

Gender Status and Position of Elderly Persons During Migration Processes in Chiautzingo, Puebla, Mexico

Condición y posición de género de personas adultas mayores durante procesos migratorios en Chiautzingo, Puebla, México

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ABSTRACT

Differential analysis of gender status and position was carried out among men returning from the Bracero program and their wives, who remained in the localities of origin in the municipality of Chiautzingo, Puebla. From an ethnographic approach and with participant observation, in-depth interviews were conducted with a sample of nine adults: five men and four women. In fulfilling their labor assignments, migrants experienced violations of their human rights that negatively affected their gender status and position, which improved upon their return due to access to resources and prestige. Intergenerational migration networks were created, covering up to third generations. Women were affected in their status and position by reproducing gender subordination in the domestic group and the community. The contribution of the women who remained in their locality during the migratory process and the continuity of unequal relationships were made visible.

Keywords: 1. social relationships, 2. masculinity, 3. subordination, 4. Sierra Nevada, 5. Chiautzingo, Puebla.

RESUMEN

Se realizó el análisis diferencial de la condición y posición de género entre hombres participantes retornados del programa Bracero y sus esposas, quienes permanecieron en su localidad de origen, Chiautzingo, Puebla. Desde un enfoque etnográfico y con observación participante, se realizaron entrevistas a profundidad a nueve personas adultas mayores: cinco hombres y cuatro mujeres. En el cumplimiento de sus asignaciones laborales, los migrantes sufrieron violaciones a sus derechos humanos que afectaron negativamente su condición y posición de género, las cuales mejoraron a su retorno debido al acceso a recursos y al prestigio. Se crearon redes intergeneracionales de migración que abarcan hasta terceras generaciones. La condición y la posición de las mujeres se vieron afectadas por la reproducción la subordinación de género en el hogar y en la comunidad. Se visibilizó el aporte de las mujeres que permanecieron en su localidad durante el proceso migratorio y la continuidad de las relaciones inequitativas.

Palabras clave: 1. relaciones sociales, 2. masculinidades, 3. subordinación, 4. Sierra Nevada, 5. Chiautzingo, Puebla.

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INTRODUCTION

Studies of transnational migration in Mexico generally favor regions with high rates of labor force expulsion. In the case of the state of Puebla, during the 1940s and 1950s, the Bracero Program (BP) policies facilitated the participation of peasants from impoverished communities in seasonal day labor in the United States (U.S.). The operation of the BP has been assessed differently; according to the vision of Durand (2007), the success of the program is associated with the negotiating capacity of the Mexican government in the face of the situation in the United States due to the latter's participation in World War II, thus requiring greater labor force. Despite the oil expropriation and agrarian distribution in Mexico, many peasants undertook this journey. In the first semester of 1943, 304 migrant workers from the state of Puebla enrolled in the BP (Durand, 2016). This figure increased throughout the existence of the program and involved members of households from various municipalities, such as Chiautzingo.

Hence the interest in contributing to gender and migration studies from an ethnographic approach, based on the experiences of those involved in such process, to analyze their social constructions, experiences, opportunities, and vulnerabilities, positioned in different gender statuses and positions, and understanding their relationship with gender assignments and relationships. According to Sánchez and Vizcarra (2009), “the relevance of these studies with a localist approach consists precisely in delving into the specificities of the cross-border migration phenomenon, in which the experience of men and women is taken as the axis of social analysis” (p. 224). Studies are still needed that analyze from a gender perspective the status and position changes experienced by the people participating in migration processes and social transformations. In the case analyzed hereby, people who were affected by the migration and return processes are considered, as is their current situation as elderly people.⁶

This article provides empirical and theoretical elements of anthropological and sociological studies of ethnographic nature that analyze migration from a gender perspective, through the subjectivity of the people involved in the migratory phenomenon. Likewise, this work is expected to contribute to the research body that considers the importance of making visible the differentiated effects of migration and return on those who migrate and those who remain in their communities of origin (Ramírez, 2009).

This article aims at showing how the migration process during the BP (1942-1962) differentially affected women and men—today elderly people—in their gender status and position, in Chiautzingo, Puebla. These effects are also associated with vulnerabilities related to the intersectionality of the gender, ethnicity, generation, and social class of the subjects.

This research was carried out in the years 2016 and 2017, focusing on cases of migrants who live in the town of Chiautzingo, Puebla. It is worth mentioning that said municipality was and is considered an important issuer of migrants. Gender perspective was assumed to approach the subjectivity of the participants on the factors involved in the studied phenomenon, through in-

⁶ “Elderly person: someone 60 years of age or older (...) This concept includes, among others, that of an older adult person” (OAS, 2017, p. 4).

depth interviews and participant observation. In the results, transformations in gender position and status were identified.

The first section presents the theoretical discussion built on the contributions of gender perspective, the analysis of social constructions and assignments, and the concepts of gender status and position and masculinities, which are central aspects to identify in the narratives of the interviewed women and men. Subsequently, the data of the research context and the elements present in the migration during the BP are included. Then the research methodology, the characteristics of the population participating in the study, and finally the analysis of the results and our closing remarks are addressed.

