

Youth Identities and the Migratory Culture among Triqui and Mixtec Boys and Girls

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the impact of generational relations and the formation of youth identities on the basis of field work conducted in the Upper Mixtec and Lower Triqui regions (Oaxaca, Mexico). Using the concepts of *Cultural Capital* and *Symbolic Capital* proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, it describes how the culture of migration transforms social expectations and the imagination of young indigenous men and women and their empowerment in both domestic units and school and community.

Keywords: 1. Mixtec, 2. Triqui, 3. Culture, 4. Symbolic Capital, 5. youth.

Identidades juveniles y cultura de la migración entre las/los jóvenes triquis y mixtecas/os

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el impacto de la emigración en las relaciones generacionales y en la formación de identidades juveniles a partir de los resultados del trabajo de campo realizado con jóvenes en la Mixteca alta y en la Triqui baja (Oaxaca). A través de los conceptos de *capital cultural* y *capital simbólico*, propuestos por Pierre Bourdieu, se describe cómo la cultura de la migración transforma las expectativas sociales y el imaginario de las/los jóvenes, y modifica sus posiciones de poder tanto en la unidad doméstica como en la escuela y la comunidad.

Palabras clave: 1. Mixteca, 2. Triqui, 3. cultura, 4. capital simbólico, 5. juventud.

Introduction¹

*How do I imagine the North?: As a clean, beautiful place,
a great metropolis, a world power.*

*There is money, technology, fashion there [...]
and I like gringa² girls (laughs).*

Juan, 18 years, Lázaro Cárdenas High School,
Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, February 18, 2009

The purpose of this article is to analyze the cultural changes brought about by international emigration from Oaxaca's Mixtec region by indigenous youth. We show how these changes have created a migratory culture that gives meaning to new youth identities. We also describe how the values and symbols of prestige associated with emigration to the United States affect gender-based and generational relations, as well as young Triquis' and Mixtecs' feelings of belonging in the Autonomous Municipality of San Juan Copala (AMSC) and in the city of Tlaxiaco.

The culture of migration is understood here as a set of values and prestige symbols based on the assumption that migration is the main or only source of personal success and the best or only socio-economic expectation for children and youth. In this context, migration also becomes a social obligation of young men. Those who do not emigrate—regardless of the educational or vocational options available in the region of origin—are considered “lazy” and unenterprising (Durand and Massey, 2003; García, 2007). Those who have traveled “to the other side,” families who receive remittances or have a relative with American citizenship, enjoy not only more economic capital in the community but also greater recognition and status—or what Pierre Bourdieu

¹This presentation is a preview of the research project entitled “Political culture in localities with high migrant exodus. Generational perspectives.” The fieldwork carried out in the Mixtec region was supported by four young people studying for a Master’s degree in Rural Development at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), Xochimilco: Prisca Martínez, Armando Martínez, Carmen Cariño and Sindy Hernández.

²Slang term for American.

has called “symbolic capital”—³possibly allowing them to occupy leadership positions, administrative positions or political positions. Among many young people, exodus to the United States is also boosted by the social value and expectation of accumulating power and prestige among family members, in the community and peer groups.

A little-studied effect of migration has been the generalization of forms of identification and grouping of youth in indigenous communities, with the adoption of cultural consumption patterns similar to those of global cities. Indeed, as noted by Maya Lorena Pérez Ruiz (2008:26):

Migration buys a sort of moratorium or negotiation for some traditional norms such as the early age at which marriage must be entered into, or the time to take on adult obligations and assume social obligations. It is presented as a way to modify standards regarding sexuality among young people.

This moratorium opens a gap between the end of childhood and full integration into adulthood and leads to a transformation of intergenerational and intergeneric relationships. I will explain some of the most significant changes occurring in these relationships, which result in a different form of accumulation of symbolic capital among the Triquis and the Mixtecs. I will analyze first the factors of change resulting from the impact of emigration in Triqui and Mixtec communities, to subsequently present an analysis of the values of prestige being adopted by young people in the region.

³In connection with studies among Kabyles, in southern Algeria, Pierre Bourdieu (1980:202) argues, “symbolic capital provides everything that is often seen as *nesba*, meaning the network of allies and relationships that one has and retains through commitments, debts of honor, rights and duties accumulated through successive generations. This capital can be mobilized in extraordinary circumstances. Economic capital and symbolic capital are inextricably mixed. Thus, the display of material and symbolic strength by prestigious allies can by itself provide material benefits, in a type of economy in which good faith or good reputation are the best (or the only) financial guarantees.” (translation from French to Spanish by the author).

