

## 9 Migration, Woodcarving, and Engendered Identities in San Martín Tilcajete, Oaxaca, Mexico

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*Are you willing to spend some time to look deeply into my eyes and ask me who I really am?*  
[Lamberto Roque]

### Abstract

This chapter offers a perspective on gender relations in a predominantly male migrant-sending community in Mexico. The aim is to bring to the fore the impacts of migration as lived in the sender community and their implications for social justice and human security. The case of the indigenous rural municipality of San Martín Tilcajete in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, a male migrant-sending community, is examined, drawing on methods of critical feminist ethnography and social representations theory to illustrate the changes for the women who stay behind. Parallel to migration, the community has also experienced important transformations due to the development of a woodcrafts trade and increasing tourist activity. Very gradual changes in gender representations and empowerment have taken place, with women becoming *de facto* household heads, as well as craft makers and retailers, educators, administrators, agricultural producers, social figures, and civil servants. Nevertheless, detailed narrations of women's experiences show that their new roles and responsibilities do not necessarily translate into greater social, political, and economic autonomy, or recognition of the invisible material and emotional costs linked to migration.

**Keywords:** Social justice, migration, social representations theory, critical feminist ethnography, Mexico.

### 9.1 Introduction

The present case study crosses disciplinary boundaries to look at the impacts of migration in an indigenous area in Mexico, with special reference to women's lives. The chapter addresses the consequences of migration for the community of origin, not abroad. Most work on Mexican migration has been preoccupied by quantitative analyses of migration flows and remittances or by study of the networks that facilitate these flows. Too little attention,

relatively speaking, has gone to studying the lives of the stay-behinds, viewed in the round, including what happens in their hearts and minds, their identities and relationships, and their communities and culture.

In the traditionally indigenous locality that I examine (the municipality of San Martín Tilcajete in Oaxaca state), which is devoted to subsistence agriculture, processes of modernization and urbanization have led to mass migration, but these forces have come to the region accompanied by an increasing presence of tourism and the development of woodcarving production as an important economic alternative making seasonal international migration a viable choice. As we shall see, these processes are not gender-neutral. In a community setting such as San Martín Tilcajete, a cradle of mass migration, why do women not even have the right to migrate and yet must always assume the consequences and costs of others' migration? Furthermore, in a *de jure* male-led community, where men leave for abroad for work and leave women in charge

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de facto, when will changes at the political, economic, social, and cultural levels reflect this empowerment and aim at greater social justice for all? Following Nancy Fraser's approach to understanding social justice, in which recognition and representation as well as redistribution are all important and connected aspects, I look at the consequences of migration in this locality, with special reference to the nature of and any evolution of ideas, identities, norms, and conflicts about gender.

The chapter is organized in six sections. After this *Introduction* (9.1), which provides the general outline of the chapter, comes a discussion of *Human Security and Social Justice* (9.2), the guiding themes of the book and this chapter. Later, the specific research position I have used is presented, linking *Social Representations Theory* (SRT) with *Critical Feminist Ethnography* (CFE; 9.3). The municipality of *San Martín Tilcajete* then takes centre stage. Section 9.4 includes an introduction to the area of study (9.4.1), and a more detailed account of migration in the municipality (9.4.2), male migration (9.4.3), and woodcarving (9.4.4) as an economic alternative to migration and a major interacting factor. Section 9.5, the heart of the study, is devoted to *Women and Migration in San Martín Tilcajete* and considers female migration in Tilcajete (9.5.1) and case study examples of the women who stay behind (9.5.2). It closes with a summarized list of the findings of the study regarding the costs and implications of migration (9.5.3). Finally, some *Concluding Remarks* (9.6) are presented.

## 9.2 Human Security and Social Justice

*For a world where we can be socially equal, humanly different and totally free.* [Rosa Luxemburg]

Social justice is one of the most important challenges regarding migratory processes (emigration, transmigration, immigration, forced migration, etc.) in the world today. Historically, the nation state has sought to monopolize control of movement of people across its borders in order to protect its territorial sovereignty, for its own security. However, the nature of threats and the security referents have changed under global capitalism. Both as a scientific and as a political concept, security has been reconceptualized in the post-Cold-War era (see Brauch/Oswald/Mesjasz/Grin/Dunay/Behera/Chadha/Chourou/Kameri-Mbote/Liotta 2008). Narrow conceptions of security focusing on military and political dimensions have been wid-

ened to include economic, sociocultural and environmental dimensions, and have been sectorialized into specific domains – such as health, energy, water, food, livelihood – with distinct periodicity (short-, mid-, and long-term). They have also been deepened in terms of scale in order to include not only the state as referent (national security) but also the individual (human security), interacting at inter-personal, community, national, international, regional, and global levels. Finally, they have been enriched by attention to the subjective and emotional aspects of security, including the content and evolution of identities. It is important that discussions of social justice in migration be anchored in a complex, dynamic, and ample perspective of human security that looks beyond the state, without neglecting it. In this chapter I consider the stresses, threats and opportunities in many dimensions of local people's lives, especially in women's lives, in a small community in Mexico that has become heavily engaged in migration, especially international migration.

For the purposes of considering social justice and migration from a human security perspective, this study employs Nancy Fraser's work. As Novak points out "the trouble with 'social justice' begins with the very meaning of the term... books and treatises have been written about social justice without ever offering a definition of it. It is allowed to float in the air as if everyone will recognize an instance of it when it appears" (2000: 1). One general definition of the goal of social justice is "the full participation and inclusion of all people in society, together with the promotion and protection of their legal, civil and *human rights*. The aim of social justice – to achieve a just and equitable society where all share in the prosperity of that society – is pursued by individuals and groups through collaborative social action" (IRP 2008: 53). Nevertheless, some of the tensions surrounding its conception already become apparent; they have to do with the difficulty of balancing its individual (personal), group collective (social), and mass collective (societal) dimensions and its level of analysis and implementation (micro-, meso- and macro-). As Habermas points out (2005: 1), "if the core of the liberal constitution is the guarantee of equal individual liberties for everyone", both classic and modern conceptions and edifices have been challenged by the dynamism and complexity of contemporary social relations, where globalization undermines the State and its structures, and global relations in the transnational era remain marked by profound structural and symbolic inequalities.

From a critical feminist standpoint, Nancy Fraser advocates a theory of social justice for the knowledge society era of post-Social politics. Her approach seeks to transcend ‘either/or’ dichotomies and account for the interrelationships of the local, national, regional, and global beyond the Westphalian frame that has focused on national security rather than on justice. She discusses a tripartite model of social justice aiming at ‘participatory parity’, with reference to the economic dimension of *redistribution*, the cultural dimension of *recognition*, and the political dimension of *representation* (Fraser 2001, 2005, 2008). Unlike other approaches, in her view and in order to be effective in terms of social justice, all three dimensions must have equal weight:

Insofar as the stress on recognition is displacing redistribution, it may actually promote economic inequality. Insofar as the cultural turn is reifying collective identities, it risks sanctioning violations of human rights and freezing the very antagonisms it purports to mediate. Insofar, finally, as struggles of any type are misframing transnational processes, they risk truncating the scope of justice and excluding relevant social actors (Fraser 2001: 13).

In order to tackle the displacement of egalitarianism under hegemonic neoliberalism, Fraser proposes a conception of justice which encompasses recognition and distribution; to counter reification, she provides an account of the politics of recognition that does not lead to identity politics; and against misframing she offers a multi-tiered conception of sovereignty that decentres the national frame (Fraser 2001: 13). The economic dimension of egalitarian redistribution implies overcoming class exploitation, restructuring the political economy, and altering social burdens and social benefits. Recognition implies “a process of consideration and judgment, in which the identity or attributes of an object, person or relationship are first noticed, and then acknowledged and affirmed” (Connolly/Leach/Walsh 2007: 1). Thus, the politics of recognition takes into account minorities, women, vulnerable groups, devalued identities, and deconstructive tendencies, rejecting essentialisms; and linked to representation it implies autonomy, i.e., the political means to assert oneself and one’s group’s civil liberties and political rights. Fraser’s integrative approach,<sup>2</sup> if linked to the deepened conception of security mentioned earlier, can contribute to greater social justice in the transnational era.