Gender, Status, Position, Masculinities, and Transnational Migration

Gender studies have developed into a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary research field within social sciences and humanities; this is where the concept of gender finds its origin, emerging from academic contributions and feminist movements. This notion has been discussed by authors such as Rubín (1986), who defined gender as “the set of provisions by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity and in which those transformed human needs are satisfied” (cited in De Barbieri, 1993, p. 149). Likewise, Scott (1996) identified gender as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, a primary way of signifying relationships of power in a specific time and sociocultural context” (p. 33).

On his part, De Barbieri (1993) addresses sex/gender systems as:

the sets of practices, symbols, representations, rules, and values that societies derive from anatomical-physiological sexual differences, and that provide the satisfaction of sexual impulses, the reproduction of the human species, and in general the relationship between people with meaning (p. 149).

De Barbieri poses this system as an object of study, which helps understand female subordination and male domination. Paulson (2016) points out that the gender system is present in the social relationships between individuals, societies, and the environment, and that it “regulates, structures and imbues with meaning and power the roles, relationships and practices that are carried out between human beings and the environment” (p. 100).

In sociocultural systems, the social constructions of gender are an objective and subjective reality that is continually recreated in specific societies, based on the meanings provided by the reproduction of the gender order, history, culture, and language of the given context, with its specific characteristics. In such a way gender must be understood “as a non-natural social construction” (Salgado-De Snyder & Wong, 2007, p. 516). This practice influences the gender assignments, social relations, and masculine and feminine identities derived from the cultural, economic, and social conceptualizations under which people develop.

Based on the theoretical and methodological contributions of multiple authors, the gender perspective can be understood as a tool that allows identifying and interpreting the power relations between women and men in a given society and historical moment, as well as in traditional sex/gender systems, as posited by Scott (1996) in his research on sociocultural conditioning. This makes it possible to show the unequal power relations that are reproduced in the households and

daily lives of women and men immersed in gender systems in force in their contexts, customs, and traditions.

Among the theoretical tools of the gender perspective, the concepts of *gender status and position* as proposed by Young (1997) are defined in the following way:

By status I mean the material state in which women find themselves: their poverty, their lack of education and training, their excessive workload, their lack of access to modern technology, specialized tools, skills for their jobs, etc. Position means the social and economic location of women with respect to men (p. 102).

These notions were constituted as theoretical-methodological tools to identify that women as a social category have unequal access to resources and power with respect to men in local processes of *social change or transformation*, from the *gender in development* approach. These tools are enriched according to the sociocultural contexts wherein they are used, as in this research, so as to analyze the status and position of men and women at different stages of their lives, particularly in terms of their access to resources such as work, income, housing, properties, access to land, among others (Alfaro et al., 1999; Young, 1991). Gender position is expressed through social recognition and prestige, which are distributed or assigned differentially between genders, where power relations and gender assignments influence, for example, access to paid work, the decision-making on resource management, and their own lives (Alfaro et al., 1999; Young, 1997). It is also important to analyze these aspects from the intersectionality of individuals.

Intersectionality is a theoretical-methodological approach that, according to Viveros Vigoya (2016), has become the expression made use of to account for the overlapping of power relations from various social categories, which:

consists in apprehending social relations as constructions arising simultaneously in different orders, of class, gender, and race, and in different historical configurations (...) in contexts in which the interactions of race, class, and gender substantiate these categories and confer them their meaning (p. 12).

From there that other categories also emerge where other power relations based on distinctions by ethnicity, age, or generation, in addition to those mentioned above, exist. The inclusion of this approach helps explain the social differentiation between individuals of the same community, who may have experienced the same event from a different perspective based on historical, social, cultural, and political facts, where “racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other systems of discrimination create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women” (Symington, 2004, p. 2). These oppressions condition their participation in the decision-making and negotiations on gender relations within the household.

According to Robichaux (2005) and De Oliveira et al. (1988), the household unit is a set of people united or not by ties of kinship, who share a home, organize their daily life and their reproduction, and where the existence of social relations between members is acknowledged, which can represent oppression for one person and benefits for another, within a situation of inequality.

In the studies on masculinities, the work of Viveros Vigoya (2003) stands out showing the diverse perspectives, interests, and theoretical-methodological approaches that, from diverse ethnographic studies, contributed with empirical elements on the construction of masculinity and territorial differences and cultural aspects of masculine identities and gender relations in Latin America. In relation to masculinities in migration processes, there are contributions from a gender perspective such as those of Montes de Oca et al. (2012), Díaz (2012), and Sarricolea-Torres (2017). Their research is based on the premise that masculinity is culturally constructed, such as that carried out by Gutmann (1999), who noticed that men will tend to follow established patterns that may vary in each society and will comply with gender mandates; the author also posited that there are diverse masculinities. An example of this are the assignments and stereotypes that lead men to identify with the duty to “get a job and be a provider for the household” (Be Ramírez & Salinas Boldo, 2019, p. 28), an issue that is generally associated with male migration.

