

Labor Reintegration of Return Migrants in Two Rural Communities of Yucatán, Mexico*

Mirian SOLÍS LIZAMA**

ABSTRACT

The objective of the article is to describe and analyze the process of reintegration into the labor market of migrants who have returned from the United States to two rural communities in the State of Yucatán, Mexico. These communities have different social and economic dynamics. The ethnographic work and in-depth interviews, conducted for this paper show that the labor reintegration of migrants depends not only on the reasons and the forms of return, but also on factors such as their time of stay in the north, their life experiences in the United States, the amount of time they have been working again in their communities, and the investment and augmentation of their savings.

Keywords: 1. return migration, 2. labor reintegration, 3. rural community, 4. Yucatán, 5. Mexico.

Reinserción laboral de migrantes de retorno en dos comunidades rurales de Yucatán, México

RESUMEN

El objetivo del artículo es describir y analizar el proceso de reinserción laboral de migrantes retornados de Estados Unidos a dos comunidades rurales del estado de Yucatán, las cuales tienen dinámicas sociales y económicas distintas. La información, proveniente de trabajo etnográfico y entrevistas a profundidad, muestra que la reinserción laboral de los migrantes depende no sólo de los motivos y las formas de retorno, sino también de otros factores como: el tiempo de estancia en el norte, sus experiencias de vida en Estados Unidos, tiempo que llevan trabajando nuevamente en sus comunidades y la inversión y multiplicación de sus ahorros.

Palabras clave: 1. migración de retorno, 2. reinserción laboral, 3. comunidad rural, 4. Yucatán, 5. México.

Date of receipt: June 8, 2016.

Date of acceptance: February 21, 2017.

*Text originally written in Spanish. This investigation was carried out during the post-doctoral stay at the Centro Peninsular en Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales at UNAM, under the counseling of Ricardo López Santillán, whose camaraderie during the stay and his pertinent suggestions on this text are greatly appreciated. Thanks also to CEPHICS for all the assistance offered during the course of the investigation.

** CEPHCIS-UNAM, Mexico, mirian.solis.lizama@gmail.com

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17428/rmi.v9i35.416>

Introduction

In this work, I will present the preliminary results of an ongoing investigation into the return of migrants to their places of origin, particularly to Xohuayán and Tixbacab, rural communities located in the South and East of Yucatán state, respectively. Starting with ethnographic data, I will focus on the reintegration of the returnees into the labor markets of their communities and which aspects explain the ways in which they have carried out that process of reintegration in rural areas with distinct social and economic dynamics.

The work is divided into four sections. The first is a brief description of Xohuayán and Tixbacab; the second focuses on the socio-demographic information of the migrants; the third presents the motives and manners of returns; and the fourth explains and analyzes how these motives and manners, along with other features, influence the process of reintegration into the labor market. The empirical information being presented was obtained through in-depth interviews of returning migrants, as well as informal chats with non-migrants in both communities.

Studies of the return of migrants in Mexico and other countries can be divided into three types: 1) those that discuss the concept of return in light of theories that have also attempted to explain the exodus (Cataño & Morales, 2015; Cassarino, 2004; Egea, Nieto, & Jiménez, 2002); 2) those that are interested classifying the motives and manners or types of return (Jáuregui & Recaño, 2014; Mestries, 2013; Díaz, 2009; Durand, 2004); and 3) those who approach the labor-market and socio-cultural reinsertion of the migrants into their native communities, here we also can include works that analyze the ties between return migration and violence and crime (Anguiano, Cruz, & Garbey, 2013; Rivera, 2013a, 2013b; Tovar & Victoria, 2013; Vilalta, 2009; Cobo, 2008; Papail, 2002; Espinosa, 1998).

It is useful to return briefly to the approaches of the theoretical models that attempt to explain why migrants return, with the goal of drawing upon some of them to analyze the cases presented here. Neoclassical theory maintains that migration occurs due to wage differences. The movement occurs from areas with low wages to ar-

eas with high wages (Harris & Todaro, 1970) and returns are seen as a failure of the migrant experience (Cassarino, 2004).

The new economy of labor force migration shows that departures are a strategy of households to better the conditions of the family group. Returns happen when the objectives have been achieved, which therefore assumes the return of successful migrants. Migrants plan their return to enjoy their achievements, greater prestige and to reunite with the family that awaited them and managed their remittances. Maintaining their community ties eases their reintegration (Mestries, 2015; Cassarino, 2004).

Structuralist theory conceives of international migration as a result of the inequalities that exist between receiving and ejecting nations, as well as the dependence on cheap and flexible manual labor by developed economies (Mestries, 2015, p. 43). When these developed economies enter a crisis, the first to be affected are immigrants because they are forced to return (Mestries, 2015, p. 44). When positive changes occur in the country of origin of the migrants they may feel motivated to return due to the expectations generated by these changes. However, these expectations are rarely rooted in the local reality, so the migrants encounter the unexpected, are unable to readapt and decide to re-emigrate (Cassarino, 2004, p. 258).

Trans-nationalist theory maintains that the return is not the final phase of the migratory process, but rather “a circular system of social and economic relationships” (Albo, Ordaz, & Li, 2012, p. 240). The theory proposes that migrants maintain a fealty to their native homeland and destination country; they live between the two in a constant coming and going, returning when they have achieved their objectives (Mestries, 2015, p. 45).

Lastly, the theory of social networks maintains that returning migrants bring with them tangible and intangible resources (Cassarino, 2015, p. 265). The migratory experience allows them to develop other types of relationships that provide them valuable resources, apart from financial ones, such as access to information and the support of family and other social networks (Hazan, n. d., p. 11). “The return, like migration, requires being prepared and supported by social networks based in the region of origin” (Mestries, 2015, p. 44).

Although the various theories contribute toward explaining the return and reintegration of the migrants into their communities, the breadth of experiences we encountered in the real cases we studied tell us that it is difficult to explain the return based on just one theoretical model. Later, we will return to the theory of the new economy of labor force migration and the theory of social networks to analyze the return of the migrants from Yucatán.