### 9.3 Research Position: Social Representations Theory and Feminist Critical Ethnography

*The quotidian speaks quietly with the eternal.* [R.M. Rilke]

The *Theory of Social Representations*<sup>3</sup> (TSR) is useful in order to ethnographically research economic, cultural, and political processes where distribution, recognition, and representation are all intertwined and are important for human security (broadly understood) and social justice.<sup>4</sup> It is important to go beyond an individual-societal dialectic and explore the interrelation between social dynamics at the heart of identity processes at all levels and the social representations that sustain these processes. The community and domestic units (blood-related or legal and ritual family units in this case) are the social institutions that mediate the causes and consequences of migration at the material and symbolic level. From a social psychological perspective, much mainstream research linked to justice in Mexico, Latin America, and North America (e.g. research into difference, discrimination, racism, violence, personality, identity, gender, inter-group relations, cooperation, and competition) has been undertaken from an individual and group perspective, leaving behind or in second place anthropological, societal, and sociological considerations.<sup>5</sup> This has to do with the influence and weight of the behaviourist perspective, which can be traced back to figures such as G.W. Allport.<sup>6</sup> Without diminishing the relevance

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- 2 The debate surrounding the interrelation of universalism, minorities, and individualism has been at the core of liberalism (Beck 2008). According to Habermas (2005: 1), “the idea of equal individual liberties for all satisfies the *moral* standard of egalitarian universalism, which demands equal respect for and consideration of everyone” on the one hand, while “it meets the *ethical* standard of individualism, according to which each person must have the right to conduct her life according to her own preferences and convictions” on the other.
  - 3 At this point it is important to distinguish between [1] representation as part of the politics of justice (political means to assert oneself and one’s groups, civil liberties, and political rights) and [2] ‘social representations’ (the category rooting Social Representations Theory, SRT), which are how people are defined and depicted within a society. SRT is a theoretical and methodological perspective for addressing social justice, as will be explained in detail in the following section.
  - 4 For a feminist discussion of the broad security perspective, its challenges for women, and the usefulness of Social Representations Theory, see Serrano (in press).

of such research when considering issues of social justice and human security, the historical, societal, and cultural dimensions that root and reproduce injustice must be considered.

### 9.3.1 Social Representations Theory

*Social Representations Theory* (SRT) is multidisciplinary in its origins; it draws directly from psychology, sociology, and anthropology. It originated as part of the critique of individualizing and reductionist perspectives, as well as those that advocate the collective as the pinnacle of human achievement. Congruent with Fraser's social justice approach, TRS accounts both for social structure and the processes whereby the social subject constantly generates, interprets, and transforms knowledge inter-subjectively. Unlike the Marxist conception of ideology as false consciousness, or the Durkheimian conception of passive social subjects paralyzed in the face of 'social facts' and social control, Moscovici explored the ways through which social groups are structured and act according to different yet shared social representations, enabling them to perceive, give sense to, and transform them, appropriating and gestating knowledge, communicating, and becoming active minorities created by but not only determined by power structures (the social change conception). In this view, conflict and tension in the social sphere are addressed positively as motors of change and not necessarily of crises, a process of innovation that is normalized as well as questioned

where representational activity occurs (Arruda 2002; Arruda 2010).

A social representation is constructed in culture and is not an individual psychological or cognitive construct. Social representations are social products derived from interaction and their nature is relational. Social subjects re-present reality, which is to say that they do not merely reproduce it mechanically as a mirror; they interpret and transform it and at the same time are transformed by it. This has direct implications for social scientific and feminist gender studies of migratory contexts, given that representation processes are linked to the processes of conformation, maintenance, and transformation of social and collective identities. The multi-level identity approach considers relations within individuals and between in-groups and out-groups, as well as historical, societal, and ideological processes, including deeply embedded representations of gender such as world outlooks and other constructs that are more flexible and less resistant to change.

### 9.3.2 SRT and Critical Feminist Ethnography

As Madison (2005: 4) points out, consistent with Fraser's arguments "political representation has consequences: how people are represented is how they are treated". Critical ethnography research emphasizes giving local people, women, and invisibilized groups the right to express and represent themselves, establishing a dialogue and collaboration with them and being critical of its own standpoint; engaging in serious longitudinal studies that enable one to acquire an honest meta-reflexive position and deep insights with regard to and in relation to the research context and people, while considering silences, omissions, and processes of invisibility; and enabling researchers to be an active part of the social process, collaborating in the transformation of society, for example through participative-action research (Delgado 2010). It "begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain", and this 'ethical responsibility' means "a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being" (Madison 2005: 5).

Gender is a "system of social regulation that orients a specific cognitive structure, built following a biological referent that makes notions of the masculine and the feminine normative" (Flores 2001: 7). Such a system, that has gender representations at base, constitutes the cultural framework from which identities

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- 5 For example, the *Framework for Enabling Empowerment* (FrEE), which has been developed since 1985 by the Mexican Institute of Family and Population Research (Pick/Sirkin 2011), is based on individual needs, capabilities, and behaviours, developing resources in the face of poverty. Under the slogan "I want to, I can", workshops provide information guiding decisions and communication skills in order to promote autonomy and control over rights (<[www.imifap.org.mx](http://www.imifap.org.mx)>). Without denying the importance and usefulness of such an approach that is said to have benefited nineteen million people, this chapter in contrast applies Social Representations Theory as it implies the potential of addressing justice, rights, identities, change, and culture in a much deeper sociological psychological way than would be possible under an individualistic-empowerment and behaviourist frame (for a discussion regarding each socio-psychological tradition see Farr 1996).
  - 6 Migration studies have also been heavily influenced by behaviourism (see Truong/Gasper 2011, especially chapter 1).

are elaborated, others are identified, and relations and world views are established. Researching from a critical gender perspective implies elements of participatory and critical research, a democratic exercise in which the researcher together with research subjects participate in order to reclaim spaces to value their voices and actions in areas where hegemonies of everyday life have silenced and devalued them. Researching together with women as social subjects implies working together for a space of memory and representation, a space where they can talk, think about themselves, remember their lives and experiences, and share them with laughter and often with tears, reflecting about themselves, their identities, relations, and life experiences.

## 9.4 Migration, Gender, and Woodcarving in San Martín Tilcajete

*This is a trip toward the unknown; toward the deep corners of loneliness, and the insides of the intestines of a monster that feeds itself by devouring others.* [Lamberto Roque]

The work presented in this chapter was all undertaken in the municipality of San Martín Tilcajete, in the state of Oaxaca. It draws from different and interconnected research projects in the same community at different times, with various individuals (both male and female), families, and groups (school groups with children and adolescents, groups of women and men, artisan groups, people at the health clinic and those involved in the government's 'Oportunidades' programme, official community committees, etc.), starting in the year 2003; it is still ongoing. Altogether, it has involved nine years of critical feminist ethnography, with different research periods while living in the research area (the longest lasted for two continuous years) and recurrent visits and communications during the rest of the time. It has also included a variety of research techniques, of which the most relevant for the purposes of the present chapter have been applying an exploratory free association questionnaire to explore the community's social representations (n=150), two local censuses (2004–2005 and 2008–2009), and a series of longitudinal in-depth interviews with a sample of eleven women which were transcribed in nearly five hundred pages and later analysed.<sup>7</sup> Currently, in-depth interviews with men are being undertaken, transcribed, and analysed, although they will not be drawn on here.

### 9.4.1 Setting the scene: San Martín Tilcajete

The state of Oaxaca in the south of Mexico, with almost four million inhabitants (INEGI 2010), is one of the two poorest states in the country; those states also have the most indigenous presence.<sup>8</sup> Administratively, the state is divided into seven regions. In the region of the Central Valleys, we find the City of Oaxaca, capital of the state and a tourist hub hosting over a million national (eighty-four per cent) and foreign (sixteen per cent) tourists per annum (Boletín Estadístico 2004).<sup>9</sup>

The municipality<sup>10</sup> of San Martín Tilcajete is located approximately 32 kilometres south-east of the capital city. Allegedly, the locality was founded two centuries BCE, but the present-day community is of Zapotec origin and dates back to the year 1600 (Reyes 2003: 4). Although census data vary, a realistic estimation of the population based on fieldwork data and the medical centre census is a total of two thousand community members, of whom fifty-five per cent are female and forty-five per cent male (Fernández/Serrano 2004). The community covers 27 km<sup>2</sup> and contains private, communal, and *ejido* lands. In 1981 it was recognized as an autonomous community within the district of Ocotlan. It is governed by a political system of 'traditional uses and customs' rooted in a hierarchical system of communal duties and obligations, organized through male-headed family units. The male heads or 'contributors' must pay fixed annual and temporary quotas to the local administration committees and provide unremunerated community service in yearly periods, with a rotating active and passive term in office every twelve months, till citizens are sixty years old or they reach the highest possible rank.

