North and that communities should protect themselves by pursuing autonomy from this destructive system.

and all. The media. The kids are paying attention to that.”

The feeling of threat that Tomás and Naila express – that people were becoming increasingly egotistical and individualistic – was reiterated almost daily during my six months living in La Partida. Villagers regularly reflected that (US) corporations were profiting by instilling consumerism in young people, denigrating Zapotec customs and sense of self-worth, and encouraging villagers to migrate. Coca Cola offered a particularly constant reference point. Yet, the critique itself provided the grounds to advocate for something different.

First, the community assembly helped people in La Partida vigorously challenged individualism and degradation from within. The village’s management of returned migrants provides an illustrative example. Each time someone came back from the United States or urban Mexico with an individualistic “gringo” attitude – or even worse, a deportee provoked violence – the village used *cargos* and *tequios* to re-indoctrinate them back into the communal, Zapotec way of life. Tomás gives an example of a time in the early 2000s there what he calls “nonconformities”:

For instance, someone [a migrant] would return and they [villagers] would give them a *cargo* right away, and the person would protest. He wanted to continue wandering around the street, free. But then the [towns] people come and they explain, ‘OK, who do you want to do what you have to do? Us? Doesn’t it make you feel ashamed that we would do your tasks, with you wandering around as if you were broken? (*como si no sirvieras*) (*laughs*).

Rather, the village insisted that people do *cargos* to re-adapt to village life. Mario, who lived in Los Angeles for nearly 20 years, and was deported in 2009 for drug use, explains how this affected him. When he returned to La Partida, he describes, “I had to start from the bottom. To go to the village leaders and say, ‘This is what happened.’ I had to promise to stop drinking and using drugs. And I had to do lots of *cargos*. I was already guard at the town hall, and now I have to be guard at the church – lots of *cargos*.” Yet, the obligations also made Mario feel productive and taken care of. Staffing his newly established hot dog stand in the town center, he tells me, “Take a picture of me! I want my boys [his two children still living in Los Angeles] to see that I’m working, I’m not like I was there.” And when I ask if he wants to leave the village again, he replies, “Now I have everything I need: I have a home, I have food. I don’t want to go to Mexico City because there’s a lot of crime there, and here it’s calm.”

The “*cholos*” – the villagers’ word for young troublemakers deported from LA who began drinking, fighting, hitting innocent people, and generally causing havoc in the village – were more difficult. Yet, while Retorno was undone by such returnees, La Partida took a strong stand, throwing the migrants in jail. Roberto, who served as village president in 2010, describes how when a group of *cholos* returned in 2000, the assembly decided to give them *tequios* and send them to jail:

There was a time when there were a lot of drunk young men [back from the US] and the *pueblo* had to put them in jail. We said, ‘If you don’t have work to do, we

have some for you here, and we gave them a few days of *tequio* as a punishment. And fines, too. From *tequio* to jail, then back to *tequio*. *Tequio* is a way to straighten the young people out (*enderezarlos*).

Collective practices served as a technique of ideologically “straightening people out,” and villagers report that there have been no problems since.

Externally, assemblies and solidarity helped the village limit corporate interventions that might be degrading. Efrén tells me:

Thanks to the *pueblo*'s organization ... we can defend ourselves. So, when a big company wants land, wants this, wants that, we get together to talk, to see if we accept it or not ... For instance, the television antenna here, the company told us that we had to give them land to set it up. So, we called a meeting to discuss if it would be a good thing to have TV here or not. As a *pueblo* we decided that yes, it would be good if we had this kind of communication with the city, and we accepted ... There were people who said it was not good, that the television brings in outside culture. But most people said yes, so we let them install the antenna if they paid us taxes for the use of the land. The company had to pay. And there was an agreement that after ten years, if the *pueblo* decides the company has to pay more, we'll negotiate a new agreement.

Assemblies helped La Partida collectively name the terms on which they would let corporations and “outside” culture in, enabling them not only to limit television but also to do things like prohibit litter and plastic bags, or charge fees of merchants traveling through the town.

In particular, politically, this cohesion helped La Partida manage its relationship with state funds and development programs.¹¹⁷ In the late 1990s, when the community started receiving funding for its civil servants from the state and federal government, instead of fighting over the positions for their own gain, its citizens gathered and voted to pool the stipends and redistribute them among all 55 members serving *cargos* in a given year. The assembly also monitored civil servants very closely, aggressively denouncing any who appeared to mismanage state funds. One past president tells me, “People criticize you for everything, thinking you’re making a business out of everything. They check your accounts, they check everything, and if something comes up they put the evidence before the group and charge you a fine, and if they’re angry, then to jail.” While such funds were divisive in other villages (Eisenstadt 2007), La Partida’s communalism helped it avoid such a fate.

The communal structure also provided tools to resist cooptation by political parties, such as what happened in Retorno. Whereas political parties often play patronage role in similar communities, people in La Partida repeatedly insist, “There are no political parties here.” Why? Because “Political parties come in – you’re red [PRI],

¹¹⁷ As Laura Nader (1991) shows in *Harmony Ideology*, a book about a neighboring village in the 1970s, the principle of unity vis-à-vis outsiders has long helped Zapotec villages avoid state interference.

I'm yellow [PRD], and it's divide and conquer." Yet, people in La Partida sustained suspicion by discussing such events in their village assemblies. In 2011, when a senate candidate came to speak at the village festival, they heckled her, yelling, "Who is this women to come and tell us what to do in our *pueblo*?" Because La Partida was so wary of cooptation, it solicited almost no development resources from state agencies, beyond the standard municipal funds. Whereas Retorno had dozens of state programs running at a time, in 2010 La Partida had only one, for chicken coops, and in 2011, it had none. Residents had never heard of any NGOs or microfinance institutions operating in the community.