Some authors have pointed out that migrants do not necessarily return to their place of origin, but rather to a place with growing employment, so they suggest the growth of the latter be supported rather than the former (Escobar, Martin, Lowell, & Fernández de Castro, 2013). Others, however, maintain that migrants tend to return to their native communities due to the existence of family and community networks (Mendoza, 2013; Mestries, 2011). It also has been pointed out that return migration may increase the rate of unemployment due to the inability of the labor market to absorb these surplus workers in their entirety (Mendoza, 2013, pp. 71-72). This last point gains credence if one bears in mind that between 2005 and 2010, the number of Mexicans who had returned from the United States had never been greater, according to Escobar et al. (2013); since 2005 that number was 230 000 and in 2010 it was 980 000. To this we must add that those who return no longer go back to the United States and are also accompanied by children born in that country, something which, according to the authors, did not happen before 2005 (Escobar et al., 2013, p. 17).

In the face of these general approaches on return migration and the reintegration of migrants into the labor market, coupled with the fact that studies on the international migration of Yucatán natives are scant and for none of these is return migration and labor reintegration the principal subject of analysis, the case studies presented in this document gain relevance. Especially if one takes into account that the countryside in Mexico has been in crisis for decades, that the labor market in this country is ever more selective and competitive, making more vulnerable those who, like the migrants, come from rural areas, have low levels of schooling and even, because of their ethnic origins, find themselves relegated to informal jobs with low wages

and, in the best of circumstances, they become self-employed with meager incomes.

Native land or context

Tixbacab and Xohuayán are rural communities categorized as precincts with fewer than 2 500 inhabitants; they depend on municipal capitals, Cenotillo and Oxkutzcab respectively. According to the 2010 Census (Consejo Nacional de Población [Conapo], 2010), Xohuayán has a population of 1 340, of which 617 are men and 723 are women. Tixbacab has 349 inhabitants; 167 men and 182 women. The latter is located in the eastern part of the state, some 140 kilometers from Mérida. Xohuayán is located in the southern part, almost 130 kilometers from the capital of Yucatán.

According to the Consejo Nacional de Población (Conapo), the two communities in the study suffer from high degrees of marginalization (Conapo, 2010a). Their public services are substandard. Pavement is limited to only the main streets, but in Xohuayán, for example, it is in poor condition. Practically all homes have electric power, but street lighting is not available throughout the entire town. In both communities, the inhabitants don't have access to drinking water throughout the day, or every day, so they must find a way to store the water for their activities and hygiene. The state Ministry of Health provides services to the inhabitants; community health centers see patients Mondays through Fridays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. In case of a medical emergency outside working hours or on weekends, patients must travel to the municipal capital or to neighboring towns to receive treatment from private physicians. And if the patient's family does not have a vehicle, they must pay for transportation to the medical appointment, since there are no buses operating between these communities and the neighboring towns.¹ In general, families rely on Seguro Popular. As far as educational services, both communities have preschool and elementary school, as well as junior high school and high school via distance

¹ In Xohuayán, some inhabitants who own vans make morning and afternoon runs between the community and the neighboring towns. In Tixbacab there is a morning bus that travels from Cenotillo to Tizimín, one of the principal cities in the state, but it makes just one trip per day.

learning. These remote learning offerings began in Tixbacab in September, 2015 and in Xohuayán they are about to complete their second year in operation. The existence of a distance learning junior high school has, in the last decade, allowed young people to extend their years of schooling beyond the elementary grades. According to older adults, when they were growing up they could only study up to the third grade and not every child then went back to school. This in part explains why in Tixbacab the rate of illiteracy among adults is 14.34 percent and why 40.55 percent of them did not complete elementary school. In Xohuayán the rate of illiteracy among adults is 26.04 percent and 52.70 of them did not complete elementary school (Conapo, 2010a).

In Xohuayán and Tixbacab, but especially in the former, one can notice the contrast between traditional Maya houses built from perishable materials (palm fronds and cane) and other structures made of cinder blocks, concrete and Californian styles. The inhabitants indicated that buildings made from *material*,² grew in number after the beginning of migration to the United States. In Xohuayán, when one walks down the streets, it is surprising to see the styles and number of homes that have been built or are being built. This is evidence of the positive impact of migrants' remittances in terms of the purchase and improvement of dwellings.

Xohuayán is a place with deeply rooted customs and traditions: every inhabitant over the age of five speaks Maya, this is the language used daily by every generation. Men speak Spanish more fluently than women do, and although the latter understand it, they refuse to speak it, possibly afraid they might make a mistake.³ Adult women and many younger ones wear the typical hipil every day; this garment and the *terno*⁴ are very common during family celebrations. Most women wear the traditional white terno when they marry. In Tixbacab only older adults speak Maya, since the language is no longer used by young people and children. The hipil as an everyday garment is worn by a

²This is the term used by local inhabitants to refer to houses built of concrete.

³The refusal of the women to speak Spanish is evident in adults as well as the young. In many instances, the girls who studied junior high school through remote learning used Spanish, but others refused to do so.

⁴This is the formal attire. It is commonly used in celebrations of patron saints and in typical dances.

smaller number of women and when weddings are celebrated the couples wear traditional Western dress. The rituals related to the planting and harvest of maize fields are waning in popularity in Tixbacab, but in Xohuayán they are practiced regularly.

The communities in the study share one feature that in a way explains the emigration of its inhabitants the United States: the lack of well-paying jobs. In both towns, the men primarily work the fields as farmworkers, small ranchers or both at once. Some are construction workers and those with mechanical or electrical skills work in those professions. Landholding is communal, although there also exist small landowners. In the 1990s, thanks to the Program of Certification of Communal Landholding Rights and Certification of Parcels (Procede), a portion of the older adults in these communities received land titles that grant them the right of legal usufruct of communal parcels. In Tixbacab, the communal landholders were in favor of the subdivision. In Xohuayán, some of the communal landholders accepted it and others did not.

In Tixbacab, a smaller number of communal landholders practice agriculture, and the planting of beans and corn has decreased. Plots where in years past cornstalks grew have been transformed into corrals, since more men now see cattle ranching as a better option to secure a higher income. The distribution of water through wells and cenotes, coupled with the proximity to various Cattle Ranching Unions, where cattle are processed, has favored the growth of these activities. Some communal landholders don't have their own cattle, but work in association with the cattle ranchers in the region and provide for their families and maintain their own small parcels with the wages they earn.