In the migration process hereby studied, male mobility prevailed, since, according to Hondagneu-Sotelo (2018), “the implicit and explicit definitions of heteronormativity have been fundamental to the laws that govern the control of immigration” (p. 28). With this, male participation was reinforced in certain historical periods, emphasizing the differentiation between “the one who leaves,” and the members of the group “who stay” (Ramírez, 2009). Within the household, this led to decision-making associated with social constructions and gender identities linked to gender mandates that affect the relationships between women and men and, consequently, fit into the organizational systems of rights and responsibilities (Zapata et al., 2012).

The importance of women is highlighted in the various contributions of women-focused gender and migration studies (Ariza, 2000). However, Olivera Bustamante and Sánchez Trujillo (2008) show the scarce production around the resignification, modification, or reproduction of the subordination of women immersed in the migration phenomenon. Ramírez (2009), in his contributions on the labor trajectories of women married to migrant men, documented that when migrants establish new interactions and social relations in transnational spaces, changes in the gender relations within the household may arise.

In multiple population settlements in Mexican rural areas, national or international migration processes can be experienced by one person or by the entire household unit. Mobility is usually based on the search for better living conditions, access to employment, among other factors. Although the causes are diverse, the way migration is experienced is different for women and men. Therefore, the characteristics and dynamics of household units and the migration process in more specific contexts are worth investigating.

Research Context

There is a rich ethnic and cultural diversity in the 32 states and 2 457 municipalities of Mexico (Inegi, 2015a). Puebla is the eighth entity with the highest number of migrants due to the impoverishment of the population (Conapo, 2010). A person is considered to live in poverty when they are socially deprived in at least one aspect (education, health, social security, among others) and do not earn a sufficient income to satisfy their needs (Coneval, 2016). According to population

data from Inegi (2015b), the state of Puebla had a population of 6 168 883 people in 2015, of which 59.4% lived in poverty (Coneval, 2016).

The municipality of Chiautzingo—a word of Nahuatl origin standing for “in the small swamp”—is part of the metropolitan area of the state of Puebla. It is located in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada and borders the municipalities of San Felipe Teotlalcingo, San Salvador el Verde, San Martín Texmelucan and Huejotzingo (Inegi, 2015a). By 2010, Chiautzingo ranked 81st among the municipalities with the highest migration in the entity (Conapo, 2010), and it was in the Mixteca region of Puebla where the emigration of workforce increased the most in that period. Rural population predominates in Chiautzingo and it has high and medium rates of marginalization in the localities of San Lorenzo Chiautzingo (municipal seat), San Antonio Tlatenco, San Juan Tetla, San Agustín Atzompa, and San Nicolás Zecalacoayan (Sedesol, 2015). Differences can also be observed in the number of inhabitants by sex, which is associated with migration processes, mainly of men, which are historical; and there is a higher life expectancy among women. The total municipal population for 2015 was 20 441 inhabitants, of which 9 726 were men and 10 715 were women. As for the population of elderly adults, 1 571 people were identified, of which 718 were men and 853 were women (Inegi, 2015a).

The economic activities of the inhabitants of Chiautzingo are mainly the primary sector: family farming. Most of the household units own ejido (common land) or small property plots, in which they plant maize, beans, vegetables, and fruits such as peaches, pears, apples, tejocote, and others; among the commercial crops flowers stand out, especially open sky and protected roses. The agricultural food products they produce are destined for self-consumption, while the surpluses are sold in the municipalities of Huejotzingo, San Martín Texmelucan, San Salvador el Verde, and Puebla (Inegi, 2015a).

In Chiautzingo and other neighboring municipalities, migration is not a new phenomenon as it dates to the beginning of the 20th century and was directed to the urban areas of central Mexico, with little incidence of illegal migratory movements towards the United States. At no historical moment have Mexican migrant workers enjoyed equal treatment in relation to local workers. Labor relations, the type of work they perform, or the benefits they can access, are modified based on the migration policies established by the governments of the nations to which they migrate.

METHODOLOGY

Facts and their problematization are the starting point of all scientific research. In this case, a qualitative research approach with a gender perspective was chosen. In the fieldwork, the ethnographic method was used, which consists in recording cultural knowledge by means of a holistic analysis of society and the detailed investigation of interaction patterns (Barrantes, 2013). With this method, the description or analytical reconstruction of the interpretive nature of the culture, the ways of life and the social structure of the community to be investigated is also achieved. However, qualitative research is not linear, as in its process the researcher decides and chooses, becomes a starting point, and conducts the research from their perspective, experience, values, expectations, motivations, and also from the environment in which society develops, with

its complexities, traditions, customs, conflicts and diversity (Rodríguez et al., 1996). Gender perspective was a breakthrough in the analysis of this information, based on the factors that intervene in the status and position of the people involved in the migration phenomenon.

Processes experienced by women and men who today are elderly people were investigated, based on the concepts of intersectionality of gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, kinship, and generation, which influence existing and new social relations (Viveros Vigoya, 2016). Transnational and return labor relations in the community and the household unit were also analyzed, as well as in other organizing axes that place individuals in differentiated positions, to which are added the rearrangements in the household unit and the community (Zapata et al., 2012).