Economically, La Partida's cohesion gave it leverage over the process of capitalist development in the village. In particular, the community statute provided a tool – and assemblies helped encourage individuals – to avoid privatizing land. For several decades, the Federal and state government had relentlessly been pushing land privatization.¹¹⁸ In particular, starting in the early 1990s a state program called PROCECOM (Program to Certify Communal Lands) came to La Partida several times a month to inculcate ideas of private property and induce people to convert communal lands to smallholdings. For instance, PROCECOM bureaucrats would give each villager a "certificate of rights" within the communal lands; map and measure villagers' parcels; talk about communal land as if it were smallholdings; and provide fencing and other dividers.¹¹⁹ Ignacio, La Partida's adviser from the indigenous NGO, describes:

The village leaders have felt a lot of pressure. Even in these years, the *Procuraduria Agraria* [state land agency] is insisting, insisting, insisting with them. They call them to meetings on the topic; they go to visit them; they tell them the [land certification] program is going to end and that if they change their minds later they'll have to pay to join the program ... They say that if you don't enter the certification program now you're not going to have access to projects (development funds), tree projects, reforestation, etc ... it's a daily pressure, every week, every two weeks there is the bureaucrat telling them to join.

These concrete markers created an *impression* of private property, degrading the status of the community as a whole. In response, the village used its community statute not only to codify migrants' role, but also to put its communal practices and landholding into writing, reminding both members and the government of their collective rights. Thanks to the statute, Ignacio adds, "Now even the young people are really, really enthused. They [including several returned migrants] are the ones who have gone around the village on foot, marking off all the old land demarcation points, interviewing the elders ... and they made their own map of all the [communal] lands." The reinforcement of communal values helped protect the shared resources.

La Partida has also sustained its forests by refusing to privatize. In the 1960s,

¹¹⁸ Despite the fact that legally, communal land like La Partida's cannot be privatized, starting in 1992 President Salinas de Gortari's revisions to Article 27 of the constitution created loopholes to make this possible.

¹¹⁹ Stephen (2005) describes a similar process in a nearby community.

70s, and 80s, several nearby villages lost their communal land, because paper companies,¹²⁰ promising to “help” the villagers raise money, greased the wheels of the state privatization process and then bought out the newly titled individual landholders. Archives suggest that during this process, La Partida repeatedly held assemblies to remind villagers not to be deceived by these promises. Pablo, a village councilman, recounts, “There is wood [here]. They [corporations] have not exploited the wood, and we have worked hard to conserve it ... No company has touched it. They have wanted to, but the *pueblo* is very bull-headed and they say no. Now, on the contrary, the young people want to reforest more; there are places where their grandparents planted corn in the mountains, and they want to put more trees there.” Communal organization has also enabled the village to pass a ban on cutting down trees and call *tequios* to plant additional trees any time the government does so, such as in 2010, when the state widened the road that passes through the town. Today, they often boast that they maintain one of Oaxaca’s only “virgin” forests.

While La Partida’s cohesion buttressed it from outside incursion, it also sometimes proved detrimental to the community. For one, cutting themselves off from state and corporate sources of income may ultimately hinder the village’s self-sufficiency. During my fieldwork, the Ávila family was striving to start a business making wooden craft animals to sell to tourists. While they hoped to get grants from the state government to develop their business, the village’s resistance to state funds blocked their way. Daniel Ávila, the head of the family, complains: “Sometimes the village leadership doesn’t want to lend themselves to help people – and that’s frustrating.” Similarly, the village doctor Gilma, who came from Oaxaca City and had been working in La Partida for three years, complains that the community leaders were too wary to sign a proposal that would have gotten them more free wheelchairs than any other village in Oaxaca. Its bull-headedness sometimes left the village deprived of important resources.

In particular, government programs related to women’s rights and domestic violence were sticking points. Doctor Gilma goes on: “I have asked for permission to come speak to men in the assembly, to talk to them about domestic violence here, but they won’t give it to me. The problem is they’re very *machistas*; they’re afraid of a woman who speaks up.” The federal and state governments had repeatedly used the discourse of (individual) women’s rights to discredit communal indigenous practices (Hernández Castillo 2001; Newdick 2005). Inasmuch as women’s rights aligned with those promoted by “outsiders” like migrants, urban doctors, and state development programs, the village’s relationship to gender inclusion and resources remained particularly fraught.

Conclusion

La Partida’s story illustrates that while history serves as a reference point, communal practices are neither inherited nor destroyed in any straightforward way; they must be reinvented. Indeed, they *are* reinvented by migrant communities in the face of new geographical mobility and new, individualizing values. The irony of La Partida’s ongoing communal structure, of course, is that it depends on the very migrants whose

¹²⁰ Specifically Maderas de Oaxaca (see Bray 1991).

influence it aims to mediate. While the village has created a remarkable space outside of capitalism, the future of this ideological project hinges on its ability to find ways to stretch communal identity and belonging across borders, to draw migrants in, and to adapt, to some extent, to their demands. Migrant money, ironically, has helped protect its anti-migration counterpart. Migrant influence, however, has also helped to change the village, especially in the realm of gender, and even in ways that have made women back home wary. As fewer people leave – especially given the growing difficulty of crossing the border and the limited job prospects in the United States – and migrants grow increasingly detached, particularly in the second generation, it is unclear whether their “will to improve” the village will be enough to continue giving La Partida the advantages that communalism has long provided. To do that, as important as autonomy has been in the La Partida’s history, the community may have to seek a politics of connection as well.

Conclusion

Over the last three decades, migration has bonded Rosa Delgado, Maria Ramirez, and their indigenous Oaxacan villages to life in Southern California. Their stories reverberate across Mexico, where 96% of communities, plagued by market-oriented state policies and the resulting crisis of rural subsistence, now record outflows to the United States (OECD 2006). More than half the country now has at least one close relative on the other side of the border (Cornelius 2009). Migration therefore plays a central role in Mexico's economic and political future. Relying on more than US\$23 billion in family remittances and facing the return of almost 450,000 people a year, its government has increasingly sought to channel these "flows" to productive use (Passel and Cohn 2009; Iskander 2011). Yet migration also has implications for politics, shaping the struggles staged in home villages and their visions of "alternative globalization" (Evans 2008). Even in the most remote Mexican communities, the meaning and direction of "development" cannot, now, be understood outside of their relationships to the United States.