In a community where 95.3 per cent of the population is Catholic and the Zapotec language has been

7 For the full results, access to transcript sections, coding frames, and the direct voices of *tileño* women presented at greater length, see Serrano (2010).

8 Twenty-eight out of the sixty-eight ethnolinguistic indigenous groups of Mexico converge in Oaxaca (Barabas/Bartolomé/Maldonado 2003).

9 Valid data for 2004 are used, because of important variations in estimations following the APPO crisis in 2006. The crisis involved a confrontation between the state of Oaxaca, which eventually deployed federal forces, and the *Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca* (APPO).

10 Almost every town or community in Oaxaca is a municipality, most governed by a traditional sociopolitical system.



lost three generations ago, the social and cultural organization responds to a very active calendar of public and private feasts. The public festivity calendar begins with the celebration of the Day of the Dead in the last days of October and extends until the Mother's Day festival on 10 May. During these six months, there are at least two grand celebrations per month – each of which lasts several days and has an 'octava' or minor scale replay celebrated a week after the original party. The community is well known for the frequency and sumptuous nature of its festivities. Private feasts include baptisms, confirmations, 'quinceañera' or fifteen-year celebrations, weddings or fandangos, burials, and birthdays. Most members of the community are related in some way and everybody knows all the members of the community at least by name and reputation. Gossip and the constant vigilance of fellow community members ensure compliance with social canons. Breaches of the law or misconduct are handled by the municipal authorities; fines are usually paid for with cement bulks used for building public infrastructure. There is a community room designated as a prison for handling minor offences, although domestic problems and violence are treated as private and are thus seldom denounced or castigated; when they are, cement bulks for public use might help restore social ties but they hardly compensate for or alter intra-family relational dynamics where women are the most common victims.

Traditionally, San Martín was reliant upon subsistence agriculture for domestic consumption (Perez 1991). Nowadays, following the fall in international agricultural prices, land erosion and global environmental change, the end of agricultural subsidies in Mexico, and facing competition from larger-scale technologically-equipped national and international farms, the community has turned to woodcraft production and migration as the two main means of subsistence; economic transformation in the past four decades has been tremendous, as will be discussed. The practice of agriculture remains common, given the importance that food sovereignty, growing one's own food, and contact with nature still have in local culture, especially amongst the older generations. A risky activity because of changing weather and rainfall patterns in a semi-dry area, agriculture and farming are still felt as important even though in most cases they entail lost investments and are significantly subsidized by entire families working the land or hiring external labour. Resources to subsidize agriculture come from either migration or woodcraft production, and agriculture is an 'officially' male-dominated process, though women,

children, and elders also partake in it.<sup>11</sup> The families that only engage in agriculture are the poorest families in the community, including a few female-headed households made up of women, children, and elders, or women and elders, who live way below the poverty line.

#### 9.4.2 Migration in San Martín Tilcajete

The history of international migration from Oaxaca to the USA dates from the beginning of the last century. The Bracero Programme in the forties had the "greatest influence to promote international migration in Oaxaca, given that not even the devastating effects of the Mexican Revolution in many towns or the construction of the railroads in the USA at the beginning of the century had such impact" (Reyes/Gijón/Yúnez/Hinojosa 2004: 201). At national level, during the twenty-two years that the Bracero Scheme lasted, it "mobilized an average of 350 thousand workers between 1954 and 1960, hiring 4.5 million workers in total" (Durand/Arias 2005: 20). San Martín Tilcajete became part of the programme following the construction of the Pan-American Highway in the forties, when the community was directly linked with the outer world. From that time, the itinerant circuit that is very common nowadays, from the community to the capital city Oaxaca, was established for work, education, recreation, medical care, banking, administrative and government services, etc.

When the Bracero Programme ended and the USA closed its borders, migration in the state of Oaxaca remained intra-national, from rural zones to urban areas, towards the regional economic centres. Given the proximity and the routes of communication between San Martín and the capital city, intra-state migration was not significant. Instead, the flows towards the centre of the country (the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico) were significant, as well as those towards the plantations in the north of the country for agricultural work and to the south-east for tourist developments. These migrations were both temporary and permanent, and the number of

11 The political system of male authority in the community, which had been ideologically reinforced by the Catholic religion, was substantially backed by the agricultural land distribution following the Revolution (1910 onwards) and the National Project of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). Twenty-five million hectares were granted under collective ownership (*ejido* and collective lands), organized in male-headed agricultural productive units.

*tileños*<sup>12</sup> that have family in Mexico City today or once lived there is considerable. Nevertheless, following the fall in international oil prices and agricultural prices in the eighties, the weakening role of the state, the crisis of the welfare state and the rise of neo-liberalism, extreme wealth disparities, increasing poverty, and demographic pressure, international migration towards the USA gained an unprecedented force (see Ruíz 1992).

According to a study undertaken by College of Economic Professionals of the state of Oaxaca, remittances as proportion of State GDP have increased rapidly, from seven per cent in 2003 to ten per cent in 2007. In 2008 the total remittances were estimated at 12.5 per cent of the State's GDP. Remittances sent by Oaxacan migrants living in the USA are the third biggest source of revenue for the state of Oaxaca after federal funds and tourism (Pacheco 2009). According to data from the Central Bank, the state of Oaxaca received US\$1,457 million dollar in remittances in 2008.

#### 9.4.3 Male Migration in San Martín Tilcajete

In the community of San Martín Tilcajete, migration has been male-dominated. The history matches that for Oaxaca as a whole. The first significant period of international migration dates back to the Bracero Programme (1944–1964), when the USA sought cheap Mexican labour through 'contracts', usually for short and specified periods of time. Migrants usually returned to their communities after fulfilling their contracts. When the programme gained increasing appeal, the USA closed its borders and terminated it, although some of the scheme's pioneers settled in the USA permanently.

The second period of migration, from the 1960s to the 1980s, was characterized by intra-national migrant flows, as communications and transport improved, or followed emerging job opportunities in Mexico City or in the agricultural producing states in the north of the country and in the south-east in tourist developments in the Caribbean. Where opportunities were good, migrants settled permanently in those locations.

In the third and current phase, international migration from San Martín recommenced in the 1970s, though it substantially decreased during the woodcraft boom (1986–1994). It soared following the 1994 crisis and has remained constant till today, with an in-

crease after the APPO crisis in 2006 and sustained growth despite the international crisis in 2008. The community has established itself as a cohesive group in Santa Cruz, California, where the extraterritorial community of San Martín Tilcajete is located, following decades of migration, with some *tileños* and/or their children already holding US citizenship. Most illegal immigrants find support from other *tileños* who are currently there or have been there before – sometimes several times – and have established important networks of support, services, work contacts, and so on. Migration has also spread to Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose, Oakland, Chicago, Oregon, and New York. Job prospects for *tileños* in the USA as illegal and semi-skilled workers remain concentrated in agriculture, work in hotels, cleaning, car washes, personal and care services, and construction and building.