In Xohuayán agriculture and cattle ranching also coexist in the communal landholdings, but the former activity has greater relevance among the inhabitants. The fields are seasonal and besides corn, they plant pumpkins, chiles and different varieties of beans, like *ibes* and *xpelón*. Part of the harvest is for family consumption and the rest is sold in municipal market at Oxxutzcab. Some farmers have set aside part of their parcels for the planting of citrus (limes and sweet oranges), as well as avocados, eggplants and achiote, crops meant exclusively for sale.

Cattle ranching at a small scale is an ancient custom in Xohuayán, and with the passage of time the number of communal landholders dedicated to it has increased thanks to remittances sent by migrants. However, as an economic activity it does not seem to have the same importance as it does in Tixbacab. This is probably due to the difficulty in procuring water for the animals. Xohuayán's elevation makes it difficult to dig for wells and these would be very expensive. In addition, the surrounding area also lacks natural sources like cenotes to supply water. Those inhabitants who have plots close to the town leave their animals at pasture for two or three days, then they go to retrieve them and bring them to town to drink from the troughs or cisterns located in the plots. Those who have more distant plots choose to fill large water tanks with potable water and take these to their plots to supply their animals. This fact points to two problems: first, this reduces the amount of drinking water available to the population, and second, a vehicle is needed to transport the water.

For the women, the labor situation is even more difficult, since these small communities don't have spaces to employ them. Some four years ago in Tixbacab, a cooperative comprised of ten women dedicated to raising poultry began operations; three years ago, a communal dining hall entered service and employs a small number of other women certain days a week. Except for these spaces, there are no other job opportunities for the female inhabitants. Some of the women who contribute to their family's income sew clothing, weave hammocks and sell typical Yucatec food. The women of Xohuayán's mostly engage in the embroidery of hipiles, ternos and blouses. The demand for hand or machine-embroidered clothing transcends local boundaries, since some of the embroiderers work for people in Mérida, who deliver to the women all the material needed for the garments and pay between 100 and 150 pesos for embroidering a blouse. Embroidering is not exclusive to women; some men also earn their daily wages through the sale of hipiles or blouses. In Xohuayán, it is common in the mornings and evenings for several homes to sell local dishes like panuchos and salbutes, tortas, empanadas, Chinese food and other dishes, thus allowing men and women to earn a small income to supplement earnings from the fields and from embroidery.

Faced with a lack of labor opportunities, the inhabitants of Xohuayán and Tixbacab, mainly the men, decided to emigrate to the United States in search of employment. The municipal capitals, Cenotillo and Oxkutzcab feature prominently among the municipalities that experience considerable ejections of their inhabitants to the United States. According to Conapo (2010b), Oxkutzcab has a *very high* degree of migratory intensity and Cenotillo has a *high* degree, helping them occupy the second and third highest rankings in the state, respectively, as far as population ejections per municipality (Conapo, 2010b).

In both towns, international migration dates back to the era of the Bracero Program (1942-1964), although the 1990s stand out as the period with the greatest exodus.⁵ Tixbacab and Xohuayán experienced the phenomenon of migration later; in the former community empirical evidence revealed that its inhabitants began to leave mainly in the 1980s, while in the latter this occurred in the 1990s.

When asking returnees their reasons for emigrating, they replied that their earnings from working the fields was not enough to subsist and, at the same time, that they wanted to buy a plot of land and a house. The networks they maintained with friends and relatives in Cenotillo and Oxkutzcab facilitated their arrival in the United States. Migrants from Xohuayán travelled to San Francisco and Santa Rosa, California. Those from Tixbacab went to cities in Colorado, primarily Denver. In their various destinations, almost all interviewees worked in restaurants, first as dishwashers, while later, several became waiters and cooks specializing in various cuisines. Their biweekly earnings ranged from 800 to 2 000 dollars.⁶ After one, two, five, even 10 years abroad, those who once were absent sons and daughters decided to return home and are now again in the land of their birth.

Who are the returnees?

The returnees to Tixbacab and Xohuayán are mainly younger men. The mean age of the interviewees is 39. Migration among women is more

⁵ For more information on migration in these municipalities consult Cornejo & Fortuny (2012) and Solís (2005).

⁶ Their total earnings depended on the type of work done, length of stay in the United States and number of jobs held simultaneously.

common in Tixbacab than in Xohuayán. In the first community, we interviewed just one returning migrant and met another two who had returned to their home town after several years residing in Colorado. According to the inhabitants there are women who today live in Denver; during our field work we met one of them who came back to visit her home town: she emigrated in the 1990s and is a legal resident of the United States. In Xohuayán, we interviewed a woman who returned after living in San Francisco for approximately one year, but no one was able to point to any other woman who had emigrated. To explain the non-participation in international migration among the women of Xohuayán, one of the returnees said:

the women here don't go there, they don't dare [...] they're afraid because they're young women and young women here are very closed-minded. A woman must stay at home beside her mother, they feel it's their duty, so they don't leave (Raúl, personal communication, February 2016).

Most returnees are married; before emigrating some of them were single, but they married upon their return. The only two who were still single when they were interviewed come from Xohuayán, but they plan to marry soon with young women from the same community. Among the migrants there is a preference for endogamy; for them, marrying in the United States implies not returning to their native town and this was not something they were willing to do.

Various authors who tackle the study of migration by Mexicans to the United States have documented that the majority of these migrants have low levels of schooling (Alarcón & Ramírez, 2011; Angoa, 2009; Tinley, 2006; Levine, 2001) and this can also be seen among the returned migrants in Yucatán, as, on average, they have completed six years of formal education. As to the year when they emigrated for the first time, we observed that only one did so in the 1980s, but that in the 1990s this same individual crossed the border without legal documents four more times. He is the oldest returned migrant, at 58 years of age. Of the other migrants, 24 percent undertook their voyage in the 1990s and 71 percent in the first decade of the 2000s. The returnees from Tixbacab first emigrated in the 1990s and those from

Xohuayán did so starting in the 2000s. Without exception, all of them crossed the northern border without legal documents.⁷

In summary, the returned migrants mainly are young men, married, who emigrated in an undocumented manner, primarily in the 2000s and who have six years of formal education. When comparing the returned migrant population of both communities, we find that the youngest migrants, with the highest levels of formal education and who experienced their first migration in the 2000s are those from Xohuayán. A broader study on the migration in both communities could tell us if the presence of young returnees in Xohuayán is because returning is more common in this community or because young people in Tixbacab emigrated less frequently in the last decade.