Meanwhile, on the US side of the border, more than 22 million people currently live and work under threat of deportation, in every state of the nation. Nearly two thirds were born in Mexico. They perform jobs fundamental to daily life in the US, producing food, caring for homes and children, and doing the grueling, dirty, and difficult work that US citizens often reject. Yet, because they are marked "illegal" they remain politically disenfranchised, economically exploited, and increasingly sick, segregated, and poor (Massey 2012). As of 2010, three quarters of all Latinos in the US were afraid of deportation, and Latinos had become the most segregated group in America, their wages falling not only behind whites but behind blacks as well (Massey 2012). Never before in US history have so many people living within the nation lacked basic political rights (Massey 2012). Yet, at the same time, these migrants mobilized immense social protests, fighting for the opportunities afforded to citizens of the United States. Declaring themselves "undocumented and unafraid," the protestors called into question the system of migrant "illegality," as well as the fear it had fueled.

The interplay between development and migration, in turn, has been closely tied to the transformation of gender relationships. While it is clear that moving North can "empower" migrant women in some cases, scholars have also realized that labor migration is complex and contradictory, and moving across borders can also subject women (and men) to entrenched class, gender, and racial marginality. What's more, the *idea* of "women's empowerment" may be used to legitimate demands that women work more and harder, with fewer rights, such that, in Nancy Fraser's (2009) words, "The dream of women's emancipation is harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation" (110).

Migrant communities' ongoing politics will shape the ongoing *articulations* of development, gender, and migration. On the Mexican side, migrants' investment and involvement will influence processes of development or decay and the politics of "alternative globalization." On the US side, at a moment where migrants are increasingly shunted to the margins of society, their mobilization will help decide whether they gain recognition or get thrust into a growing "underclass." Across borders, the gender

dimensions of those politics will shape whether – and where – people can tie gender equity to democratic representation and redistributive justice.

Theorizing the Mexico-US Interplay

To date, the vast majority of literature – along with the “common sense” of most Americans – frames this transformation of Mexico-US relationships as a process of “immigration.” In this view, immigration is an event, in which members move “from” one side “to” another in a linear act. We hear little about the importance of development, or the interplay between the two ends over time. In particular, the focus on the act of migration obscures the effects of the sending-side political history that precedes it, or the political role Mexican villages come to play afterwards, in relationship to the United States. Instead, the vast majority of research focuses *either* on development (the hometown) *or* on migration (the receiving end), separating these processes from each other and failing to probe the deep interconnections between places, across geographical space. Thus, they miss patterns and politics that can only be understood by examining the relationships between the two ends over time, far beyond the “transnationalism” of things, money, and ideas that “flow.”

Meanwhile, despite calls for attention to the co-constitution of gender and migration (as well as race!), analyses of this relationship often get reduced to an “impact model” as well. Thus, research focuses primarily on whether migration “empowers women,” obscuring the ways specific, geographically-situated migration pathways get *articulated* – and political struggles waged – in racialized, gendered terms. Looking at migration as a single “phenomenon,” this framing does little to consider the distinct political practices and local interactions that shape how these relationships play out, with crucial implications for migrant communities.

Articulating Migration, Gender, and Development

This dissertation has argued that we must think about the relationships between Mexican sending communities and their US destinations as a set of unique ties between particular places. It also shows how the process that links sending and receiving sites fosters different articulations of gender, migrant status, race, and class. Thus, I reframe the interplay between Mexico and the United States as relational, dynamic, and comparative. So doing, I make several theoretical contributions to the fields of migration, development, and gender, each of which corresponds to a distinct methodological approach.

First, I examine migration relationally. Looking at migration as a set of relationships shifts the way we think about it, at a few different levels. For one, I focus on communities rather than individuals and states. Most immigration studies take as their unit of analysis either macro-level processes or individual and household factors. By contrast, I look at how communities (and receiving cities) – embedded in local and national political contexts – forge political institutions and practices that mediate broader political economic forces and translate their effects into distinct individual practices and actions. In rural Mexico, the community is the salient social and political unit organizing

migration, particularly through social networks. In the United States, increasingly, cities and counties mediated the power exercised over undocumented migrants, weaving them into different political economic arrangements at the local level. Thus, on both ends, the local state is a key site of study (cf. Hart 2002).

Methodologically, this means examining, ethnographically, how local practices shape migrants' behavior and understandings of their positions in their home villages and in the US cities to which they come. It also means interviewing people not as "representatives" of a common process but instead as related *members* of a community, who engage with, defy, and support each other in unique ways in the process of migration. And, it means observing relationships and negotiations within and across communities, such as between women and men, between migrants and non-migrants, and of migrants with the people they work for and live among.

Second, the relational approach requires attention to the *articulation* of - that is, the interrelationships between - gender, race, migration status, and class. I have shown that the meanings of masculinity and femininity - along with the meanings of ethnic and class difference - emerge in distinct ways at the community level, and that the expression of these registers of difference is fundamental to understanding the process of migration. Whereas theories of "intersectionality" frame gender, race, and class as independent structures, external to the people they affect, I argue that the expression of each cannot be understood separately from the others - or from the particular contexts in which they take on meaning. While migration almost always transforms members' understandings of masculinity and femininity, bringing men and women into new roles, the meaning of these new positions cannot be understood apart from the historical constitution of gender, in relation to race and class.