Although some families of early migrants have moved permanently to the USA and settled there, migration is very largely cyclical-pendular. Typically it is male-led and represented by a specific age range, although women and members of all age groups also participate.<sup>13</sup> Despite the perils of migration or perhaps exactly because of the importance of facing and overcoming them, it has typically become an almost inescapable rite of passage to adulthood for young male adults following the end of high school and before considering marriage. Once they have faced their first migrant period, men return to marry and after settling with their wives in their paternal parental home or having their wives pregnant, men resort to migration in order to save and build their own room

12 The term *tileño* denotes a person from San Martín Tilcajete; its plural form is *tileños*.

13 Estimating migration for San Martín Tilcajete has been very difficult, as migrants come and go and data variability throughout the year and across years makes it very hard to estimate. In addition, the illegal nature of international migration from San Martín Tilcajete means that family members left behind in the community of origin are very reluctant to respond to surveys regarding migration. For example, according to the National Census by INEGI, San Martín Tilcajete has had twenty-eight international migrants in total since the year 2000; this figure is absurd. If we take the share of migration amongst the economic activities in the community (thirty per cent in 2004) in relation to the number of families, we would find that a very conservative estimate of migrants would be 150 people (130 men and twenty women). Considering the national proportion of migrants relative to families involved in the migratory phenomenon (1.7), the estimate would then give us a total of 294 migrants. This fits better with discussions held in the community.

or small house back in the community. For men between sixteen and fifty, international migration remains a preferred economic alternative, although it alternates with periods of residence back in San Martín, working as carvers and in agriculture. The interaction between migration, woodcarving, and agriculture is important as it provides economic alternatives for *tileño* families. As woodcarving has become increasingly successful as a source of income and prestige since the mid-eighties, it has become an important interrelated factor that has transformed the community of origin and also migration, although not all families combine migration with carving. Most frequently, migration is combined with agriculture in order to produce home-grown foods and preserve land tenure, although agriculture always involves an expense and does not always yield favourable returns, given the mounting prices of materials and poor land conditions in a semi-arid region with water shortages, land erosion, and climate variability.

Once they have some capital and as they grow older, migrant men return to the community to settle back with their original family; if they have children (particularly, though not exclusively, males), they tend at some point of their migrant trajectories to take them abroad to live with them and work. Migrating and overcoming the perils associated with migration from adolescence onwards holds important social value for men; it confirms their masculinity in the community of origin and abroad amongst peers. Most domestic chores that men learn and perform whilst in the USA for work and for their everyday survival are always undertaken by women back in San Martín; this applies also to families where both spouses and children have emigrated. As will be discussed below, this often also applies to authority to run the household and its economy, agricultural lands, the woodcarving business, and political positions in the local hierarchy. This shows the importance of analysing gendered social representations, and the meanings and practices associated with them in the community of origin.

#### 9.4.4 Woodcarving in San Martín Tilcajete

Since woodcarving has been such an important interacting phenomenon in San Martín Tilcajete, sometimes providing resources for emigrating and sometimes as part of a valued return or stay-home strategy, it deserves special attention. Ethnic-cultural tourism is important in the Central Valleys region, following the designation of Monte Albán and the City of Oaxaca as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987;<sup>14</sup> it has

been a catalyst for the development of an important arts and crafts industry. San Martín Tilcajete is one of the three main *alebrije*<sup>15</sup> woodcraft-producing communities in Mexico. From the mid-eighties the woodcarving boom meant that most household members residing in the community, as well as migrants during periods spent in San Martín, turned to woodcraft production; this included women, children, and elders. There are two main types of woodcraft production: i) high-quality, unique, time- and labour-intensive specialized pieces, and ii) average-quality, pattern-repetitive, quickly-made, small inexpensive pieces (for a detailed account, see Chibnik 2003; Cant 2012). From the resources derived from migration and those generated since the carving boom, the community has been radically transformed. Private and public infrastructure and tourist services have substantially improved.

Despite intensive female labour, artisan households are male-led. Local men are in control of most of the craft's productive process (sometimes deciding even from abroad how, when, and where pieces are made, and the labour distribution). However, sales and commercialization of woodcarvings are under the control of exogenous male regional, national, and international retailers and intermediaries who sell woodcarvings for much higher prices. In the actual socio-economic 'glocal' setting, with interdependent multi-level networks of exchange, individuals have autonomy and choices, but these are limited and bound to specific contexts. As with migration, men head the processes of wood production, retailing, and commerce inside and outside of the community, and this brings our attention to the topic of economic distribution and social justice, with a specific gender analysis.

Although resources have increased from both migration and woodcarving, and the quality of life is of an overall higher standard, competition linked to woodcarving and envy due to migration have weakened social cohesion, hampering any attempts to organize in large collective commercial associations or productive projects.<sup>16</sup> It is only extended families and smaller-scale groups that have organized in productive

14 This is complemented by the recent declaration of the Prehistoric Caves of Yagul and Mitla as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in August 2010 in the same region of the Central Valleys of Oaxaca.

15 *Alebrijes* are woodcrafted figures made out of copal wood, with exotic colours, lively patterns, and creative designs. The consolidation of this activity has placed the community in global production and distribution chains, taking *tileño* art and artists to national and international exhibitions.



processes, in overt competition to other groups in the community. Envy, lack of cooperation, exploitation, competition, piracy, and public offence have characterized woodcarving.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the social nature of interpersonal relations that makes friends part of the extended family through lifelong ties and practices of mutual obligation, reinforced at private feasts and public celebrations, has led to the formation of bigger workshops with a specialized division of labour and cooperation. Paradoxically, higher incomes have meant that reciprocal exchanges are more selective but more defining; educational standards are higher and alternatives open, allowing for stronger intra- and inter-group cohesion despite intra-community atomization following carving and migration. These two facets permeate the community, providing its members with esteem and a common identity bridge over a deepening abyss that hinders the definition and articulation of collective goals.

Lastly, woodcarving has been possible through unpaid family labour, especially by women and to a lesser extent by children and elders. Typically, men carve wood and women prepare and paint the pieces, although most men also paint and some women carve. Direct and regional sales are led by women, unless the commercial relations involve core clients, in which case men handle business transactions. Most pieces are signed by the male household leader, who forges an individual reputation and is always in control of sales revenues, even if he temporarily migrates to the USA. In the production chain, time invested in carving and painting pieces is on average the same for women and men; however, alongside woodcrafts women must fulfil their care, domestic, and social obligations. In a study conducted in San Martín in 1991, women were found to work on average at least fourteen hours more per week than men (Pérez 1991: 30–1). With the demise of agriculture, the extra responsibilities imposed on women by migration – for example, caring for children throughout the day and painting at night – mean that today women work on average twenty to twenty-five hours more per week

than their male counterparts. In a community where economic, social, political, and cultural power and esteem have traditionally been monopolized by men, domestic chores, parenting work, and other care work undertaken by women have been historically invisible. This has not changed with modernization, and in addition women's labour in the woodcraft trade tends to be devalued. Nevertheless, two of the best known paintresses of *alebrijes* are women: María del Carmen Mendoza Mendez, leader of the Ángeles workshop together with her husband, and María Jiménez, famous for her angels.

## 9.5 Women and Migration in San Martín Tilcajete

*At last I wonder how many marriages and families have not gone through what I am going through? Cristina [♀, 30–35]*

### 9.5.1 Female Migration in Tilcajete

Female migration has very distinct features when compared to male migration. Dominant gender social representations lead to different ways of organization, whereby women are often discriminated against. Following Fraser's social justice axes, let us now look at migration in the concrete case study, bearing in mind the political, sociocultural, and economic dimensions. The societal weight given to care associated to femininity and imposed upon women at the sociocultural level is tremendous. Care has been ideologically naturalized and politically justified, linked with the private-domestic vs. public realm dichotomy in the polity. Nevertheless, in a traditionally male-led community where migration has meant an important exodus of adult men who are supposed to be in charge of political, economic, and administrative activities, the consequences have been tremendous *de facto* changes in gender roles, even though female leadership and work often remains unrecognized and migrant men remain the *de jure* authority or seek to exercise it *de facto* through relatives, even through their mothers. Besides, if women migrate, it is mostly linked with the fulfilment of these conventional care ethics.

During the second wave of migration, in the 1960s–1980s, women migrated alone, especially within Mexico at a young age and as maids, returning to San Martín after a few years to marry or take care of the sick and elderly, or staying away and sending remittances to family members when single. Since the 1990s, female migration has also taken place interna-

16 Examples of this are two important yet competing groups that organize parallel *alebrije* festivals and events for tourists and the inability of the entire community to agree on a single collective trademark, especially as other communities and regions of the country (and even internationally) have started to copy and produce *alebrijes* with the innovations developed in San Martín Tilcajete that make the pieces unique.