Participant observation techniques were employed, and in-depth interviews were conducted. An in-depth interview is a face-to-face conversation between the researcher and an informant, which aims at “understanding the perspectives that informants have regarding their lives, experiences or situations, as expressed in their own words” (Robles, 2011, p. 40). An interview guide was designed, built from the literature review that frames the research and observation of the social context. This guide was tested and adjusted; once changes were made, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and systematized for analysis and interpretation. Through classification in codes, the discursive tendencies that were analyzed considering the contributions of the gender perspective and the social constructions of women and men were identified. In the discourse analysis, the experiences of people and the ways they provide them with meaning from their subjectivity and identities were accounted for (Rodríguez et al., 1996).

Through participant observation, places were identified in Chiautzingo where elderly people converge, such as the municipal presidency, the health clinic, the market, the church, the main square, among others, so as to make significant discoveries; a research log was prepared. From 21 in-depth interviews, the testimonies of four men participating in the BP, and an undocumented migrant from the next generation, with equally undocumented migrant sons and daughters, were chosen in order to contrast differences between migration processes. The testimonies of three adult women, wives of migrants, and that of a woman with undocumented migrant children were also selected; their names were changed for privacy purposes and informed consent was obtained for the use of the information. The choice of these testimonies made it possible to include former participants of the BP and others who did not participate in it, but who reflect the influence on the increase in migration in the following generations and who resorted to undocumented migration, which allowed evidencing the existence of networks of intergenerational migrants.

Interviewed individuals provided their testimonies collaboratively. The size of the sample was defined once reaching theoretical saturation, through a qualitative sampling by reference chain (Mendieta Izquierdo, 2015). Informants were identified by means of the “snowball” technique, which consists of selecting an initial sample and identifying new people from the population participating in the study, who the informants recommend interviewing; this way, a qualitative sample of individuals who share similar characteristics is obtained. Table 1 shows information on the characteristics of the interviewees.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Elderly People Interviewed
 Who Participated in the BP

Name	Current age in years	Marital status at the beginning of the migration process	Year of migration	Age at the beginning of the migration process	Year of return
Fabián	82	Married	1952	19	1958
Eduardo	84	Single	1953	19	1961
Santiago	84	Single	1954	19	1958
Celestino	84	Single	1954	17	1956
Juan	65	Married	1986	30	2003
Azucena	78	Married	-	15	NA
Ernestina	82	Married	-	19	NA
Luisa	80	Married	-	17	NA
Georgina	70	Married	-	30	NA

Source: Own elaboration (2020).

This study included participants with experience in the BP, as well as the wives of migrants who participated in the program, whose ages are generally over 70 years old. Most resort to private medical services to treat conditions such as diabetes; women, on the other hand, resort mainly to Seguro Popular (popular insurance)⁷. As for schooling, most participants studied some grades of primary education; women had fewer years of education. The men who were single at the beginning of the migration process married during it; currently, three of them are widowers. The women interviewed were also married; today two are widows, another was abandoned by her husband and her marriage was dissolved, and the fourth still lives as a couple. The household units to which they belong include daughters and sons, averaging five.

RESULTS

Among participants, the decision to emigrate was associated with the need to provide, given that in their place of origin families faced precariousness and poverty, lack of access to arable land as main means of production, unemployment, and low wages as day laborers. This situation led them to consider migrating to the U.S. as a temporary alternative of employment, access to economic resources, and opportunity to acquire goods and means of production, as evidenced in Celestino's testimony.

I am the eldest son, the young man of the family, and I felt the need to go out and work because we were very poor, and we still are, but not the same as then. As a child I was always barefoot or wearing huaraches [leather sandals], they bought me shoes only for school, but

⁷ Government health program that was still in force during this study's fieldwork.

huaraches for day to day, taking care of oxen, donkeys, and sheep (Celestino, 84 years old, San Nicolás Zecalacoayan, personal communication, May 25, 2017).

This testimony reflects the poverty endured and the exercise of the male mandate to work and be a provider. It is a social construction influenced by culture, identity, class, and kinship, through which masculinity is demonstrated. Stating “I am the eldest son, the young man of the family,” affirms the trait that generally remains one of the main social assignments, and which shows that men will tend to follow gender mandates, as proposed by Be Ramírez and Salinas Boldo (2019) or Gutmann (1999). However, masculinities are multiple and depend on the status of individuals, and on the context and society where they live (Kimmel, 1998).

The BP was disseminated through advertisements in the main national newspapers and on the radio (Durand, 2016), in addition to mouth-to-mouth communication in peasant communities. The hiring of workers was advertised as taking place in nearby government offices:

In 1954 I heard on the town radio that they were hiring people to go and work in the United States. When I found out, I asked my father for permission and went to Puebla to sign up; from there they sent me to Mexico City, to continue there with the paperwork and get to the border (Celestino, 84 years old, San Nicolás Zecalacoayan, personal communication, May 25, 2017).