The implication of this way of thinking is that we cannot read women's "liberation" off their jobs or the places they live; no one is, simplistically, "empowered by" the United States. Instead, women gain a sense of voice through the *actions* they take to defend their wellbeing, as both women *and men* develop new ideas of the kinds of communities they want to live in, and the kinds of lives they want to lead. What's more, men play critical roles in this transformation, as they, too, begin to see the importance of gender equity in broader struggles for social change. In any given site on a migration pathway, we cannot presume a particular relationship between gender, race, and class, or that these lines of difference "reinforce" each other in an additive ways. Rather, we must look at the contradictions and tensions between them - and the ways gender terms, in particular, may be used to both enable and disable the members of migrant communities. Methodologically, this requires tracing how the local meanings of difference get made, and the practices through which they change. Close attention to respondents' current interpretations must be placed side by side with historical documents, to show how people understand masculinity and femininity, over time.

Third, a relational approach also attends to the *transnational* interplay between origins and destinations, as specific places in the United States and Mexico produce each other. Whereas immigration studies often fall into the trap of methodological nationalism, comparing migrants and non-migrants from the same village as if migration were a

“treatment effect,” my approach, by contrast, underscores the dynamic relationships between them. I also move beyond existing studies of migrant transnationalism in that, instead of attending primarily to money, ideas, and people that *flow*, I look at how the meaning of place on one end of a migration pathway gets made, in relation to the other end. Thus, I make a theoretical effort to link the two ends and to underscore the co-constitution of sending and receiving sites. So doing, I draw attention to the long-term effects sending communities have on both sides of the border, due both to legacies of their historical development, and to their ongoing role as counterpoints to the United States. This transnational interplay is deeply political. While migration has historically been seen as a safety valve, *diffusing* protest, in my analysis, the comparison that migrant communities are able to make between places – the “dual frame of reference” – may actually *fuel* the politicization of Mexican communities, as they become sites of inspiration, dialogue, and alternative globalization.¹²¹

Methodologically, such a transnational lens requires multi-sited, global research, as called for by many scholars (e.g., McHugh 2000; Sayad 2004; Brettell 2007; Fitzgerald 2012). Yet, instead of *comparing* sites as independent units, as is the case in many multi-sited studies, this approach *follows* the interplays, tensions, and connections between places, both near to each other – such as Retorno and La Partida - and across national borders – such as each of these villages with its receiving site. Given the logistical and emotional challenges of obtaining such breadth, this transnational research requires time. But also, more importantly, it relies heavily on collaboration between researchers, who can support each other in learning about the deep histories that root each, related place.

Fourth, in addition to being relational, my approach is also *dynamic*. That is, I see migration as a historical process, with an arc over time. We cannot understand migration as an “action,” I argue, without tracing the historical processes through which communities mediate political economic pressures and shape the meaning their members make of movement. Even in a linear migration pathway, such as that of La Partida, a sending community does not just disintegrate as its satellite emerges. On the contrary, and perhaps counter-intuitively, migration helps sustain anti-migration dynamics, reconstituting communities on the sending side, even as it degrades them. Thus, as Mexican theorists like Esteva and Prakash (1998) and Barkin (2003) have suggested, the peasantry does not simply “disappear” but instead continues to play a crucial symbolic and political – if not material – role in the process of globalization. This dynamism goes both ways, as community members’ own actions shape the ongoing process (and among “community members” I include not just hometowns and migrants but also the residents of immigrant host cities). Thus “development impacts” is not a one-time effect but part of the ongoing expression of cross-border relationships. Methodologically, this historical lens requires that participant observation be combined with historical research – both archival and based on interviews – to root our understanding of contemporary dynamics in comparisons with the past.

¹²¹ Indeed, in the 1990s, rural Mexico – in the guise of the Zapatistas – was the nucleus of political inspiration for new visions of “alternative globalization” around the world, as the peasants defied political economic globalization and insisted, as one Zapatistas’ slogan says, “Another world is possible.”

Finally, my approach is *comparative*. Instead of seeing migration as a generalized process, I examine its *multiple* pathways, each distinct in its construction, reconstruction, and response. In the past, scholars have generally attributed differences in migration streams to migrants' social class, their historical timing, or the national-level political environment from which they come (as in the comparison between Cuban refugees and Mexican labor migrants). However, among otherwise *similar* sending communities, they tend to accept that different migration patterns represent *stages* in an otherwise similar process. By contrast, I contend that similar communities subject to the same historical process manifest and manage its constraints in unique ways. By studying sites in the same sending and receiving areas, I illustrate how widely different pathways can exist side-by-side, shaped by the character of local politics and by the interplay of sending and receiving sites. While I examine two such pathways here, there could be many different variations on this process, unique to the sites involved.

Methodologically, comparative analysis entails juxtaposing pathways we would expect to be similar, in order to reveal both the constraints of political economy, and the ways its effects are contingent on the *actions* communities take. This is *not*, I emphasize, a controlled comparison, in which “all else is equal.” Instead, it is a relational comparison, in which I examine how different groups of people, facing a *shared* process of transformation, shape its path. The similarities across such sites show us the limits imposed from above. Their differences, however, point to moments where the process is contingent, leaving space for alternative pathways and for political maneuver. By highlighting contrasts, such comparisons unseat the assumption that a particular trajectory is “natural,” questioning, for instance, the presumed inevitability of Mexican migrants' insertion into farmwork, or the expectation that migrant women will feel “empowered” upon arrival in the United States. Variations render each path particular and contestable, illuminating the role that members have to play.

The Framework: Community Migration Pathways

The framework I use to think about specific interplays and processes of migration – and that provides a roadmap for “what to look for” in other places and historical times – is what I call a “community migration pathway.” As I have shown throughout the dissertation, a community migration pathway has three moments, which, together, help us to understand *both* how history matters *and* how it is shaped by members themselves.

The first moment is the construction, or genesis of migration, which focuses on the political history that defines the meaning and pattern of movement, from the sending side. Here, I look at how local political practices mediate broader changes in the political economy, creating patterns in migrants' destinations and selectivity and giving a certain valence to the process of migration. In this moment, the gender dimensions of migration get *made*, as women, in particular, seek out the arrangements – within the alternatives available to them - that will enable them to be least subject to combined oppressions of both gender and class. In addition, I examine the important analytical influence of step-wise migration, as migrants develop (or cannot develop) *options* for new jobs and destinations as they move on to the United States.