About the motives and manners of the return

The desire to earn *dollars* to give a better life to their families, to build a house, start a business or pay debts are among the motives given by the interviewees to explain their exodus to the United States. Their return, considered by some authors as the final phase of the migratory process, also involves a combination of motives. Francis Mestries (2013) indicates that the motives for the return are complex and interconnected, since they include both objective and subjective features that are often intermingled. Among the objective features he includes age, deportation, the acquisition of material goods in the place of origin and distance between the hometown and the destination abroad. Among the subjective factors, the author includes social and human capital, community identity, the reaching of objectives and feelings of affection (Mestries, 2013, p. 178-180).

The testimony of the returnees clearly expresses that in those cases where the migrant underwent a planned return, several motives were intertwined, like nostalgia for their families and communities, fatigue from long workdays and the desire to enjoy the goods they had

⁷ Undocumented entry into the United States was the only option the inhabitants of Xohuayán and Tixbacab had when they emigrated, since in Yucatec communities United States government programs H-2A and H-2B do not apply. These programs permit temporary and legal workforce migration to that country.

acquired. For example, Fernando,⁸ who left Tixbacab in 2005 and returned in 2012, explained his return:

The principal motive [to return] is for the family, especially after my wife said you know that the house is done, there's a little cash, so like they say, for love of family you have to go back. Because there will be opportunities to go again, but my goal was just one trip and accomplish what had to be done so as not to come and go back again, and above all, the main thing is the family (Fernando, personal communication, November 2015).

Those who emigrated as bachelors, in addition to having built their houses and saved some money, decided to return in order to marry, but also because they felt tired of being subjected to long and exhausting workdays that caused them stress. For Reynaldo, for example, the return implied rest:

I grew tired, I got bored too, everyday working and working, because there you can't just go out as you wish, sometimes I work double shifts too, I start at nine in the morning and finish at 10 at night, 11. I work three double shifts like that; I can't do anything else. I called my family, you know what? I want to return, I'm only going to wait one more year, and my mother said, it's alright, we'll wait for you here (Reynaldo, personal communication, February 2016).

The returnees with motives similar to those of Fernando and Raymundo are those who planned their return, they took weeks or even months preparing their voyage, many times convinced their returns would be final. Others returned due to family matters that forced them to take a sudden decision. One of these is Javier; he is 46 years old, he first emigrated in 1995 and after a two-year stay in Colorado Springs he returned to his hometown because he wanted to be with his family. In 1999 he embarked on a second voyage. The goal was to earn money to settle a debt of his father's, he returned to the same place, where he worked as a kitchen assistant. In 2002, he returned to his hometown unexpectedly:

⁸The names that appear in this text are fictitious.

I returned because my son got sick with a heart problem and I had to return. They notified me and I returned with the paycheck I had, I didn't buy anything [...] I returned on March 20, on the 19th I received my paycheck and on the 20th I was already heading back here (Javier, personal communication, November 2015).

Juan, too, received news that prompted him to take an airplane and return home. He is 48 years old, emigrated for the first time in 1991, and between then and 2009 he made several trips to the United States. His stays were always in Denver, where at first he worked as a dishwasher until he became a cook in various Chinese restaurants. In 2012 he returned to Tixbacab, his oldest son's wedding forced him to make this decision:

It wasn't planned to return quickly, but it turned out that my son, who is 22, decided to get married now, so I told him not to get married because he's very young, but he made the decision and told me, if you want to come, you will, if you don't, you won't. So, it was like a forced return, because I had planned spending more time and then returning, but it didn't work out that way. So I returned, but with the intention of going back quickly [to the United States] once the wedding was over and then back again, but that didn't happen because the problems have already started⁹ [...] (Juan, personal communication, November 2015).

Another return due to personal motives was that of Marcela, 36, who emigrated in 2005 to Denver to be with her husband. Three months after arriving in that city she began to work cleaning houses. One year after her arrival she became pregnant and left her job. Her son was born in Denver and when the child was 11 months old, her husband decided she should return to live in Tixbacab. Although not completely convinced, Marcela heeded her husband's decision and returned to her hometown in 2008.

⁹By the start of the problems, Juan is referring to his mother falling ill repeatedly and his siblings leaving the responsibility of caring for her to fall on him. This created conflicts within the family, but Juan agreed to care for his mother, who due to her advanced age and delicate health requires much care and constant visits to the doctor, which prevents Juan from leaving his hometown.

I came back because my husband says that over there it's not for living, over here he likes the woods and he says that one day, since we're not from there, they're going to kick us out. [In Tixbacab] where are we going to return? How are we going to subsist? That's why I returned, because since I was pregnant he was going to send me back, because he worked at a restaurant from 11 in the morning to two in the morning, and I barely saw him. Here, with the little he was able to send, I built my house, well I remodeled it, because it was my father in law's and he gave me a part of it. Truth is, I didn't want to return, life over there is pleasant [...] there is comfort, you live well, eat well, of course, like I told you, you have to work to stay there (Marcela, personal communication, November 2015).

Elena, 41, had a similar experience to Marcela: she left Xohuayán for San Francisco in 2003 to be with her husband, to whom she had been married 15 years but had been unable to become pregnant. Shortly after her arrival in California she began working as a kitchen assistant at a restaurant. Almost a year after her arrival in California, Elena became pregnant, so her husband and other relatives convinced her to return to her hometown before the birth of her child, otherwise *the baby would be claimed by the United States government*.¹⁰ Against her will, but fearful of what might happen to her son, Elena returned to Xohuayán in 2004. She recalls her life in the city of the *Golden Gate* with nostalgia.