The son's depending on the father to make decisions and the father's exercise of power over the son's decisions reveals the intersectionality of gender, kinship, and generation by interweaving power relations from various social categories (Viveros Vigoya, 2016). Simultaneously, the immediate availability of young men to undertake the tasks required is shown.

Given the recurrence of migration in Mexico, the migratory phenomenon has been extensively studied, which has made it possible to identify “a series of trends and continuities, (...) which, qualitatively speaking, also outlines a configuration of social conditioning factors derived from their status as men” (Montes de Oca et al., 2012, p. 87). The economic shortages of the migrants' communities of origin and the dissatisfaction of basic needs within households induced the migration process of men and provided them with alternatives to respond to gender mandates as providers, these being the main causes of the observed phenomenon. Upon learning about the possibility of migrating, local young men were willing to participate.

I couldn't miss that! I did the paperwork and finally got my permit. There were countrymen who did not get permits, many borrowed money to do the paperwork, promising to pay when they were in the U.S., those people even cried (Celestino, 84 years old, San Nicolás Zecalacoayan, personal communication, May 25, 2017).

According to this testimony, those who were not accepted in the program showed anxiety, desperation, weakness, and impotence in the face of rejection, even crying, which contradicts the idea that such expressions are exclusive to women.

The selection and recruitment process of Mexican workers to obtain the temporary work visa for the BP demanded a specific profile: “legality, circularity, masculinity and rurality” (Tuirán & Ávila, 2010, p. 104); it implied being a young man, of rural origin, with knowledge and experience in agricultural matters. The requirements to join the BP reflected the intersectionality of social categories such as countries involved, migration policy, employer, and worker, which implied the

inequity of the relations between those directing the program and migrants. As Symington (2004) argued, these aspects reflect the oppression experienced by migrants due to different aspects of intersectionality.

The gender position of the BP participants was one of inequality and subordination due to ethnic, class, and even racial differences, due to racialization in American culture. Migrants had to obey the orders of the employers and wouldn't be hired again if they didn't abide by the rules. To formalize labor relations, "they created an environment of apparent legality and certainty for the braceros: the authorities and employers in the United States assumed the commitment to pay the round-trip transportation, provide maintenance during the trip and respect their labor rights" (Tuirán & Ávila, 2010, p. 104). However, conditions were not favorable, as pointed out by Santiago:

In the U.S. I worked as a seasonal worker, wherever they gave us work in the cotton fields, I remember they paid us per kilo collected and my hands ended up all peeled on the fingers. Imagine, a flower that you have to peel to remove the cotton (...) This flower is very hard and with tiny thorns, there was no time for you to heal because you had to work every day, no rest (Santiago, 84 years old, San Antonio Tlatenco, personal communication, May 27, 2017).

This testimony shows that, as pointed out by Tuirán and Ávila (2010), the legal aspects and labor rights such as access to benefits (rest days and health services) were not fully complied with in the program.

Work visas were provided at different points in large Mexican cities. At first, the BP process focused on the Federal District (current CDMX), yet the Mexican government eventually gave in to the demands of its U.S. counterpart to recruit from other cities, a change that violated the original agreements (Durand, 2007):

First, we enlisted at the [Secretariat of the] Interior, in a park called Tolsá, in Mexico [City], and from there they sent us to Empalmes, Sonora, and from there to Puebla, at the [Secretariat of the] Interior. There they had a list and told us when to show up in Sonora, Monterrey, or Chihuahua, there were several hiring points (Eduardo, 84 years old, Chiautzingo, personal communication, May 25, 2017).

As brought up by Eduardo, workers traveled to the border on their own resources, an aspect of the BP that was not respected either (Tuirán & Ávila, 2010). The transportation of workers to different points near the northern Mexican border would have been a minor investment for the U.S. government; yet the selected and recruited braceros had to invest in transportation, present their applications and documents, and go through different medical examinations.

I had to present a lot of documents for the paperwork, all of that costed a lot of money and well, we didn't have any, we lived almost day to day. I had no choice but to go to Don Eusebio [the town lender] and ask him for 500 pesos (Santiago, 84 years old, San Antonio Tlatenco, personal communication, May 27, 2017).

Santiago reports having been subjected to various medical tests without prior authorization. For the employer in the United States, these exams guaranteed healthy and strong workers; on the other

hand, for the Mexican worker these were “shameful” or a “humiliating.” In the view of Viveros Vigoya (2016), this was a reflection of the asymmetric exercise of U.S. power in its relationship with Mexico executed through the BP, and that it violated the migrant in his person and masculinity.

Before taking the bus that would take me to the U.S., I had to go through a medical check-up and they stripped me naked, they checked my whole body, my teeth, my hands, and from my manly parts to my anus, it was very humiliating, but you had to do it if you wanted to work in the U.S. (Celestino, 84 years old, San Nicolás Zecalacoayan, personal communication, May 25, 2017).

The medical examination wounded the masculine integrity of these braceros. Connell (2003) argues that hegemonic masculinity arises from the male body, and so their gender status and position, as well as their masculinity, were affected and violated in that event, as pointed out by Alfaro et al. (1999).