The second moment is the *reconstruction* of migration, which is concerned with the local practices of domination on the receiving side, and the ways they reconstitute each pathway. While scholars have increasingly pointed to the importance of the state in forging migrant “illegality,” they have almost universally focused on *law*. Yet, as is increasingly becoming clear in a fragmented United States, state power operates at multiple levels, and city institutions are a key node in translating law into lived experience. Particularly in places and around issues that are embattled – as is immigration in the contemporary United States – the *implementation* of laws by local institutions like the police (or the refusal to implement them), can be definitive in shaping the logic of state power, imposing coercion or generating consent. Therefore, to understand a migration pathway, we must look at how local logics of control produce distinct subjectivities among migrants, making some feel abject (excluded), as in Retorno and others feel like subjects, as in La Partida. Rather than being inherent to this process, “assimilation” and “women’s empowerment” are locally produced as goals that, even as they provide material benefits, may also obscure ongoing marginality along *other* axes, particularly when tied to good/bad binaries. Finally, these distinct subjective reactions shape members’ ongoing movement to and interactions with the hometown, leading them to depend on or distinguish themselves from it, and giving people a new idea of the kind of *pueblo* (people and village) they want to create. While in my story, both North County San Diego and Los Angeles *entrenched* the pathways in the respective sending villages had begun, in other places and among other groups of people, the process of reconstruction might involve a transformation of or deviation from the trajectory in which the migrants started out – such as converting a temporary pathway into a permanent one, should migrants from a place like Retorno find their way into urban areas of the United States.

Finally, the third moment of a migration pathway is the response, in which I examine how members on both sides of a transnational community pursue what Rosa Delgado or Maria Ramírez, from the Preface, might call “freedom”: the autonomy and wellbeing to pursue lives they have reason to value. Importantly, as Maria and Rosa expressed at the outset, members’ primary goal in this process is not simply material wellbeing (as studies of both migrant incorporation and rural development often assume) but instead dignity, or the capacity to shape their own lives. In the moment of “response,” I look at the ways people build “alternative hegemonies” in the face of domination, transforming, opposing, and rebuilding the political power structures that have defined the places they started from, as well as those they encountered on the receiving end. As *pueblos* (people and places) become unstitched across space, they may wage what Karl Polanyi (1944) called a “double movement” striving to re-create collective, democratic, and participatory “traditions” that defy the fragmenting, individualizing logic of the contemporary political economy and moderate its destructive effects. Understanding such responses entails rejecting a static understanding of hometowns, to see how Mexico provides space for political maneuver. As communities become mobilized, they may target their efforts at the United States, but politics may also cross borders. In this moment, as well, both “development” and gender take on new meanings, not just because of the remittances and ideas that get sent “back,” but also, and perhaps more importantly, in relation to the *active* project of re-embedding community.

The pathways of Retorno and La Partida illustrate two distinct versions of this process, highlighting the variations among, and historical and geographical particularity of, community migration pathways. Retorno, as I showed in Chapters 2-4, developed a pathway of migration characterized by return. Its migrants left out of deprivation and debt, driven to farmwork to subsist – but also constrained by its structure to continue in agricultural jobs. Then, on the receiving end, the criminalizing logic of North County San Diego kept them excluded and terrified, effecting a double subjugation of women and fueling the process of return. Yet in response, the village forged a transnational movement, democratizing, demanding resources, and involving women for the first time.

By contrast, as I illustrated in Chapters 5-7, La Partida's pathway took shape around departures. In the hometown, a long history of redistribution gave migrants choices about when and how to migrate – as well as where to go – enabling women, in particular, to leave the village behind. The networks they built linked them into LA's urban service sector. Once in the United States, they developed a partial sense of belonging based on the local moralizing regime – which framed them as “good immigrants” – and women, in particular, felt a sense of freedom, choice, and capacity in the United States. Yet their appreciation for the US also obscured the injustices of their ongoing disenfranchisement. Finally, the separation between migrants and those back in the village sparked tensions, as migrants sought to “bring back” US ways, while the village refused, rebuilding its communal practices in response.

Taking “Community Migration Pathways” on the Road

While migration from Mexico to the United States is the largest international migration stream in the world, with 20% of contemporary international migrants living in the United States, marketization and “development” are also undermining communities worldwide, and, in conjunction with the demand for low-wage labor, forging similar interconnections across the globe. In the last two decades, Mexico-US migration shifted from being concentrated in Western Mexico and Southwestern US states like California and Texas to reaching every state in Mexico and the US (Massey 2012). Meanwhile, migrants increasingly left their homes in the Philippines, India, Turkey, and elsewhere to work as domestic servants, construction workers, and farm hands, not only in the United States and Europe, but also in the Middle East, as well as in nations of the Global South (Lin 2014). From 1990 to 2010 international migration grew 65% worldwide (OECD 2013). As of 2013, 232 million international migrants (3.2% of the world population) – along with hundreds of millions more internal migrants – live outside of their communities of origin. While they are not all labor migrants like the people of Retorno and La Partida, many live in places that subject them to political exclusion, economic exploitation, and social control.¹²² Around 10 to 15% are undocumented (IOM 2010). Millions of sending communities, in turn, are reshaped by their movement.

¹²² In the case of China, where somewhere between 150 and 250 million rural migrants work as low-wage labor in urban areas, this control comes in the form of the *hukou* household registration system, marking the migrants as excluded outsiders even within their own nation.