The reflections presented here are the result of ethnographic work and in-depth interviews conducted with young people, teachers in the lower Triqui and upper Mixtec regions, and four focus groups with students from the Lázaro Cárdenas High School in the city of Tlaxiaco (totaling 15 men and 23 women: one man and one woman resident in this same city, while all the others come from 22 communities in the upper Mixtec and upper Triqui regions).⁴

Dancing reggaetón in Copala

January 19, 2008 marked the celebration of the first anniversary of the Autonomous Municipality of San Juan Copala, capital of the lower Triqui region in the state of Oaxaca. The autonomous authorities invited various social organizations, journalists, students and teachers. However, given the political violence in the region, only very few of us accepted the invitation. But hundreds of inhabitants of the 17 communities making up the autonomous municipality did show up: women and girls, dressed in their long red *huipiles*, some wearing beautiful necklaces and floral wreaths; small boys wearing white cotton shirts and pants. The community policemen positioned themselves cautiously on the hillsides to ensure that the celebration went off without mishap.⁵

In the morning, traditional authorities and some guests made speeches of welcome and explained the achievements of one year of autonomy. Cultural events were held during the afternoon in

⁴In the Autonomous Municipality of San Juan Copala (AMSJC) we have launched, as of one year ago, a diploma course in education and autonomy, with a group of teachers and students pursuing a Master's degree in Rural Development at the UAM, Xochimilco. I also mention here some comments from Triqui teachers in workshops set up for the diploma course, plus some contributions from two of the Master's degree students, Carmen Cariño and Armando Martínez, who are preparing their thesis in the MASJC. In the city of Tlaxiaco, I am retrieving the work done with pupils from the same Master's course to make a video on the Lázaro Cárdenas High School (Preparatoria Popular Lázaro Cárdenas [PPLC]).

⁵The autonomous municipality has suffered armed attacks by other political forces in the region, particularly the Popular Unity Party (PUP).

front of the Town Hall. The emcee was announcing, in the Triqui language and in Spanish, recitations, songs and regional dances performed by groups of boys and girls of the new municipality's integrated schools. Towards the end of the event, he announced that the young students of San Juan Copala high school were then going to dance *reggaetón*.

Among the red *huipiles*, beside the basketball court that served as the stage, appeared six teenagers who seemed newly arrived from another world: three girls dressed in miniskirts and tops, with three boys with their hair carefully teased with gel to stick up. Then began the repetitive, catchy beat of the music that millions of Latino teenagers listen to across the length and breadth of this continent and the three couples started a dance—erotic, acrobatic—which they had obviously been rehearsing in many long sessions prior to the fiesta. At the first few bars of music, the authorities rose to their feet with a look of alarm which made us guests fear nothing short of the beginning of some confrontation.⁶

They rushed over to the school principal who was ogling the suggestive dancing in jaw-dropping disbelief. He immediately stopped the music and signaled frantically with his arms for the dancers to leave the court. But they remained motionless as if playing “statues,” adamant they would not give up the exhibition they had so painstakingly rehearsed. After a few seconds of tension and uncomfortable silence the director resigned himself to again start up the music and like magic the youngsters resumed their frenzied movements on stage.

At the end of the party, the *reggaetón* was the only topic of conversation among the guests, and evidently it was an issue of concern among the teachers and municipal authorities. Six teenagers had expressed on stage the powerful cultural and generational contrasts that are being exposed by the growing migration to the north, greater schooling and the effect of new communication technologies.

⁶Three weeks earlier, at the end of 2007, the town had indeed been the scene of a gun battle lasting almost half an hour.

In the nearby City of Santiago Juxtlahuaca,⁷ where many of these young people enter high school after their three years of middle (or post-primary) school, business is thriving with the help of remittances from family members who have emigrated north. In recent years the downtown area has seen the opening of two fast food restaurants, several loan offices, package messenger services, agency for travel to the United States, many hardware stores and firms selling building materials. Internet cafés have been set up on virtually every street where young people flock to listen to the latest hits, chat, play online games with real or virtual friends and, occasionally, to do their homework. Many of these kids have family or friends in the U.S.A. and, like them, listen to hip hop or *reggaetón*. They walk like them, in hip-hugging jeans, wearing T-shirts bearing slogans in English, and are eager to own cell phones, mp3 players and a few other accessories they consider essential to identify with peers.

Characteristics of Migration in the Two Regions

The Mixteca is a mountainous region in southern Mexico in the states of Puebla, Guerrero and Oaxaca. Various indigenous peoples live in the Oaxacan Mixtec region, such as the Mixtecs and the Triquis. Over the last decade, this region has seen intensive migration to the United States.⁸ A study by the National Population Council (Conapo, 2002:37) noted that in 2000 it registered a migratory outflow similar to the traditionally-known exodus from the western part of Mexico.