For their employers in the U.S., braceros represented paying low wages to an available labor force that could be exploited and mistreated (Schaffhauser, 2016).

They made all of us workers stand in line, they asked us to undress, and together with our few things that we carried in our hands or a bag, they sprayed us with DDT as if we were animals (Eduardo, 84 years old, Chiautzingo, personal communication, May 25, 2017).

The testimonies of Eduardo, Celestino, and Santiago provide an account of racial discrimination and class exploitation, and violation of the human rights of migrants. They were subordinated and their gender position was in a lower hierarchical echelon than in their country of origin, besides having to pay the expenses of going to work in the United States. They found themselves defenseless as the laws of their own country did not protect them.

According to Fabián’s testimony, upon returning, braceros allocated the resources obtained to the acquisition of goods, which were generally administered by the head of the family, the wives also being under his protection and control and without the right to make decisions on resources. This describes the hierarchy by gender and age, as well as the inequality experienced by the migrant’s wife, based on the exercise of power by the migrant’s father, an expression of unequal relationships as posited by Scott (1996).

Although I was already married, I gave the money to my father, because he knew what to do with it; I gave my wife money as she needed it. We also bought several hectares of land, which I inherited in life to my children (Fabián, 82 years old, Chiautzingo, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

Fabián’s testimony displays asymmetric gender relations, reinforced by generational intersectionality, kinship, and age, where not even the marital status of the migrant was an impediment to the oppression of his wife. The reproduction of hierarchies and the exercise of power across generations and genders are present in the way in which the father decided on the money obtained during the migration process. Thus, patriarchal order was not altered; it excluded women (wives or mothers) from decision-making and access to resources, which reproduced their subordinate position (Zapata Martínez, 2016). As a result, resource control was centered on whoever held the highest position in the hierarchy of power within the household at that time.

The money I made I gave to my daddy. He bought several pieces of land and before he died, he shared the land equally among my brothers. He didn't give me anything, he did good, I gave him my money and you can do whatever you want with your gifts, I don't blame him for anything (Celestino, 84 years old, 2017, San Nicolás Zecalacoayan, personal communication, May 25, 2017).

According to patriarchal ideology and gender assignments, the father is the highest authority in a traditional family, and therefore the decisions made by him are not called into question. In Celestino's testimony patriarchy is the clearest form of power, naturalized and reflected in decision-making in the father-son relationship.

Being a provider as established by the male gender assignment implies being a working man, not mattering what a man does as long as he fulfills said mandate: "it is a decent and morally acceptable way of earning the right to life" (Capella, 2007, p. 153). This matter shows his honorability and is a source of pride, as Fabián and Eduardo related to us:

When I went to work in the U.S. I did it all the way till the end of my contract, so they gave me an honor card that meant I was a successful worker, and I brought my pennies. Each trip meant buying a piece of land. Here in my town, I am highly esteemed, most of my life I served my community, as a volunteer commander, patrol leader, guarding the palace and the church, police officer, and delegate president of the voter registry. I liked to help (Fabián, 82 years old, Chiautzingo, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

I went nine times, I bought these little pieces of land, those houses next door. I was in many places, I went to Stockton and Sacramento, in California, and around Texas. Where I lasted the longest was in the harvest of chili pepper, cauliflower, lettuce, in the first year. Then I got tomato, peach, fig and a little bit of everything. I sent every peso I earned. I don't drink or smoke, thanks to that I was able to achieve something (Eduardo, 84 years old, Chiautzingo, personal communication, May 25, 2017).

With the resources acquired, interviewees were able to occupy positions of citizen representation and in religious ceremonials, which involved investing their own resources, time, and work in favor of the community, according to local uses and customs. Participation in these positions did not imply remuneration but resulted in prestige, a sense of belonging and social recognition; these aspects shaped changes in the social and economic status and position of migrants (Young, 1997). For them, migrating was beneficial because upon returning and with the profits acquired abroad, they generated means of production and improved their living and working conditions. This influenced their gender positions as good providers within their households, as migrants, and successful agricultural producers, this coupled with the prestige generated through collaborative community work.

In this context, the condition and position of men and women was influenced by gender assignments: greater representation and importance is given to men as migrants for fulfilling their mandate as providers, and women's work is naturalized. Recognition is for the successful migrant. Women do not obtain social recognition for the domestic, productive, and care work they perform while waiting in the household, because "a woman must be hard-working, honest, a good wife,

and a good mother” (Eduardo, 84 years old, Chiautzingo, communication personal, May 25, 2017), without expecting any particular recognition.

Participation in the migration process occurs differentially by gender. According to Álvarez (2009), women’s participation can be of three types: women who migrate when they accompany the men of their family; those who migrate on their own; and those who stay in their localities caring for the household unit members while the husband or children migrate. This classification does not describe the functions they perform in any of the three situations, nor their contribution to the reproduction of their households, as reflected in the statements of the women interviewed:

My husband would go to the U.S. for a few months, come back for a while, and leave again. I stayed at his parents’ house, but they were already very old, I took care of his parents and also the children, while my husband went to work (Ernestina, 82 years old, Chiautzingo, personal communication, March 28, 2016).