The community migration pathway framework gives us a theoretical tool to understand the interconnections that develop between specific sending and receiving sites – as well as to consider the prospects for politics. On one hand, the relationship between indigenous Oaxacan villages and their destinations in California is a unique expression of this process. Oaxacan communities are unusually cohesive and politically active, and they arguably sustain a deeper interplay due to this cohesion, and to Mexico’s proximity to the United States. Nevertheless, even members of sending sites that are *not* communal are likely to seek “freedom” in their own terms, as they confront the degradations of living, excluded, as migrants outside their natal homes. Indeed, as the pathway of Retorno suggests, village-level “democratic traditions” – indeed, the very *concept* of “community” (or here, “*pueblo*”) – may, in fact, get *invented* in answer to the exclusions of migration. Oaxaca and Southern California may also be distinctive in the degree to which they vary at the local level. Nevertheless, this variation is analytically illustrative, drawing attention to political conditions that may matter for migrants’ paths on a range of scales. The community migration pathway can be taken “on the road” precisely because it is *not* a model that repeats in other places, but instead a framework for understanding relationships, which would be enhanced the more instantiations we understood.

Where this framework bears weight is in bringing the theoretical and methodological lenses of relationality, articulation, transnationalism, dynamism, and comparison to the study of development, gender, and migration. Around the world, it urges us to examine not just the act of moving but instead the interplay of sending and receiving sites and the articulation of gender, ethnicity, and class that emerge in each place. It also suggests that rather than seeking a *general* model, we consider the implications of distinct pathways – and of variations within and across them – in Mexico, the United States, and elsewhere.

Empirical studies suggest that similar patterns reverberate in other locales. In the United States, for instance, even though there have been few comparative studies of migrant “illegality,” empirical data suggest that criminalizing and moralizing logics of immigration control reverberate in other sites. For example, undocumented Mexican migrants in a rural border area, where they were more exposed to arbitrary police action like those in North County, experienced greater fear of the police and political and social withdrawal than those in nearby El Paso (Talavera et al. 2010). International studies hint at similar patterns; for instance Leerkes, Varsanyi and Engbersen (2012) note that undocumented migrants in the Netherlands from Eastern Europe face greater risks of social exclusion where policing is more rigid. Nevertheless, we can only understand a given community’s experience in the US in *relation* to the sending side. Other examples of Mexican sending sites (Goldring 1990) as well as of distinct streams of migration, such as from Ukraine to Italy (circular) and to the United States (linear) (Solari 2010) highlight how binational patterns, likewise, may reverberate in very different migration pathways around the world, each producing gender in its own ways.

Comparisons over time, meanwhile, also hint at how the relations between sending and receiving sites evolve. For instance, in periods of more criminalizing policies in the US, migrants experienced greater economic and social marginality (Calavita 2005). Thus, the ongoing criminalization of migrants in the US may further alienate them from

political activism and provoke a process that Jennifer Jones (2011), studying North Carolina, calls “reverse incorporation.” Likewise, Mexican government efforts to promote “development” and to include migrants in this process may shape how its communities relate to the United States in the years to come. As US and Mexican policy shift in the coming decades, they will have crucial implications for the prospects not only of Retorno and La Partida but also for the millions of other home communities, tied to the United States by circuits of migration.

The Prospects for “Freedom”

Where have these pathways left Retorno and La Partida, in the effort to promote their own “freedom”? The convergences in the two pathways – combined with the direction that US immigration enforcement has moved in the last decade – suggest certain reasons for despair. In the United States, both in relatively tolerant places like Los Angeles and in more hostile ones like North County San Diego, the contemporary moment in US immigration control has been defined by exclusion, coercion, and criminalization. Across sites, this trend has brought undocumented migrants downward economic mobility and increasing social isolation. It has also cut them off from circulating to Mexico, making it harder to access their hometowns as a site of politics.

Under this regime, *both* Retorno and La Partida witnessed a fragmentation between community members home and away, which may debilitate the kinds of transnational linkages that can help spur mobilization. Although immigration protests in the US seem promising, there are major hurdles to overcome in keeping migrants mobilized: on one hand, as North County San Diego illustrates, many migrants are afraid, discouraged, and focused on returning to Mexico, which keeps them silent. On the other hand, as the community of La Partida makes clear, movements for migrants’ rights must also overcome consent to existing systems of labor exploitation and immigration control.

On the Mexican side, rural villages have lost their economic foundations, so they have few resources to sustain members economically in the long term. Even though the Mexican economy has improved in recent years and US migration has slowed massively, those remaining in Mexican villages – or hoping to return – have few prospects for making a living in the countryside. Despite government efforts to decentralize resources, empower women, and “develop” such villages, their resources cannot sustain sending communities in their former incarnations. Therefore, both Retorno and La Partida rely on migrant remittances for support. Yet migrants have increasingly become cut off – either forcibly (in the case of Retorno) or by choice (in the case of most migrants from La Partida).

Furthermore, Retorno and La Partida each remain caught in their own vicious cycles. For migrants from Retorno, by the end of my fieldwork, life in North County San Diego was getting progressively worse: terrified, economically marginal, and socially isolated, nine in ten migrants wanted to return home. Yet fewer than one in ten felt this was economically possible, trapping them into a downward path. The orientation to home, however, helped them tolerate low wages and inhumane conditions, on the premise of one day going home. The migrants’ *political* withdrawal made this exclusion

even scarier, raising the specter of an underclass, socially and politically divorced from US life and willing to tolerate inhumane conditions due to their “mental exit.” Meanwhile, the hometown – where 92% of families still made below the minimum wage and 50% of residents relied on migration for their primary income (Cornelius et al. 2009) – offered little in the way of a stable alternative. While the development programs and state resources obtained in the FIOB’s struggle offered some relief, including infrastructure improvements, cash transfers for women, and small business programs where families could invest remittances, they promised few options for the kind of growth that would be needed to let Retorno’s vast population of migrants come home.