17 It also has led to many factions that seek to control municipal authority.

tionally to the USA, normally as companions to their husbands or fathers who have previously established themselves in networks there. Children are a deciding factor, as some families have sought to have children in the USA in order to obtain US citizenship, though women tend to return to the community in Oaxaca to raise them, unless a close female relative in San Martín stays in charge of care duties throughout infancy. There is a strong bond with the community of origin, which is reinforced by endogenous marriage patterns, investments and retirement there, close family ties, and the possibility of coming and going to the USA, even though tightening security controls have made crossing the border more difficult and expensive. Both parents typically emphasize the importance of raising their children in San Martín, even if that means leaving them in the hands of relatives. However, the preferred choice tends to be mothers returning and raising their children whilst living with their husband's parents and siblings, with the male migrant spouse periodically returning. This pattern is congruent with national migration estimates of communities of 2,500 people or fewer, where 86.8 per cent of international migrants are male, and only 13.2 per cent female (INEGI 2011; see also INEGI 2010, 2005).

Campaigns promoting human rights for citizens in developing countries in the context of migration often now voice the demand 'the right not to migrate' or to migrate in acceptable conditions. In contrast to the first phase of campaigns that aimed at improving relations and realities in migrant destinations – addressing the stresses, humiliations, and abuse endured by migrants – the more recent phase advocates a radical transformation in the settings in which migration is generated. Returning to Fraser's discussion we need though to ask: *Why do women in a community setting such as San Martín Tilcajete, cradle to mass migration, not even have the 'right to migrate'?*<sup>18</sup> Women who are affected in their everyday lives by mi-

gration and must invisibly assume its costs directly and indirectly (see section 9.5.3) do not even have the option to migrate because of the prevailing social and cultural canons, and when they do, it must be by accompanying husbands, parents, or other family members, in order to be controlled by them, otherwise community and family members will impose sanctions on a woman for migrating. Women may migrate within the country, usually as housemaids, since their work is closely supervised and their earnings benefit others. However, if migration is a step towards women's autonomy, education, self-affirmation, or liberty, sanctions can be as subtle as segregation and denial or escalate to overt expulsion from a marriage, family, or community. In such a rigid social system, women who do not conform to socially sanctioned rules must leave their families and the community for good, losing every right to struggle for redistribution, recognition, and representation in the local area.

Although studies of female migration in Mexico have been common since the late 1990s, studies of the costs assumed by women *in the community of origin* and their social, political, and economic implications are scarce and remain a challenge; much less emphasis has been given to recognition, representation, and redistribution. Some noteworthy studies are a general two-volume compilation of the effects of remittances and migration on peasant and indigenous women in various areas of the country (Suárez/Zapata 2004); a discussion on gender, migration, and social control in Veracruz (García/Ruiz/Ruiz 2011); a comparative article on indigenous migrant women from Oaxaca (Sánchez/Barceló 2007); a study regarding the impact of migration on marriage in a Mixtec community (Martínez 2003); a study regarding women and men in the development and organization of a productive cooperative in a migrant-sending context in Ayoquezco, Oaxaca (Figueroa 2011); and various studies regarding the implications of migration for public health in the community of origin, covering chronic and psychosomatic diseases up to the spread of HIV-AIDS (for one example linking this with social representations see Flores/Serrano 2012).

As stated, the findings given here follow more than nine years of critical feminist research looking at everyday life in Tilcajete, triangulating feminist ethnographic fieldwork with the free association questionnaires, two local censuses, and eleven longitudinal in-depth interviews.<sup>19</sup> The next section will present two detailed illustrative examples or testimonies in order to give voice to women and contextualize the discussion. It will be followed by a list of core findings in

18 Balancing recognition, representation, and redistribution in the migratory process, as will be seen, here refers to 'choice'; it is not presented as a legal interdiction per se given that the Federal Constitution is more important than indigenous traditional rights or municipal or local state laws. Nevertheless, it is relevant to distinguish between *de jure* rights guaranteed to all Mexicans, men and women, by the Federal Constitution and the *de facto* reality in the local setting. Let us remember that San Martín Tilcajete is a community governed by traditional law which is based on traditional practices of everyday life that have restricted free movement of women for centuries and still do so as a social practice.

terms of implications and costs of migration for women in the migrant-sending community.

### 9.5.2 Case Study Examples: The Women Who Stay Behind

#### 9.5.2.1 Case of Adriana [DAD, ♀, 18–25] and Erika [DAE, ♀, 40–45]

The relationship of Adriana<sup>20</sup> with migration is the story of coming of age in Tilcajete as the daughter of Erika, an unusually self-determined and empowered mother (whose testimony and words will also be presented), an alcoholic stepfather, and a biological father who has lived away in the USA and has been absent during all her life but whose symbolic presence and family have been defining in her upbringing, given the community setting. She does not know him at all except for the contradictory stories that she has heard from her mother, her biological father's family, and from others.

Rodolfo (his name) left for the USA when Erika became pregnant. Erika and Rodolfo were not married and for many years Erika thought he did not want to settle and establish a family with her; that is what she had heard from Rodolfo's parents: "He left. He did not want to have anything with you. He is not sure your daughter is his", "You have loose morals" they would say. Erika did not decide his departure, but she did not mind. According to her, unlike most other women she was looking for a family, which meant a child and not necessarily a husband and much less a conflictive relationship with his parents trying to control her; she had enough personal, family, and economic resources to be a single mother and she cut all ties with them. She had planned to become pregnant by one of the best-looking men in town because she wanted a "beautiful daughter" and she was prepared to raise her daughter on her own despite the social implications of her decision: gossip and pressure from the community. Besides, she had her own home and after her father's death she had seen her mother's example of strength and work.

Socially, being a fatherless single mother in a male-led and male-organized community was quite unusual

at the time. Erika [DAE, ♀, 40–45] said her pride helped her: "I struggled... I had nothing to be ashamed of", although she was constantly singled out. It proved difficult and after a few years Erika found another partner named Luis. He was willing to accept her daughter Adriana although he also wanted "a family of his own blood". Unlike other women, Erika did not want to get married despite significant pressures: "They will always speak about others [but] no, we are fine like that. Otherwise it is harder to separate. It would be more difficult. It's better just like that so if we choose to go in different directions, each can just leave as we entered [the relationship], just like that". Surprisingly, given commonplace patrilineal endogamous marriage in Tilcajete, they settled together in *her* house where they bore a son to consolidate their union.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, politically and *de jure* he is the household head. Despite an irregular and precarious income (US\$5–8 per day on average), Erika is and has been the economic pillar of the family. According to Adriana, Luis used to work in construction and be responsible, that is, fulfil his role as provider, 'but he has turned into an alcoholic for many years now': "He would finish working and would not come back home, we would have to go get him lying lost on the ground... I think it was the pressure of the other builders because he lived with us.... I worry because of my brother, he suffers most... My mom is fed up, I told her to leave him, and once she did, but then the next day his mother came to speak for him and he is back since" [DAD, ♀, 18–25].

The economic empowerment and decision-making of Erika as *de facto* household head in Tilcajete are noteworthy. She decided to establish her own household, to work independently of Luis's income, to raise her daughter on her own without relating with Rodolfo's family, to have a second partner and son and not get married. Even if the central cultural and identity premise was still that of making a family and complying with motherhood as defining femininity, and her initial choices were reactive following Rodolfo's departure, they certainly break with traditional ways. Perhaps later Luis was a useful compromise in the light of societal pressure, and although without

19 For the full results, access to transcript sections, coding frames, and the direct voices of *tileño* women at greater length, see Serrano (2010).

20 Note: names and some details have been changed to protect the identity of informants. Quotations have been translated, while trying to respect their original meaning and style as closely as possible.

21 The practice of bearing children to consolidate unions is commonplace, although following migration it has become a most important practice, almost like a ritual. It is a private and public confirmation that the union is still solid, and many male migrants will seek to get their partners pregnant during each visit to the community of origin. This has led to many women secretly resorting to contraception.

recognized representation or recognition she was and is the *de facto* household head. Erika's story is also notable as it was one of the first cases of the kind at the time. Single mothers are now more common in the community although they tend to remain under the protection and vigilance of their families, especially bound to the authority of male figures such as fathers or brothers.