As for the migratory history, it differs among different municipalities, sub-regions and peoples of the region. Thus, some communities have a decades-long tradition of international migration, while others continue to migrate primarily domestically or intraregionally.

⁷Up until the Autonomous Municipality was founded, in January 2007, San Juan Copala and most of its districts were part of the Municipality of Juxtlahuaca.

⁸The migration intensity index was established in a study by the Conapo (2002). This is a multivariate index on a statewide and municipal scale that states the effects or main consequences of Mexican migration to the United States.

Migration from the Lower Triqui Region

Located in the so-called Mixtec Knot, that is, where the Upper Mixteca meets the Lower Mixteca, the Lower Triqui region is a fertile agricultural and forested area which for decades was a major producer of coffee and bananas. Here, international emigration is relatively recent. Until the 1970s there was a seasonal migration of men to cut pineapple, harvest tomatoes or pick cotton in Loma Bonita, Oaxaca, and in the regions of Guasave, Los Mochis and Culiacán, Sinaloa. They used to return after the harvest season to attend to the crops in their communities. Some families in the region of Copala had moved to Oaxaca or Mexico City and become engaged in the sale of handicrafts. However, this rural-urban migration process was much more common in the Upper Triqui region.⁹

The system of seasonal labor to the agricultural fields of Sinaloa grew rapidly in the 1970s: Entire Triqui families and single men were recruited in their home communities by bilingual brokers and traveled in a truck hired by the agricultural entrepreneurs themselves. During the 1980s, various economic and political factors favored emigration and combined with the opportunity offered by entrepreneurs in the Northwest to seek reliable sources of income outside the Mixteca: first, the farm crisis drove Triqui and Mixtec men and women to leave their land. And the increase of political violence also caused the displacement of hundreds of families. Some settled in the municipal capital of Juxtlahuaca. Others moved permanently to the Northwest. In those years, a Triqui presence became increasingly visible in the states of Sinaloa, Sonora and Baja California. Today, many families of Triqui farm laborers live, for example, in the San Quintin Valley,

⁹Situated in the Putla and Tlaxiaco districts, the Upper Triqui region occupies an inferior territory less adequate for farming than around Copala. Because of some cultural differences, like different dialects, different colors in the *huipiles* and variations in habits and customs, the two regions have gradually grown apart. So the Lower Triquis do not consider themselves as belonging to the same people as the Upper Triquis.

where the presence of this indigenous people can be observed in new, marginal colonies dubbed New Triqui Region and New San Juan Copala.

The Triqui day laborers' Baja California experience was a stepping stone for the spread of migration networks into the United States: not only were the migrants closer to that destination—which obviously lessened the cost of the trip—but contacts with work colleagues who had already crossed the border and the relationship with contractors and supervisors who had interests or ties in the United States, opened up many opportunities for younger men first and, later, entire families to risk the trip to the United States and seek better employment conditions there.

Currently, 30 percent of the Triqui population live in other states of Mexico¹⁰ and more than 10 percent have migrated to the United States.¹¹ In northwestern Mexico, the numbers of Triqui men and women are very balanced, because migration is a family and community venture.¹² In California and Oregon, on the other hand, many young male migrants work temporarily during the fruit and vegetable harvests and live in overcrowded shacks and mobile homes. These days, laborers return in winter to reunite

¹⁰According to the *II General Population and Housing Census 2005* (INEGI, 2006), of the 32 559 Triquis residing in Mexico, 9 767 live outside the state of Oaxaca. The main destination of the Triquis in Mexico is Baja California, where 3 435 of them live. In 2006, political violence escalated, again forcing many inhabitants to leave their homes and lands. For example, more than half the population of the municipal capital of San Juan Copala now lives in Mexico City, in northwest Mexico and the United States.

¹¹According to fieldwork conducted from 2002 to 2006 and with estimates of some social organizations such as the Union of Field Workers (UFW), the Citizenship Project of the Central Coast and the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations (Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales, FILOB) about 1 000 Triquis live in the Salinas Valley, about 1 400 live in the central valleys, and dozens of families of this indigenous people live in Santa María, California and Oregon. Some Triqui men now emigrate regularly to seek work on the U.S. eastern seaboard, particularly in New York and New Jersey. There are also a few Triquis in Alaska, Arizona, North Carolina, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio, according to information collected on the website <<http://www.triquicopala.com/datos.htm>> from the Triquis living in different parts of Mexico and the United States.