In La Partida / Los Angeles, meanwhile, the history of redistribution insulated members from the worst abuses by giving them choices among destinations. Living in LA brought concrete life improvements, especially for women, and drove 90% to want to stay in the United States. Nevertheless, these tangible improvements also helped form the groundwork for an ideology of assimilation, leading migrants to accept the legitimacy of current US laws and ultimately confining them to a very limited set of material, political, and social gains. The prospect of “assimilation” in Los Angeles also hinged on the binary between “good immigrants” and “bad immigrants” – as well as between women and men – dividing immigrants and even pitting them against each other. It also tied women’s feelings of liberation to their subordination in a racialized, class-divided system of migrant “illegality.” Thus, while much hope has been invested in US sanctuary cities as “emblems of social inclusion” (PICUM 2013: 9), in fact, they, too, sustain a migration regime that builds consent and fosters migrants’ ambivalence about their rights to have rights. In the meantime, villagers remaining in La Partida are now markedly better off than those in Retorno, with 35% making above the minimum wage and several able to get by working as regional traders. Yet La Partida, too, relies on remittances from abroad. Indeed, its entire communal political structure depends on economic and political contributions from migrants.

Nevertheless, despite these constraints, the variations between Retorno and La Partida, the contingencies in each pathway, and the creative answers they continue to construct also hint at promises for an “alternative globalization.” First, the historical emergence of these distinct migration pathways highlights the critical, ongoing importance of hierarchical and egalitarian political structures in sending communities, which, respectively, consign migrants to economic exploitation or foster possibilities. While these social formations appear “in the past” for Retorno and La Partida, similar arrangements will likely make critical differences for migrants around the world, and they may continue to matter here, as these villages remake themselves.

Second, while both North County’s criminalizing and LA’s moralizing regimes constrain migrant communities’ political dissent and keep them exploitable, these regimes are also unstable and contain slippages that allow communities to act. Some of these slippages may lie in the differences – and possibilities for communication – between the two sites. For instance, while the dichotomy between “good immigrants” and “bad immigrants” in Los Angeles may induce political quiescence, immigrants like those from Retorno sustain a deeply oppositional consciousness and a critique that could help to undermine the “criminal migrant” discourse that underlies *both* coercive and consensual

immigration control. In the meantime, exposure to LA's massive immigrant support structure might help migrants from Retorno realize that life in a regime like North County San Diego's is not the only way. When the state of Alabama passed the nation's most restrictive immigration laws in 2011, migrants reportedly fled for other states; such fluidity *between* locales holds promise for unveiling the possibility of escape, at least from the most despotic regimes.

Third, the political prospects and levels of activity look even more promising if we consider what migrant communities are doing *in Mexico* – and understand how political “activation” emerge in multiple sites, as people seek alternatives to the exclusions they face in California. Looking at Mexican villages in relation to the United States makes it clear that the people of both Retorno and La Partida *want out* - not only of the racism, stress, and fear they face in California but also of the fragmentation and individualization of their communities. Their Mexico-side actions reveal that the double movement Karl Polanyi predicted in 1944, in answer to the dislocations of capitalism, is already at work. In both locales, people are in the process of building emancipatory alternatives which, while codependent on migrants' low-wage work, also insist on sustaining the kinds of human relations that capitalism has begun to destroy (Gibson-Graham 2006). While indigenous political practices have often figured as “tradition” or “the past” in accounts of migrant community politics, the stories of Retorno and La Partida illustrate how people actively reinvent radical democratic practices – citing and resuscitating “tradition” to defend their contemporary wellbeing. With this politicized lens, migrants re-imagine Mexico as a place they can feel happy and free.

In Retorno and La Partida, such efforts have had crucial effects, democratizing effects, building collaboration (at least in Retorno) with broader movements for redistribution Mexico-wide, demanding resources from the Mexican state, and leading to material gains. Intangibly, meanwhile, the practice of resistance has given members a critical lens on their structural positions in Mexico and the United States. In Retorno, this came in the form of a transnational understanding of the interconnections between dispossession and exclusion. In La Partida, meanwhile, it leaned towards an insistence on mutual aid and communal ways of life.

Finally, and perhaps most amazingly, gender *did* get deeply transformed by migration, in both communities – albeit in different places and through different mechanisms than the vast scholarship on “women's empowerment” expects. These transformations emerged *not* through “exposure to the United States” but, instead, through the active political struggles for community, embeddedness, and wellbeing that I have described above. Having fought to sustain their communities, *both* Rosa Delgado and Maria Ramírez are far better off now than they were as children. Through their efforts to sustain their communities' wellbeing, both sets of women have transformed those communities as well, giving voice and vote to women.

Considering the Second Generation

While this dissertation has focused on the community-wide process of forging binational connections, and not the fates of migrants' children, my data suggest that two

aspects of the contemporary deportation regime are likely to reverberate among the next generation in Retorno/San Diego and La Partida/Los Angeles: first, the criminalization of migrants and second, the severing of ties between Mexico and the United States.

In Retorno, the current teenage generation is likely to be hamstrung by both of these shifts. Almost all of the young adult children in this migrant community were born outside of the United States, left in Mexico by their migrant parents until they came of age and could work themselves, or until their parents, finding themselves unable to circulate, brought the children over the border. Yet when they have migrated to the US, these young people have faced a much more hostile environment than even their parents experienced in the 1990s. On one hand, this means that they sustain similar critiques of US racism and exclusion, dramatically questioning the injustice of a system that keeps them almost like “slaves.” Yet, because of the new regime of enforcement, they cannot circulate or sustain the kinds of connections that fueled Retorno’s transnational movement against the interconnected oppressions they faced - as migrant workers, and as indigenous communities on the Mexican side of the border. Without such connections, Retorno may lose its cross-border political vibrancy.