Multiple functions fell on the wives who stayed in their locality waiting for the return of their partners or relatives. These functions continued to be naturalized as part of the wife and mother assignments, such as the responsibilities of domestic care and work (García Guzmán, 2019). Even the community work carried out on behalf of the absent husband reproduced the gender differences that worsened with the migration process, in aspects relating to both the position and the status of women, as addressed by Young (1997) and Alfaro et al. (1999).

My children send me whatever they can; they work in the United States. I tell my grandson: “son, if you knew, when your uncles and my husband were here, we all sat down, even if we had only beans on our plates we would all laugh together at whatever,” and now, what good is this to me. Let me tell you that to me I’m in a golden cage, it belongs to my children, and I’m locked up here, I can’t get out. Before we all went to work here, we earned little, but it was enough to eat (Azucena, 65 years old, Chiautzingo, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

Azucena’s testimony accounts for the migration of two generations of men: the husband and the children; she stayed to take care of the goods and manage the remittances. Women participating in the study were at risk of being abandoned; left alone and with illnesses, their gender status was affected, and their social position was one of subordination, dependency, and vulnerability, to which their condition as elderly persons was added, as asserted by Symington (2004). However, this was legitimized and naturalized. To all, this should be added the difficulties commonly faced by women for household units to reintegrate into the migratory space.

In other cases, the women found it necessary to generate income to support the members of their households, as it happened with Luisa, who was abandoned by her husband.

The father of my children worked nearby in San Martín, at first, he would come early, then only to sleep, and one day he told me: “I’m going to the United States to look for opportunities for us and our children.” He left and never came back, he only sent money the first month, it seemed as if the earth had swallowed him up, I had to take care of my children (Luisa, 80 years old, San Antonio Tlatenco, personal communication, May 30, 2017).

Women like Luisa sought strategies to acquire resources and support their families, despite the few options to integrate into local economic activities and their condition as poor women with

little access to a formal education that would allow them opportunities for development. Women continued to occupy positions of subordination and dependency, and the local gender system was not disrupted in terms of the assessment of reproductive and care work; it continues to be naturalized and women continue carrying it out until advanced stages of their lives.

When he went to the U.S., he sent the money to his father or brought it with him when he came back; they only gave me money to buy food or things for the children. Later he stopped working as a bracero, he worked the fields here, but the vice [alcohol consumption] took hold of him, he would go out early to drink, have lunch, go to bed and drink again. He changed a lot when he returned from the U.S. (Ernestina, 82 years old, Chiautzingo, personal communication, March 28, 2016).

Women along with their children are an active part of the migration process, as they assume more responsibilities in the face of their migration of their husbands/fathers, so as to guarantee the reproduction of the household unit with their work, as demonstrated in the study carried out in Godoy, Guanajuato (Flores López et al., 2012). In addition, migrant men experience negative aspects of masculine social construction, such as alcohol abuse, which may be associated with negative experiences of the migration process, as communicated by Ernestina.

However, changes were identified in some cases regarding the recognition of women's right to access real estate, since men were traditionally privileged in the local inheritance system, as can be attested in the following testimonies:

With tears in her eyes, my mom told me, "Don't send money anymore, your dad [stepfather] takes it from me, he spends everything on alcohol, it's not fair". I felt so much anger (...) she did not want to be without a man at home, it was frowned upon to live without a husband. Later my mom left my stepfather, and we were able to buy a piece of land. I got a house built for my mother, then I gave one to my wife. When I got married, I only visited twice again, my wife and I had a family now and I didn't want to leave her alone (Santiago, 84 years old, San Antonio Tlatenco, personal communication, July 27, 2017).

To inherit, I took into account my sons and daughters equally. Before, preference was given to men, but imagine, most of my children are women, so everyone equally. Thank God, everyone is doing well (Eduardo, 84 years old, Chiautzingo, personal communication, May 25, 2017).

These testimonies evidence changes in gender relations in favor of mothers, wives, or daughters, by including them in the inheritance of material assets. In her migration and return trajectory, Santiago was able to identify the disadvantages experienced by women in his household unit and acted against the subordinate position they occupied in her family. He played his role as provider, husband, son, and father more equitably, by making it easier for his mother and wife to own a house. As for Eduardo, he included his sons and daughters equally in the inheritance he granted in life upon his return.

The migratory experience among some participants in the BP represented changes towards the establishment of more equitable relations, yet for others, it reinforced the traditional gender system, given that migration policies such as "the Bracero Program and Guestworker Programs

are examples of systems that (...) were based on the recruitment and subjugation of male labor and the exclusion of families” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2018, p. 29).

The tradition of migrating “to the north” among households of pioneers who participated in the BP transcended generations in their localities due to several factors: the idea of following after parents or relatives; by personal expectations; socializing with ex-migrants; demonstrating manliness; obtaining social recognition, income, and assets; to learn other skills and, mainly, to transcend precarious situations. The permanence of migration in local tradition was conditioned by migration policies at different stages. A long period of undocumented migration after the BP and the differentiated experience of men and women regarding the phenomenon stand out.