Another striking feature of this case is the later struggle of Erika with Rodolfo's family for Adriana and Adriana's upbringing. Initially, she grew up believing Luis, and not Rodolfo, was her father. Those were her "happy years". Nonetheless, throughout her childhood, the family of Rodolfo and the community would let her know and constantly remind her of her origins and of the desirability of leaving her mother's side and 'terrible example' in order to follow her biological father abroad, regardless that he had abandoned her. A woman who is the economic pillar of the family and makes choices, seeking recognition and representation whilst reorganizing her life and thus defying social canons, was unacceptable, even in the face of a partner's and a father's abandonment. Adriana states that often Rodolfo's parents, especially his mother, would try to persuade her to go shopping to the capital city Oaxaca or to go and meet her father, with the hope of kidnapping her; for years she was afraid they would. She still has not figured out if that was to send her to the USA with her father, to take her to live at their household, or just to distance her from Erika and her more autonomous example.

An adolescent student now, Adriana struggles throughout the interview to put her life and identity into a different perspective, although she is aware of her current resources. She speaks of a life story of confusion and pain as a child, which centres in her emotional and not her economic needs; the questions of the interview even serve as a means of unveiling a past full of mixed messages that she has tried to forget. Here is an extract:

I never met him [my biological father]. There is the story my mom told me... then the man I thought to be my father, [but] besides all those women would tell me stories and ask me about my life, they would sow so much gossip around my life that I would run home crying. I was a little girl. Mom would tell me 'Don't listen to them, when you become adult and have use of reason I will tell you the truth. I am your mother, trust only me'. Still, every time they would tell me things like 'Your dad is a rich man in the USA, he can buy you the things you need; you should look for him and live better', 'That ugly man is not your dad'. Back then I was very lonely. I would cry a lot. Now I only want to work and study so

my mom does not have to work all the time... Sometimes my friends ask me if I don't feel curious about my dad. Well, I don't know, maybe [nervous laughter]. I never met him and with time I have learned not to have any feelings for him, nothing [DAD, ♀, 18-25].

Although she is now a young adult, Adriana's words enable us to see the impact of migration on children in the community of origin, which is a topic that has been little discussed in the Mexican literature. Of course the details of her case are unusual because Rodolfo never returned whereas most migrant fathers in Tilcajete come and go, although the confusion and feeling of loneliness, abandonment, and neglect, the pain, the fear, and the desire for a united family are common amongst children of migrants. The same is the case with the vigilance of the community and the extended family of the migrant. The peculiarity of this case is that after Rodolfo left, Erika resisted keeping in contact with him, residing in the house of her in-laws, or giving up her daughter to them. Usually, in a hegemonic culture, the migrant's extended family keep economic control and political power over the migrant's spouse, his children, and remittances. Even women who do not have much public authority in the community are highly empowered within the household with regard to the wife and children of their migrant sons.

The trans-generational power dynamics are so weighty that in the story of Erika and Adriana it was the family of Rodolfo that forced him abroad. Apparently, following the news of Erika's pregnancy – and since she was publicly represented as an autonomous and liberal woman – they involved Rodolfo in a family offence to his uncle that led him to flee the community or risk going to jail; and so he never returned. Back then, he had to leave immediately, in the middle of the night. The reasons for his migration were not necessarily economic or lack of commitment to establishing a family. Apparently in the following years he was still interested in his daughter and partner. Nevertheless, according to social canons, his family was the communication vehicle with Erika and Adriana, and neither of them received any direct communication or economic support from his side. Later, through another common contact, Rodolfo found out that his family had used the remittances he had sent for Erika and Adriana for many years in order to build a three-storey concrete house and for their own sustenance. He ceased sending money, and perhaps letters,<sup>22</sup> although he could still not legally return to the community and establish a direct link with them.



### 9.5.2.2 Case of Cristina [all citations are from DTC, ♀, 30–35]

The case of Cristina highlights other relevant features of the impact of migration on women in the migrant-sending community in relation to the economic, cultural, and political dimensions identified by Fraser. Her story has two main features. The first is commonplace for most women, spouses of migrants, who parent and raise children on their own. Despite the remittances and advice she receives from her husband by telephone, Cristina is fully in charge of three children on an everyday basis. She is also responsible for the household and domestic chores and her husband's public obligations in the community, and she produces and retails *alebrijes*. The second feature has to do with the tremendous dilemma posed by learning of her husband's parallel family in the USA. Although extramarital affairs abroad are very frequent, and some develop into lasting partnerships whilst migrants are abroad, implicit social and cultural rules always favour the spouse and children back in the community of origin as the legitimate family. However, the presence of children abroad disrupts this fragile equilibrium. In the process, the dilemma of ending the relationship or accepting the spouse back is not only a private affair involving the family or couple. Knowledge of behaviour, relationships, and children abroad is transmitted by the extra-territorial community and it becomes known and mediated by all. So, as will be seen in the case of Cristina, whichever decision she makes will still mark her socially and place her and her children in a vulnerable position.

Cristina married her husband José at the age of seventeen. She finished high school but could not study further due to lack of resources, so she started working. According to her, had she been able to study, perhaps she would have married later. Nevertheless, she had an urgent need to leave her family of origin due to a very bad relationship with her mother who was "very harsh and uncaring". She married, very much in love with her husband whom she considered "the example of perfection". They lived at his parents' house and worked producing woodcrafts. The decision to migrate was his, although the plan was to save money and build a house of their own; she accepted and as expected stayed in San Martín in charge of their son. His migration was pendular, and they had

more children in the periods he spent back at the community of origin.

At first, when José left, Cristina lived with her in-laws. Even though she had no problems with her in-laws regarding the resources sent by José for their children, they had authority over everything. She describes the difficulties of being mother and father at once, without having any familial, social, or political authority over her children: "They were very spoiled because we lived with their grandparents and I could not shout at them or show them limits... So I complained to my husband, because they would use my low status. Logically my status was below theirs because they are the elder parents". Also, her children would get very confused in terms of their parental figures, calling their grandparents and uncles 'fathers': "[they] started calling both grandfathers father, saying 'Dad Max' and 'Dad Josh'... and one day asked me 'Mom, why do I have so many fathers?'... so I had to act". At the first opportunity Cristina moved to the small house they were building. Her relationship with her in-laws remains good, "because they can't complain about anything, they see that I am impeccable with my husband and children".

Cristina explains in detail the burdens and challenges of being responsible for her children on her own during José's migration. "I have to take care of school, homework, domestic work, the house, the woodcrafts, of paying for special courses for them, everything." This reflects the multiple workloads of women who nevertheless lack recognition, redistribution, or representation. "For me it is very hard to be mom and dad, it is really very difficult, because I have the responsibility for everything, absolutely everything... if they are healthy and if they fall ill... If there is a problem with the house or if the children turn out to be a problem." The fear of underperforming and not being "good enough" is also a recurrent source of stress for these mothers, who increasingly experience anxiety-related symptoms and psychosomatic illnesses for which some are medicated (according to files at the local health clinic). They have to be accountable to their spouses, their in-laws, and the community as a whole in every realm: "Here at home they [the children] understand, but outside they act differently. ... I cry at the parents' meeting [at school]... I feel so bad because I think I am not doing things right. What am I not doing? He sees me [José], he knows. I sit and cry when I can't cope anymore... I wonder, what am I doing wrong, where is the mistake? Do they want an evil mother who does not feed them, who does not wash their clothes, who hits them with a belt all the time,

22 Although currently there are many private phone lines in *tileño* households today, they date from less than a decade ago. At the time, even public phone lines were very scarce.

or what is it they want? I always speak to them but I don't know why it has been so hard."

Besides, in the eyes of her children she also takes all the blame for José's stay abroad, which she lives as an "injustice": "They started to complain, blaming me time and time again. They started crying and I asked them 'Why do you blame me? Why only me? If it's about putting on blame, then it should be fair and include mom and dad, but why only me? Why don't you have a go at your father?' 'Because he is not here and the only one here is you' they say. Well, if the only one here is me, then you should understand me because all the responsibility of dad is mine. I have the full responsibility, and if I work, I don't work for me, it's for you and I am so very tired... Why are you so unfair with me? Complain when I don't fulfil my duties, then complain". Linked to this, in the absence of the head of the household, children frequently assume parental responsibilities. Boys take on roles of authority (especially older boys) and girls assume caring duties regardless of their age.