I liked it a lot over there, I don't know, I think it seems like a dream, it's beautiful, before you get to the city there are a lot of lights, I didn't eat Yucatec food there, like I used to eat, I wanted to eat other food. There, I ate all sorts of things, since it was just the two of us and he [her husband] earned a lot, we went out to eat whatever we wanted, we had fun, that's what I tell my children [...] I didn't work very long because I only went there to have fun; over there I liked everything, to go for a walk, the zoo, the beach, I went where there are a lot of doves, turtles, where there are squirrels, I even went where they played baseball,

¹⁰ Elena said her husband thought that since they were undocumented the United States government could take their child from them and deport them. According to Elena, other countrymen of hers had the same notion. This was the first time in the author's work experience with Yucatec migrants that someone expressed a fear of losing their offspring because the child was born in the United States.

I went everywhere [...] I want to go one more, that's what I tell [her husband], but he doesn't want to, maybe he doesn't like it (Elena, personal communication, February 2016).

In the four cases presented, the motives for the returns do not correspond to the wishes of the migrants. Unforeseen family circumstances, like those that befell Javier and Juan, altered their migratory plans and drove them to make the decision to return. The returns of Marcela and Elena, besides not being completely voluntary, include the dimension of gender, since their decisions were mediated by their roles as wives who must obey the orders of their husbands.¹¹

Two more cases correspond to migrants who were deported, thus the deportations were the objective motive (Mestries, 2013) they found themselves in Tixbacab once more. The first to be deported was Martín, 35, married and the father of four children; he emigrated in 2000 to Denver with the goal of working and building a house. His stay lasted seven years and he worked in various restaurants. Martín recounted that in Denver he established a friendship with a woman who sold drugs. Once while with her, the police arrested them and he was charged with smuggling. He was jailed for six months and subsequently deported. Although Martín attained his goal of building a house, and even financed part of the construction of his parents' house, after he was deported he arrived in Tixbacab with no savings.

The second deportation case is that of Saúl, 42, married and father to one daughter. Saúl first emigrated in 1990 and made four voyages from then to 2000. Saúl also settled in Denver, where he worked as a dishwasher and cook in various restaurants and, later, in construction. In 2012, Saúl and his friends were detained by the police; he declined to state the reason, but he was jailed for several months and then deported. Saúl arrived in Tixbacab with no savings, largely the result, in his own words, of living a dissipated lifestyle in the United States.

The motives for the returns are intimately linked to their manner or type. In the cases we studied, the majority experienced the definitive

¹¹ A prominent feature in studies on migration and gender is that women tend to adapt more quickly and better than men to their destinations, so they prefer to settle definitively (Espinosa, 1998).

return of a successful migrant, (Espinosa, 1998 cited in Mestries, 2013, p. 178), that is to say, a return that occurs when the migrant reached his goals, like building a house, buying land or vehicles, or setting up a business, for example. The cases of Martín and Saúl represent forced return, this manner is the result of deportation, according to Jorge Durand (2004).

*Reintegration into the labor market:
cattle ranching, agriculture and day labor*

For the majority of the interviewees, the return to their community also meant a return to the fields. At the time of their interviews, all of them except Elena were involved in an activity that generated income. According to their own testimonies, finding work in their communities did not present a problem; what has been difficult for several of them is meeting all their necessities with their income, especially for those with daily earnings of 100 to 200 pesos.

Given their different points of origin and the diversity of their experiences, motives and manners of return, in order to explain how the process of reinsertion into the labor market has occurred it is convenient to group them according to their place of origin and the manner in which they earn their income. We can divide the returnees to Tixbacab into three groups: self-employed, day laborers and those who combine both forms of work. In the self-employed group are those migrants who are communal landholders, who with their remittances developed a plot of land, bought their own cattle or worked in partnerships; among these, some also carry out other types of activities. Most of these migrants returned of their own volition when they attained their goals. The funds invested in their parcels and their accumulated savings facilitated this group's reinsertion into the work force.

Marcos and Juan are self-employed, they first migrated in the 1990s and repeated the voyage on more than three occasions. With their remittances, they built houses, invested in their parcels and bought cattle and motor vehicles. Marcos decided to return because he grew tired of the work and thought it was time to dedicate himself to his parcel. With his remittances, his wife opened a small market and, later on, a tortilla factory. When Marcos returned, he became

involved with the family businesses. Currently, he and his wife own more than 100 head of cattle and, in addition to working his fields, every day Marcos rides a motorcycle to neighboring towns to sell tortillas. On Sundays, he sells cochinita pibil.

Juan, like Marcos, is involved in cattle ranching and other activities. Although, as he said, *his return was forced*, the fact that he had a parcel of land, more than 50 head of cattle and cash savings before his return eased his re-adaptation into the community after four voyages to Colorado. Currently, he is the municipal commissioner and, besides his work in his fields, he has started a small business selling motor oil for motorcycles and automobiles. He travels every week to the city of Tizimín to buy supplies of these products.

Among the day laborers, there are those who returned for family reasons and those who were deported, Javier is one of them. As mentioned in previous pages, he returned because his child fell ill. He is not a communal landholder and while he worked in the United States, his remittances were used to pay off his father's debt and to build a house. Since he was on in the United States for three years, he was unable to save enough money to buy a parcel of land, much less to buy cattle. Although his return was unexpected, he soon found work as a cowherd in a ranch, where he has worked for 12 years. He receives a weekly wage of 600 pesos, and although those earnings are steady, they are not enough to cover all the needs of his family. Her wife is a member of the cooperative dedicated to raising poultry and she contributes as much as possible to the household.

Martín and Saúl are the deported day laborers. They returned with no savings whatever, are not communal landholders and represent the most difficult cases of workforce reinsertion. Since his return (in 2007), Martín has undergone several internal migrations, to neighboring towns as well as to the city of Cancún, but nowhere has he found stable work. He currently has two jobs: in the mornings he is a day laborer at a ranch and in the afternoons he is a municipal police officer. Saúl lacks steady employment, *he works where he can*, and sometimes helps his brother repairing motorcycles and bicycles or as an electrician. Years before, he took a course in electrical installation and this has helped him earn some wages. He is the only interviewee

whose living situation is precarious and who clearly expressed feeling like a *failure*.

The third group, comprised of returnees who combine self-employment with day labor, returned for various motives and all succeeded in building their houses, invested in parcels, bought cattle and accumulated savings. However, when these funds ran out, some of these migrants were forced to diversify their economic activities to increase their daily earnings and have even thought of returning to the United States.