My children left more than 10 years ago. Only one of them has papers now and comes to see me, but the other two can't, but they talk to me often. They work as waiters in a restaurant. It was really painful when they left, that's why I got diabetes, from such an affliction. I cried thinking about them at lunchtime because God knows how they were. They got there with the help of God, they crossed the desert, thorns, and trees. The six of them left but only three crossed, the others were detained, they talked to them and told them to go back for good, and here they are (Gregoria, 70 years old, San Nicolás Zecalacoayan, personal communication, July 6, 2017).

The feelings of loss, concern, and nostalgia for their migrant children, were expressed by the mothers, in the face of the risks and prolonged absences, the risks, and instability that undocumented migration represents, which was more recurrent from the 1990s in the municipality studied, as evidenced in the testimonies of Gregoria and Azucena, in contrast to the parents who take pride in the achievements of their migrant children, as shown in Eduardo's story.

Two of my boys are in the U.S., they have sent money to build their houses, even though they don't have papers. One has five cranes, works every day. I visit them often. They left in 1989, they came to get married, and then went back, they took their wives; I already have grandchildren (Eduardo, 84 years old, Chiutzingo, personal communication, May 25, 2017).

Female migration to the U.S. increased in the last decades of the last century in the municipality; this is consistent with the demographic data on the phenomenon: about two million migrant women were registered in the U.S. in 1980, and it increased to about 10 million by 2014 (Canales, 2014). This trend is exemplified in what happened with Eduardo's sons and daughters-in-law, and in the migratory trajectory of Juan and his sons and daughters.

My dad went to work as a bracero to provide for us, he instilled work in us. I went twice, I crossed through Tijuana to get to Los Angeles and the second time through Mexicali, through the desert. By the second time, I already had two children there and I took my third daughter with me, and that's how we set them on their way. I have six children there. In my last two attempts, I couldn't pass anymore, they detain you now. I'm lucky, from the first trip to the U.S. we bought a piece of land and I have another one inherited from my father. Half my town is in the U.S., in Los Angeles, New York, Baltimore, Massachusetts. In California, we have counted more than 55 families. Those who stay receive remittances to work the land (Juan, 65 years old, San Antonio Tlatenco, personal communication, May 22, 2017).

Gender perspective makes it possible to make migrants and the members of their households visible as social actors, and to understand how gender and kinship relations intersect with

economic-social structures (Woo Morales, 2007). This study perspective implies not only analyzing the migration process of men, but also the repercussions on the women who stay in their localities, assuming jobs and responsibilities in the absence of their partners or children. Likewise, it was possible to make visible how, in most cases, the subordinate gender position persisted in women, and how their condition deteriorated within the household and in the community, also reaffirming their invisibility in migration policies.

CLOSING REMARKS

According to the stated goal, it was identified that during the migration process the status and gender position of migrant men and their wives was negatively affected by the intersectionality of gender, class, ethnicity, and race relations established in the transnational and local space. Upon their return, males acquired goods means of production and prestige, with which their gender position improved in their households and community as successful migrants, able to fulfill their gender assignments and community commitments, according to the customs and tradition of their locality. On the contrary, the status and position of women “who stayed behind” were affected due to work overload and increased responsibilities, which they assumed in the absence of their migrant husbands, also enduring tension and physical and emotional exhaustion due to the migration of their partners. Moreover, they continued to be affected by the invisibility of the work associated with their gender assignments after the migration of their partners.

During their work stay in the agricultural fields of the United States, migrant men participating in the BP faced experiences wherein their status and position of gender, ethnicity and class were affected: subordination, discrimination and mistreatment, treatment that violated their human rights. There were also structural and political aspects that contributed to the transformation of the gender status and position of men and women, and the reproduction of inequitable gender relations.

Migration policies and their consequences were assumed and experienced by migrant workers, their partners, and other members of their household units in the transnational and local space, and experienced differently by gender. The inclusion of the members of their households, and the social and economic valuation of the contributions of women in the work invested in the reproduction of the labor force in national spaces for its availability in the transnational space, are aspects not accounted for in the negotiations of the Mexican government with the United States regarding migration policies, a fact that added to the reproduction of the subordination of women and the invisibility of their contributions.

Undocumented migration in the area hereby studied increased, particularly between 1980 and 1990, with diverse characteristics and consequences, such as the risks and costs involved in crossing the border, the diversification of work, the increase in the time spent in the U.S., the separation of the household members, and female participation in cross-border migration. Difficulties were faced during this study when it came to the number of former braceros included, due to their advanced age or due to mortality; still, ethnographic studies can rescue individual experiences and subjectivities that are at risk of disappearing from collective memories.

Studies on transnational migration face multiple challenges due to complexity and the diversification of the characteristics of the individuals involved in the processes, such as happens with child and youth migration, the negotiating capacity of the Mexican government in terms of migration policy, the respect for the rights of migrants, the sociocultural repercussions of returning, among other factors to whose understanding gender studies continue to contribute.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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