José exercises his fatherhood through the phone. He calls three times per week, sometimes every day. Cristina says that unlike many other migrants in Tilcayete José is an exemplary father. "He has always looked after his children. He sends them so many things and gifts, I even tell him to stop spoiling them ... I have no complaints with him as a father". Technology has been fundamental in enabling closer relations between migrants and their families in the community of origin, though unfortunately not all households have access to a telephone as there are only a limited number of phone lines available and these date only from the year 2005. Mobile phones are more common although they are much more expensive and have very bad reception in the valley. Since 2008 computers have become an increasingly valued asset and investment, linked with migrants and with the importance of education. Nevertheless, internet access is also limited and of very poor quality. There is also a generational gap in terms of technology use. Youngsters are much better prepared to use technology. Thus, phones (in homes, with relatives, or at local phone booths) remain the preferred option. Videos and photographs are also crucial. When children do not know their fathers, they become acquainted with them through photographs, videos, and phone calls.

Money is a central topic in families with migrants and it is usually one of the main reasons causing emigration, although it is not the only one. Many newlyweds resort to migration in order to seek economic

independence and build a home. Living alone – for a family, not for women – means access to representation and recognition. Some men who migrated as youngsters prefer to work in the USA; they can build savings there and rise socially. However, money and the goods it can buy have become an emotional currency in inter- and intra-family relations. Sometimes money creates expectations that lead to further migration in a vicious circle. For example, to some of the children, goods and toys become a replacement for the absent father. The television, mobile phones, toys, clothes, videogames have an increasing role in the education of *tileño* children. At school and in relationships between children, the display of imported goods figures prominently. This leads to some rifts between the children of those who go and those who stay, between endogenous traditional values and modern exogenous ones. It makes it harder for the women who stay behind to set limits: "I often wonder if we are not spoiling our children. Where should we set the limits if we give them so much?" However, migration is not an economic panacea. It is highly irregular since it depends on the job market in the USA, and it involves costs that are often displaced on to women since they stay behind and face the maintenance of the household on a daily basis and they face the relationships with creditors (for example for the money for the crossing). Most migrant wives also work and engage in economic activities besides the household and care of children, although they invest their earnings in the family; it is usually the men or in-laws who decide in what.

With migration, the role of institutional education has been transformed. Previously, when the community was devoted to agriculture, going to school was contingent upon what help was needed in the fields, and it targeted literacy. Now, education is a top priority for most families as it improves prospects for working as professionals, to administer the household and woodcarving unit, to deal with increasing tourism, or even to have better skills as migrants. In the words of Cristina: "You have to study, to prepare and have a career... I don't want a child that is linked to vandals running around insulting people or causing harm." Perhaps because of the conflict between traditional and modern values, with elders having the authority of experience, education currently represents a highly socially esteemed asset for the younger generations: "I told them [the other parents] 'I will no longer be called Cristina if my son is not a professional and I will prove it to you. Even if you laugh at me now. And when my son is an important professional I will laugh

at you and it will not be an evil laughter but one of satisfaction, you will see' I said." This also reflects the parents' own desire to study, for they invest important resources in their children's education including private schools, extra-curricular activities, materials, private tuition, etc. Although levels of education have increased for all the younger generations, including men and women, not all parents will accept their daughters' going to study outside the community once they finish high school, and long-distance learning is not yet an alternative for them.

The most striking feature of Cristina's case is José's infidelity and parallel family in the USA. Although the sexual politics of migration and their consequences deserve a study in their own right, this case can provide a window. The first stage involved finding out, knowing that others know, and locking herself in at home with anxiety crises. The support of other women was noteworthy:

I started to lock myself in at home. I would just not go out. Here, here was my world and whenever I went out I would just walk the streets without greeting anybody... Of course they found out because here everyone knows everything. I did not say anything but they heard it from the people there [in the USA]... My close friend came to talk to me: '*Comadre* what is wrong? You did not fail, you are in your same position and we are all with you... Be brave, you are worth a lot as woman, don't feel bad, it's not your fault.' At the time I did not sleep, I was very affected. I was always in a bad mood, shouting, I did not want to hear any noise. I was desperate, with my heart beating fast. I would tell my children to go away, to stop bothering me, I felt so miserable. But later I said to myself 'What am I doing to my children? I don't want to be like that.'

In the second stage, realizing his marriage and family were at risk, José came back to Tilcajete in order to sort out the situation with Cristina. In such a situation where Cristina and the children were vulnerable vis-à-vis a stranger, his family stood on her side: "My father-in law scolded him. 'It is not possible that you did this to your wife. She has respected you and behaved well. She is master of her house and from now on I don't want to see you disrespecting her again.'" The same with his mother: "I have no other daughter-in-law but her and even if you think this is painful I will not accept any other grandchildren but hers, the ones that lived in my house... No other woman will enter my house but her with her children", she said.

The subsequent negotiation between the couple highlights the unequal power relations in such a context. Cristina had to choose whether to forgive him and take him back or not, but the consequences of

her choice for her children and herself are brutal in either case. If she forgives him because she puts her family first, Cristina has to cope with sharing resources with the other woman and their son, and in the community and in front of her children she has to act as if nothing has happened; to put herself last. If she does not forgive him, she has to leave and be responsible for the break-up of the family (even if then she might take the children with her back to her parents' home), and finally, if she seeks revenge she loses everything. She concludes in relation to her unfaithful husband:

You know I will not be fighting you because of your responsibility [the other son]. He has needs and it is not his fault. At the end of the day you will have to make a double effort to support him. Look, I am your wife, and even more than your wife I am your friend. As spouse I am very hurt, but I have to support you because we are a couple. Of course if I had been unfaithful I know you would have kicked me out on the streets and kept my children. Why? Because you are a man and you think that 'Oh yeah, I am a man but she is a woman and she is not allowed to be unfaithful'... I know you would not have accepted me. But put yourself in my position, what would you have done if you come back and you find me with a son of another man, what would you have done?... Listen, I am not going to do it just for revenge, because I am a woman who does not only think about herself. I think about my children and about the example that I give them. Maybe you think there will be no problem with you because you did it far away and when you come back there will be no problem, your children will not see you doing wrong. The difference is that if I do it my children will disrespect me, they will lose all the respect they have for me, I will lose my house, my marriage, everything, all that I have struggled for a lifetime in order to build.

Although not all the features of Cristina's testimony are typical, it highlights how in the social and cultural construction of motherhood and female identity the economic, cultural, and political dimensions lead to a fragile equilibrium in which women are socially vulnerable. All suffering and sacrifices are justified. If mothers have to be for others in the first place, in a migrant-sending community where 'a mother is the only hope of her child' the boundaries of motherhood and maternal responsibilities never end: "All that I care about are my children and the tranquillity of my family. That is all I care about. Whatever else people say or do I am not interested... You would not imagine the suffering a mother is willing to endure for her children." Surely greater resilience in terms of redistribution, recognition, and representation in the local area would lead to greater intra-gender social jus-

tice. Unfortunately, the process is very gradual and invisible, as it is women-led.