Julián is part of this group; he is a communal landholder and returned to his hometown in 2009 because he missed his family. He is married and has three daughters. With his remittances, he built a house, invested in a small plot of land, and bought a truck and some head of cattle. He returned with some savings, but these were spent little by little, until the time came that he began to sell his cattle one at a time. In 2013, when his economic situation worsened, he decided to emigrate once more. He sold more of his cattle to finance his voyage. While heading to Denver, he was stopped by United States Immigration officers and was deported. He returned to his hometown, disappointed after having spent 40 000 pesos in his failed attempt to cross the border a third time. Currently, so as not to lose his remaining cattle, Julián tries to work as a day laborer for regional ranchers for 120 pesos per day; He devotes his afternoons to his own parcel. About his economic situation, he commented:

I think we're doing okay, not good but not bad, we're making ends meet with what little I earn [...] although right now is the moment when things get *too tight*. Before they didn't, because your paycheck was dependable, and now, when someone gets sick things get *too tight for us* (Julián, personal communication, November 2015).

Returnees to Xohuayán fall into the same three categories: self-employed, day laborers and those who combine the two. In this community, most interviewees mentioned that they adapted quickly to working the fields, but they are aware that the incomes the make from agriculture and, in a few cases, cattle ranching, are barely enough to pay for food and other basic necessities, so some of them have also

considered the possibility of emigrating to the United States once more. Among the self-employed are communal landholders, small landowners and those who have no parcels. In the last category are mainly younger men who work their parents' parcels.

Mauricio is self-employed. He emigrated in 2007 and returned in late 2014, married, and had his first child. In Santa Rosa, Mauricio earned about 2 000 dollars every two weeks working as a cook and busboy. With his remittances, he built a large house, bought two parcels of land and a truck and also sent money so his father could plant some crops and buy cattle. Upon his return, he tended to his parcels. Currently, he grows limes and eggplants, which he sells in Oxkutzcab. He described his work and economic situation, as well as that of the other returnees, thus:

I'm doing well, that's the truth, because with what I have I earn well. Sometimes, when we harvest the limes, the things we planted, well we do well, because I work with my father, together [...] My father told me you better buy someplace where you can work when you return, I sent the money, he bought it for me and it helped me a lot so I didn't have to *chambear*¹² like some young men have to. Sometimes they work all day, they earn 120, 150 pesos, apart from the gasoline they're going to consume, their food. How much is left? around 80 pesos. Things are difficult here, because I have a cousin like that. He sent money to his father and he never got into his son's head that he should buy some land so he would have work when he returned and now he regrets it. He says, why didn't my father tell me to buy this or that? And he tried to go back [to the United States] twice, but he didn't make it (Mauricio, personal communication, February 2016).

The only self-employed returnee who doesn't work in the fields is Raúl. He is 25, emigrated in 2007 and returned in April, 2015, not before having built a house, bought a truck and saved some capital. Before emigrating, he worked in his father's plot, but he also learned to embroider. Since his return, Raúl and his wife are involved in embroidering hipiles and ternos, which they sell among the women in their community. The everyday use of the hipil in Xohuayán favors the success of his small, family business. To embroider a garment takes

¹²This term is used to refer to wage labor.

him approximately one month and he charges between 1 000 and 1 500 pesos each. Raúl does not think that agriculture is a good option to make a living:

I don't like those sorts of jobs because I see almost nothing; I like things that produce year-round and those parcels are seasonal. If there is no fruit, there is no money and there is no food [...] I think it's really difficult, because working in a field is hard work and sometimes it doesn't produce anything. Like last year they had a very poor harvest, there's not even corn now, and for people who don't have a way to get ahead it's very hard. That's why you have to learn to do more things than what you already know. Like I tell my father, you can learn more things, not just working the fields. If my brothers weren't there [in California] he wouldn't have enough to eat, because he only works the fields (Raúl, personal communication, February 2016).

Among those who combine self-employment with wage labor, some returned for various motives. Some have their own parcels and others are communal landholders, but their crops don't produce enough resources to sustain them, so they have to work for others for 120 pesos per day.

Felipe is part of this group. He is 43, emigrated to California in 2000 and returned in 2008, convinced that he had fulfilled his goals by building a house. He had some savings and, at that time, thought he could return and once again dedicate himself to agriculture. Felipe is not a communal landholder and currently rents parcels to raise crops. The harvests aren't always what he hopes for and when that happens, his economic situation turns precarious and he is forced to find work as a day laborer. He believes returning was a bad decision:

I'm saying that maybe I didn't make the correct decision, because first you have to ensure a job, somewhere to work and a house, and then return. But you need a place to work more than you need a house. A house is also a blessing, because I have my own house, but I don't have a job, a permanent position. Without daily sustenance that's not right. I thought of a house, but I didn't think in a place to work and that was one of the bad decisions [...] I was sure that I would return to the fields, because we have no formal education, but if I had thought

about it better maybe things would be different right now, maybe I'd have a business, a parcel with irrigation that could produce year-round. Even if there wasn't enough to save, there would be daily sustenance. Right now I only work seasonally, I plant corn, beans, pumpkins, lima beans, but when my harvest is done I start looking for work, I go work for other people, as a construction worker too [...] *sometimes I get the idea of going back there* [the United States] (Felipe, personal communication, February 2016).

Returnee day laborers seem to have uncertain work futures, since they depend on others to pay their wages and because their economic activities are tied to seasonal agriculture. Gabriel belongs to this group; he is 46, he emigrated in 2002 and returned in 2008. Although he is a communal landowner, he does not farm his parcel because he does not have the economic resources to maintain it. With his remittances, he built a house and returned with some savings, but these were exhausted a few months after his return. He currently works where he can. He has four children, three young women and a teen-aged boy. The daughters embroider blouses and thus contribute to the household and reduce the economic pressures faced by their father. Gabriel's wife mentioned that were it not for her daughters, the family wouldn't have enough to eat.