Meanwhile, those remaining in Mexico may be constrained as well. Rigid US policing has blocked younger community members from coming to the United States at all, leaving them stuck in the village. It has also left many teenagers from Retorno subject to deportation, particularly young men. Already, several have been deported from North County San Diego merely for the kinds of minor shenanigans that characterize youth around the nation, such as drinking alcohol or drawing attention to themselves. When these young people go back to the village – like Julio, whom I described at the end of Chapter 4 – they clash with Retorno’s rural life. While this is the place they were born, having come of age in the United States, the young people do not see it as “home.” Unlike their forebears who were sharecroppers, these young would-be migrants have almost no employment and little to do. Whether they can make it in Mexico depends on their ability to avoid the temptation of drinking, drugs (as narcotics like methamphetamines have become increasingly prevalent in the area), and violence – requiring a combination of proactivity and a good deal of luck. Over time, education *has* become increasingly accessible to young people from Retorno (Cornelius et al. 2009), and several of them have recently gotten degrees as teachers, nurses or social workers in small cities nearby. But doing so still takes immense initiative, which we may or may not expect from young people excluded from the United States.

By contrast, young people of La Partida from the same generation have mostly been born in the United States. Because nearly all migrants from La Partida – including both women and men – came to California before marrying, their children were born in LA. Thus, while these children have grown up with the trials of having undocumented parents (along with another 5.5 million children in the United States, living in similar circumstances), they also have US citizenship. While these young people have much better prospects for rising out of the grueling jobs and social constraints faced by their parents, they, too, face racial exclusion targeted at the Latino community as a whole – as both race and “illegality” keep it segregated, discriminated against, and underpaid (Massey 2012). Their embeddedness in the United States may also shift their attention

away from the village of their forebears. While that village has forged an extraordinary communal structure, it has fewer young people of its own, relying heavily migrants' remittances, and whether the second generation can sustain such support – many having never visited their parents' hometown – remains in question.

Forging a Pathway Forward

What is to be done to limit these constraints and expand these promises? James Ferguson (1990) argues that poor communities are *already doing* everything they can to defend their wellbeing and forge lives they have reason to value. Indeed, Retorno, La Partida, and their fellow migrants have long been waging important political struggles. Whether these efforts can be sustained – or even expanded – hinges, for one, on whether their two visions can be connected. On the part of migrant communities, this means reaching beyond their own apparent “bounds” to sustain a critique of how exclusion on the Mexican side is tied to exploitation up north. It is likely that both Retorno and La Partida would be more effective in their struggles if each village took a bit of advice from the other – Retorno protecting itself from the degradations of the Mexican state and insisting on internal accountability and equality – and La Partida diminishing its insulation and reaching out, instead, to connect to other communities and understand the intertwining of marginalities on both sides of the border. For those in La Partida/LA, in particular, emancipation depends on un-doing their own departures, that is, the separations between them. In the US, building more of a dialogue with each other – as well as with US citizen communities – might begin to undo these communities' isolation and, along with it, the fear and the consent that are created in bounded receiving locales. Thus, each might gain a sense of the broader possibilities that exist.

These communities' futures also hinge on their relationships with *other* people, that is, on whether each can scale its politics up and out. Retorno's alliance with Mexico's left wing PRD party hints at such possibilities. While the PRD's electoral failure debilitated Retorno's efforts and fragmented its movement, in the future, particularly if other communities were willing to join, another such alliance might one day succeed in amplifying the vision of groups like the FIOB and enabling them to institutionalize their demands for state resources and expand their efforts at democratization. La Partida's community focus has kept it alive, but has also blocked it from building such broader alliances.

Finally, as this dissertation underscores, migrant communities are not the only ones who influence their paths. As hidden as undocumented migrants may be to many residents of the United States, in fact, nearly every household in the country eats produce harvested by undocumented Mexican migrants. Most also participate in institutions that rely on undocumented workers to care for and clean up after the rights-bearing citizens of the United States – both in their schools and workplaces, and in their own families and homes. Every time we eat a strawberry or a tomato, we might think of the worker from Retorno who picked that fruit, with a foreman screaming at him, threatening to call immigration control should he misbehave. And when we buy a shirt “made in America,” we might think of someone from La Partida, racing the clock to make piece rates.

One of the first things that US citizens might do is begin to actively implement our visions of a just society in our own cities and towns. The political economy of migration may appear insurmountable, even to those who sympathize with migrants' plights. But in fact, as I show here, people in each US city interpret, reformulate, and transform federal laws. Indeed, the current war around US immigration control is playing out on the local level, as cities and states propose thousands of bills and pass hundreds of laws around local immigration control. City-level advocacy and institutional practices are critical in shaping migrants' lives. Thus, while advocating for legal change is urgent at the federal level, it must be supplemented by on-the-ground action. Such practices not only affect migrants in the day-to-day, but also help to build "living" examples of how *else* things may be done.

In conjunction, as I have insisted throughout, we must dismantle the kinds of analyses that suggest migration coincides with "progress," especially for the undocumented. As this dissertation has urged, we might question the justifying effects of claims that being in the United States, *per se*, fosters "liberation," especially where gender is concerned. Furthermore, rather than simply denouncing states and cities that criminalize and coerce migrants "elsewhere," we might question the *multiple* logics through which contemporary migrant "illegality" comes to be. This entails interrogating not only the repression that has spread across the United States in the past decade, but also the discourses that appear friendly to migrants, such as to protect those who are "good." We might ask how these logics help to reinforce the criminalization of immigrants as a whole and their confinement to low-wage jobs and social and political exclusion. As we question the assumption of a linear path, we might also consider how good/bad binaries divide undocumented children from their parents, women from their husbands, and migrants from their hometowns, pitting people against each other instead of against their shared exclusion (Bosniak 2012).

There is much at stake in breaking down the divides between "good" and "bad," women and men, migration and development, and Mexico and the United States. Thinking about how US repression echoes and sparks reactions on the sending side might illustrate how "progress" itself takes on meaning in the specific, local relationships between Mexico and the United States. If we watch the interplays between these ideas, people, and places, we may begin to recognize the struggles that Rosa, Maria, and their companions are already waging. As we do, we may start to reimagine the location and meaning of "freedom," and the prospects for women and men, migrants, and the pathways of their cross-border communities as a whole.

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