### 9.5.3 Summarized Findings of the Study: List of Implications and Costs

Given the pattern of male-led migration in San Martín Tilcajete, with most women staying at home, women directly assume migration costs. These costs apply also in similar settings and are insufficiently recognized and discussed in migration studies. Some of the most relevant of these implications and costs are:

- I. Assuming the consequences of a spouse's or family member's *decision to migrate* even if the woman disagrees or was not asked for her opinion (as in the cases of Erika and Adriana, Cristina);
- II. Initial economic and psychological *support of migrants*: payment of part of or the full cost of the trip to the USA (Cristina);
- III. *Sustenance of the household* until remittances are received and/or when they cease (Erika, Cristina);
- IV. Intermittent or permanent economic and psychological *support for migrants* whilst abroad (Cristina);
- V. *Provision for the migrant's family* or close relations<sup>23</sup> (Cristina);
- VI. Financing migrants upon their return (Cristina);
- VII. Assuming a migrant's *social and political obligations* without any modification to women's status: women must assume all social responsibilities for community service and obligations for migrants without gaining any official visibility in terms of recognition or representation; and following this women's work and after women have climbed the social hierarchy for men, men return to fulfil important political posts in the local hierarchy and get social recognition for them (Cristina);
- VIII. Having their *body, sexuality, and reproductive and mothering capacities at the service of a complex transnational migratory process*, in the community of origin, abroad, and throughout the migratory process (Cristina);
- IX. Taking *full responsibility for parenting* often without full parental decision-making control which is instead exercised by telephone and enforced through the husband's family (Cristina, Erika);
- X. Taking responsibility for the *woodcarving business* often without formal visibility, decision-making control, or access to profits and recognition as artists (Cristina);
- XI. Coping with *transformed relations in the community* and *increased vigilance* regarding women, without a mainstream male support figure (whether it is a father, [great-] grandfather, uncle, brother, a husband, relative-in-law, a son, godfather, or any other close relation of a male migrant), including neglect, harassment, abuse, and other forms of external control exerted by all members of the community (Adriana and Erika; Cristina)<sup>24</sup>.
- XII. Regarding illnesses and migration, it is important to note the appearance of HIV-AIDS in the community as a migrant-related disease. There are four cases of HIV-AIDS reported in the community, so far affecting men but endangering women. Three are of recent appearance in the past five years and one of a male migrant who is already dead. The stigma of the disease has meant keeping the disease secret and a total lack of social programmes of health prevention. Unsafe unprotected sexual practices are rooted in prevailing social representations of virility and masculinity, reinforced through the heterosexual control of the female spouse's body and reproduction. The demand of symbolically consolidating the marital union during the temporary male migrant's visit, usually resulting in pregnancy, has

23 In the 'stepfamily'-'stepdaughter' relation, the wife of the migrant often becomes the maid of the extended family and in-laws, with all her chores, relations, and earnings being controlled. Sometimes children – especially girls – also suffer part of this abuse, not having their father as male figure present to give protection.

24 Traditionally, women in San Martín belonged to their households and to private spaces destined for their work as carers. Most people confirm that even as late as the 1980s, women were not allowed to walk around alone in the community or to go alone to the regional market of Ocotlán or to Oaxaca City. Following migration and perhaps also the introduction of the health clinic and secondary school in 1994, women have increasingly gained visibility in public spaces; but few of them drive even nowadays, and their movement is constantly monitored by all community members, including other women. If they do not act impeccably according to social canons that often go against their interest, they are seen as responsible for eliciting physical or verbal violence from others. The phrase *ella se lo buscó* (she asked for it) is frequently given as justification for acts of violence or discrimination against women.



been commonplace. Thus, most women secretly resort to contraception but they are not in a position to demand or negotiate condom use.

Overall, the women in the community of origin must cope with the bodily, economic, physical, relational, emotional, and social burdens of migration, including isolation or de facto abandonment, without this automatically leading to greater recognition, representation, or redistribution. Nevertheless and ironically, migration also offers a relief from dysfunctional relations, and although unilaterally, migration is also implemented as an intra- and inter-family conflict-mediating strategy or as a mechanism of empowerment. All these aspects need to be studied in greater qualitative depth in migrant communities and circuits.

## 9.6 Concluding Remarks

*Here is my body. Here are my arms to embrace unwanted jobs. Here are my legs to carry me away, to take me to a safe place if something menaces my integrity. Here is my entire being for anything by any necessary means. Here is my declamatory voice to remind you that I am here.* [Lamberto Roque]

Migration is a movement of human beings, a flow of identities and relationships, not just changes in the location and mobility of an uprooted working force. People involved in migration processes, women and men, adults, children, and elders, migrants and non-migrants in migrant-expelling settings, educated, low-skilled, and indigenous groups from rural and urban settings, are constantly engaging in a dialogue with their families, groups, communities, with time and humanity, with themselves and their liminal identities, in a process of self-actualization and reflexivity (Giddens 1991). This dialogue is multivocal by definition and modernity does not automatically replace tradition in it. As has been seen, gender remains strongly defining.

San Martín Tilcajete presents an interesting case study in order to research migration from a feminist critical ethnographic standpoint, seen from the community of origin. It is a setting where a poverty-stricken subsistence agricultural locality has undergone rapid economic transformation following migration, woodcarving, and tourism in the face of a hegemonic patriarchal, risk-prone, unsafe, and precarious mode of capitalism. Modernization and globalization coexist with the Zapotec world outlook, with some of its core values still defining everyday life within the community and also abroad in the transnational migratory chain.

While a changing context implies novel knowledge and practices, these do not automatically challenge old and profoundly rooted social representations. Observing everyday life provides a door into complex, hidden, obscured, and invisibilized facets of exclusion and injustice relating to migration. It is important to develop research into concomitant factors that are associated with economic imperatives but not solely based on them. For example, migration seen as a rite of passage; as a conflict-mediating strategy within marriages, and within and between families, generations, and groups; as a micro-empowerment strategy; for the advancement of education or service-related opportunities; for seeking children born in the USA who will have double nationality; in the face of collective pressure, illness, etc. The relationships between migration, security, gender, and social justice that we have seen call for the 'participatory parity' envisaged by Fraser, consisting of economic equality, diversity in the group, and collective identities that receive recognition and are valued as different, and a wide scope of justice in which excluded social agents find ways to represent themselves and to affirm their rights and value.

In a world marked by power differences, amongst the most vulnerable groups one finds indigenous women, who must not be taken for granted or invisibilized, as has frequently occurred with migration studies that do not account for identity and for relational and meta-level interconnections. In the present case study, migration was explored as an everyday-life phenomenon seen from the perspective of the migrant-sending community, that is, emphasis was not given to migrants or migration trajectories as such (as in, for example, Hondagneu-Sotelo's study of *Mexican Experiences of Immigration*, 1994; Ariza's study regarding the transformation of women during the migrant process, 2000; or Oehmichen's analysis of social control given cultural change and indigenous women's identities in the transnational community, 2001), but to migration's repercussions and the gender social representations linked to it *in the place of origin*. As in the study of *Mexican Women and the Other Side of Immigration*, looking at the way in which women are transformed by the impact of migration in San Ignacio, Jalisco (Gordillo 2010), the doctoral thesis on marriage and transnational conjugal practices in San Miguel Acuecomac, Puebla by D'Aubeterre (1998), or in Martínez's study of the incorporation of new values such as individual choice and romantic love coexisting with the authority of traditional marriage patterns in San Juan Mixtepec, Oax-

aca (Martínez 2003), our interest lies in the symbolic, representational, and discursive regimes that lead to specific gender identities and relations. Attention to identity and subjectivity enables us to deepen our analysis of migratory contexts, identifying the representational elements of the sentimental and social order which are implicated in unequal and unjust relations (Besserer 2004). Arredondo (2008) has spoken of *mujeridades*, to refer to the experiences of women on-the-move and their relation to and defiance of social expectations. As partner to that, the present case study has presented the everyday life experiences of womanhood in a changing community setting, that is, of *mujeridades* in the home area.

From the case study of San Martín Tilcajete, it is clear that both the migrants and the people living in migrant-sending communities are agents of transition, forging and acting within discursive social contexts and adjusting representations. In a context of deepening globalization, we see that migration in its interaction with woodcarving has become an alternative way of social, political, and economic integration, though with identity articulations culturally rooted in the lo-

cal community, not abroad. This said, migration has high human costs and is not gender-neutral.

Yet although women do not have the same right to decide about migration as men, migration does imply changes in the community of origin, in the family, in organization, in distribution, in power, identities, and the emergence of *mujeridades*, etc. In San Martín, woodcarving and tourism have been dynamic concomitant factors interacting with migration. Together, while they have given men the chance to come and go, they have enabled women to empower themselves de facto, even though economic, political, social, and legal changes are only slowly catching up. Instead of only resorting to migration as a survival strategy because of the lack of opportunities locally, the specific system of coming and going in San Martín Tilcajete means *tileños* having a chance to enter into dialogue with the globalizing world; and the challenge is to make these dialogues not only multilocal but multivocal for both women and men in such a way that women may effectively claim their rights to redistribution, representation, and recognition.

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