As for the motives and manners stated by the returnees, we can say that, except for the cases of deportees and those who returned for family reasons, their return happened once the migrants had accomplished their goals. Their expectation of their return was to come back to enjoy better social and economic conditions compared to what they had before their emigration. In this sense, the new economy of labor force migration helps to explain, at first, the rapid and, to a certain extent, successful reinsertion of the migrants, especially of those who planned their return and did so voluntarily. Some of them already had a parcel or a ranch and savings to invest in agriculture and/or cattle ranching. The expectation was to return, invest and live off the earnings.

In these cases, their savings were the largest resource obtained in the United States that the migrants utilized to aid their reintegration into the workforce. The skills and knowledge gained in the United

States don't seem to be important to the process of labor force reinsertion among the migrants from Yucatán, as they did not use them to find employment. On the contrary, they exploited their knowledge prior to their migration in the fields of farming and ranching, as well as social and family networks to establish their businesses.

The expectations of the returnees, focused on investing and multiplying their savings, were clearly met in the cases of Marcos, Juan and Mauricio, were successful in reaching their goals. Others, like Julián and Felipe, experienced good moments that came to an end, forcing them to turn to their social networks to find employment. Although the investment of savings was crucial at the beginning of the labor force reinsertion of the majority of the returnees, one cannot set aside the how important social networks also have been. The reinforcement of their ties to the community through the networks of common origin, friends and relatives has been for the returnees the channel through which they achieved reinsertion, as they used these to make their investments and sustain their businesses. Even the deportees, who had no clear intention of returning but were forced to do so and without any savings, have turned to their networks to find employment that affords them, as much as possible, the earnings they need to subsist. Although social networks did not, at first, play a part in the decision of these migrants to return, they have played an important role in the process of workforce reinsertion, especially for those who did not see the results they expected when they invested their savings.

The diversity of the cases presented shows once more how complex it is to analyze and explain the return of the migrants and their labor force reinsertion according to just one theoretical approach, especially when the cases had different moments of emigration and return. And it is necessary to take into account other aspects that will be presented next.

Final thoughts

Based on the empirical information gathered, one can say that the workforce reinsertion—successful or not—of the migrants into their communities depends not only on the motive and manner of their

return and of the objectives that led to the migration, but also on how long they lived in the United States, on their experiences there, on how long they have been working in their native communities once more, on the investment and growth of their savings and on the context of their place of origin.

The instances of Marcos and Juan, which represent successful and ongoing workforce reinsertion—because they invested in a ranch or plot of land, bought cattle, started a business and now enjoy a comfortable economic situation—seem to be extraordinary cases in the context of returnees to Tixbacab. To explain these cases, one must take into account that they are migrants who went through an accumulative process of migratory experiences and, therefore, of saving remittances; who crossed the border several times in a decade (the 1990s) when the economic costs and risks were lower; who received from *Procede* a communal landholding parcel; and whose relatives who lived in Mexico took on the task of starting businesses—cattle ranching, tortilla factories, etcetera.—to smooth the road toward a working life in the community upon their return. In these cases, migration points to, as the new economy of migration states, a family strategy that sought to better the standard of living of the group and to lay the groundwork for the definitive return of the migrants so they could reunite with their families and enjoy their assets.

Therefore, the family support network is one more feature that, in an indirect manner, influences the labor force reinsertion of the migrants into their native communities. The wives and parents, as the administrators of the remittances, become necessary for the success of the migrant to be reflected in the building of a house, the investment in a business or the accumulation of savings.

Unlike Marcos and Juan, other returnees who have invested in cattle or agriculture, like Julián and Felipe, were unable to multiply the savings they invested, but spent these and have been forced to sell their labor for wages that barely meet their basic needs. These are cases of returnees who migrated but once, especially after 2000, when the costs and risks of undocumented border crossings increased. Not all of them own their own parcels; they returned once they had achieved their goal of building a house and saving some money. These migrants invested their savings in cattle or agriculture, but did not

realize the hoped-for results. In the majority of these cases, international migration did not result in better work and economic conditions, since they returned to the fields, where they receive low wages, or are self-employed in businesses or activities that generate scant incomes. In that sense, international migration did not help the returnees attain higher wages than those who did not emigrate.

In the United States, the migrants gained new skills, especially those related to the cooking of various types of food, however, these new talents have not helped them to reintegrate into the labor market. The characteristics of their native communities do not favor the existence of restaurants where they could sell their services or be owners, since these would not be at all commercially viable in these rural communities. As pointed out by Salvador Cobo (2008), rural areas with few of factors of production offer few or no returns on the investments of the migrants since their small populations mean that businesses financed through remittances are not profitable. Therefore, the characteristics of the marketplace and of investment opportunities in their native communities are determinant to their success (Cobo, 2008, p. 172).

On the other hand, when migrants have considered leaving their communities to work in an urban center like Cancún or Mérida by offering their services to restaurants, they have wound up abandoning the idea. First, because they assert that any job will require of them levels of formal education they do not possess, and second, because in the city they would have to pay for housing and transportation. When they set off the wages they would earn against the expenses they would incur, they come to the conclusion that it would not be profitable to emigrate to the cities and they decide instead to remain in their communities, as laborers or in the fields. Some of them, however, faced with the inadequacy of their incomes to better their living conditions, still think of emigrating once again.

Although at the moment most of the returnees have incomes sufficient *to feed themselves, but not to save*, the ones who seem to have relatively stable work conditions are the natives of Tixbacab. This could be because they emigrated earlier, journeyed to the United States more than once, returned earlier, own communal landholding parcels and their economic activities are more closely tied to cattle

ranching. As far as the labor prospects of the migrants from Xohuayán, these seem uncertain, first because they mostly depend on seasonal crops, they are more recent returnees who still have savings and have not experienced a crop failure, and second, because many of them are younger men who do not own their own land or have sufficient economic resources to purchase it.

Although there is no one case where we can say with absolute certainty that the returnees have failed to reinsert themselves into the workforce of native communities (because even the deportees, despite their hardships, are currently working *at what they can*), it is possible to maintain that the meager wages or incomes they derive from working the fields make most of their economic situations difficult, and highlight the advantages of working in the United States. Their return to a life of want has prompted them to think about or try to emigrate once more, since they lived an *unfinished American dream*.

References

- Alarcón, R., & Ramírez, T. (2011, julio-septiembre). Integración económica de los inmigrantes mexicanos en la zona metropolitana de Los Ángeles. *Papeles de población* (69), 73-102.
- Albo, A., Ordaz, J. L., & Li, J. J. (2012). Inserción laboral y características de los migrantes mexicanos de retorno 2005-2011. Comparación urbana-rural. In T. Ramírez & M. Á. Castillo (Coords.). *El estado de la migración. México ante los recientes desafíos de la migración internacional* (pp. 237-268). Mexico: Conapo.
- Angoa, M. (2009). Mexicanas en Estados Unidos. In P. Leite & S. Guiorguli (Eds.). *El estado de la migración. Las políticas públicas ante los retos de la migración mexicana a Estados Unidos* (pp. 171-210). Mexico: Conapo.
- Anguiano, M. E., Cruz, R., & Garbey-Burey, R. M. (2013). Migración internacional de retorno: trayectorias y reinserción laboral de migrantes veracruzanos. *Papeles de población*, 19(77), 115-147.
- Cassarino, J. (2004). Theorising Return Migrations: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 6(2), 253-279.

- Cataño, S., & Morales, S. (2015). La migración de retorno. Una descripción desde algunas investigaciones latinoamericanas y españolas. *Revista Colombiana de Ciencias Sociales*, 6(1), 89-112.
- Cobo, S. (2008). Cómo entender la movilidad ocupacional de los migrantes de retorno. Una propuesta de marco explicativo para el caso mexicano. *Estudios demográficos y urbanos*, 23(1), 159-177.
- Consejo Nacional de Población. (2010a). *Índice de marginación por localidad 2010*. Retrieved from http://www.conapo.gob.mx/en/CONAPO/Indice_de_Marginacion_por_Localidad_2010
- Consejo Nacional de Población. (2010b). *Índices de intensidad migratoria México-Estados Unidos 2010*. Retrieved from http://www.conapo.gob.mx/swb/CONAPO/Indices_de_intensidad_migratoria_Mexico-Estados_Unidos_2010
- Cornejo, I., & Fortuny, P. (2012). Liminalidad social y negociación cultural: inmigrantes yucatecos en San Francisco, California. *Convergencia. Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 19(58), 71-96.
- Díaz, L. M. (2009). La quimera del retorno. *Diálogos migrantes*, (4), 13-20.
- Durand, J. (2004). Ensayo teórico sobre la migración de retorno. El principio del rendimiento decreciente. *Cuadernos geográficos*, (35), 103-116.
- Egea, C., Nieto J. A., & Jiménez, F. (2002). El estudio del retorno: aproximación bibliográfica. *Migraciones y exilios*, (3), 141-168.
- Escobar, A., Martin, S. F., Lowell, L. L., & Fernández de Castro, R. (2013). Estudio binacional sobre migrantes mexicanos en Estados Unidos y en México. Las implicaciones de la emigración cero de México a Estados Unidos. *Foreign Affairs Latinoamérica*, 13(3), 12-17.
- Espinosa, V. (1998). *El dilema del retorno: migración, género y pertenencia en un contexto transnacional*. Zamora, Michoacán: Colmich, Coljal.
- Harris, J. R., & Todaro, M. (1970). Migration, Unemployment and Development: A Two-Sector Analysis. *The American Economic Review*, 60(1), 126-142. Retrieved from http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic1222150.files/Session%2018/harris_todaro70.pdf
- Hazan, M. (n. d.). *Understanding Return Migration to Mexico: Towards a Comprehensive Policy for the Reintegration of Returning Migrants*.

Retrieved from <https://www.smu.edu/-/media/Site/Tower/Library/Miryam-HazanUnderstanding-Return-Migration-to-Mexico-Paper.ashx?la=en>

- Jáuregui, J. A., & Recaño, J. (2014). Una aproximación a las definiciones, tipologías y marcos teóricos de la migración de retorno. *Revista Bibliográfica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales*, 19(1080). Retrieved from <http://www.ub.edu/geocrit/b3w-1084.htm>
- Levine, E. (2001). *Los nuevos pobres de Estados Unidos: los hispanos*. Mexico: UNAM, Miguel Ángel Porrúa.
- Mendoza, J. (2013). Migración de retorno, niveles educativos y desarrollo socioeconómico regional en México. *Estudios Sociales*, 21(42), 55-85.
- Mestries, F. (2011). Los migrantes de retorno entre la crisis y las fuerzas de la raíces culturales. En A. M. Aragonés (Coord.). *Mercados de trabajo y migración internacional* (pp. 341-373). Mexico: UNAM, IIE.
- Mestries, F. (2013). Los migrantes de retorno ante un futuro incierto. *Sociológica*, 28(78), 171-212.
- Mestries, F. (2015). La migración de retorno al campo veracruzano: ¿en suspenso de reemigrar? *Sociológica*, 30(84), 39-74.
- Papail, J. (2002). De asalariado a empresario: la reinserción laboral de los migrantes internacionales en la región centro-occidente de México. *Migraciones Internacionales*, 1(3), 79-102.
- Rivera, L. (2013a). Migración de retorno y experiencias de reinserción en la zona metropolitana de la ciudad de México. *Revista Interdisciplinaria da Mobilidade Humana*, 21(41), 55-76.
- Rivera, L. (2013b). Reinserción social y laboral de inmigrantes retornados de Estados Unidos en un contexto urbano. *Iztapalapa Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades*, 34(75), 29-56.
- Solís, M. (2005). *La migración internacional y su papel en la reconfiguración de la identidad en Cenotillo, Yucatán* (Tesis de licenciatura no publicada). Facultad de Contaduría y Administración-Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, Mérida, Mexico.
- Tinley, A. (2006). Migración de Guanajuato a Alabama. Experiencias escolares de cuatro familias mexicanas. *Sociológica*, 21(60), 143-172.

- Tovar, L., & Victoria, M. (2013). Migración internacional de retorno y emprendimiento: Revisión de la literatura. *Revista de Economía Institucional*, 15(29), 41-65.
- Vilalta, C. (2009). Emigrantes mexicanos retornados y el uso de la violencia en la comisión del delito. *Migraciones Internacionales*, 5(2), 76-96.