¹²For example, 1 747 Triqui women and 1 688 men live in Baja California, while in Sonora there are 875 Triqui women and 899 men.

with their families in northern Mexico. Some follow the crop cycles in the United States and work during the harvest season in southern California or Arizona.

The accumulation of financial capital has enabled a monetary reassessment of traditions and an ever more costly reproduction of habits and customs. The organization of the fiestas, compliance with civil or religious duties, and marital agreements,¹³ currently represents very high financial costs which can only be borne by years of paid work, sometimes requiring the whole family's migration to the agricultural fields. Families that have managed to successfully mediate with employers in the north and in the U.S. (such as recruiters, contractors, *coyotes*, *raiteros* and lenders) can now finance lavish feasts and fairs attended not only by Triquis, but also Mixtecs and other residents throughout the region.¹⁴ At the same time, many Triquis are forced to emigrate to cover the debts incurred by complying with charges like these and particularly in order to get married.¹⁵

Today, when young Triqui males finish middle or secondary school, their predictable path is migration, either nationally or internationally. They abandon their communities and head to north Mexico or the United States, either to cities or agricultural fields. In the case of young women, many emigrate to join relatives elsewhere in Mexico, to get jobs in nearby cities as domestic servants or shop employees.

¹³In the Triqui community and many other Mixtec communities, when a marriage is arranged between the bride's parents and the groom's family, the latter must pay what is known as the "bridal cost," consisting of foods and beverages for the reception, plus an amount in cash.

¹⁴There are 18 fiestas throughout the year in Copala. The most important are Carnival; the third Friday of Lent when they celebrate Tata Chu, a fallen image of Christ found in the main altar of the Church of Copala; the festivals of San Juan, San Jose and the Santa Cruz; the days of Easter and All Saints Day (García Alcaraz, 1997:160-167). The stewards, entrusted with managing such religious celebrations, are responsible for any type of costs, ranging from the slaughter of cattle and buying dozens of crates of soft drinks, beer and liquor, to fireworks and rockets.

¹⁵With regard to the impact of migration on asking for the bride's hand in marriage and paying for the wedding celebration, see Lestage (1999) and D'Aubeterre (2000).

International Migration of the Mixtecs

The history of Mixtec international migration is far longer than that of the Triquis. In the mid-twentieth century, some men in the region—especially in the districts of Juxtlahuaca and Huajuapan de León, in the Lower Mixtec region—joined the Bracero Program. These pioneers established contacts with employers in California and began to weave networks which for decades allowed the migration of adult men. However, it was not until the 1980s that entire families began to exit and consolidate the ethnic and community migration networks.

As in the case of the Triqui peoples, in the 1970s the arrival of contractors from Sinaloa in the Mixtec region led to the mass exodus of families to Los Mochis and Culiacán (Sinaloa), Hermosillo (Sonora) and the San Quintín Valley and Ensenada (Baja California). Thereafter, the rapid development of horticultural exports guaranteed a burgeoning labor market that attracted thousands of indigenous Oaxacans.

Since 1982, with the economic crisis and declining wages in Mexico, Mixtec migration to the north has substantially increased and many men have crossed the border into the United States where wages were up to ten times higher than in Mexico. Communication between migrant communities allowed the established kinship networks and neighborhoods to spread to Baja California, Sinaloa, Mexico City, and further afield to California, Oregon and Washington and to many other states in the United States, in particular North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida and New York.

The U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 enabled millions of Mexican agricultural workers to regularize their immigration status and move to more secure permanent jobs in cities. New migratory flows from southern Mexico, mostly of indigenous origin, came to fill the poorly-paid and unsafe jobs in the field. So Mixtec labor rose considerably in Californian agriculture. In 1994, Runsten and Kearney estimated that about five percent of day farmworkers in that state were of Mixtec origin

(Runsten and Kearney, 2004:43), Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004) calculated that at the end of that decade, 10.9 percent were indigenous people from southern Mexico (mostly Mixtecs) while Edward Kissam's forecast made in 2003 estimated that by 2010 over 20 percent of farm labor would be done by indigenous workers from southern Mexico.

In the last ten years, researchers have detected a greater dispersion of Mixtec labor across the west Coast of the United States, particularly in Oregon (Stephen, 2008). Another trend is the massive influx of young people, many of them teenagers, who are extremely mobile geographically and workwise in the United States.

In Oaxaca's Juxtlahuaca district alone, some seven thousand workers migrate each season, according to Agricultural Workers Program (Programa de Jornaleros Agrícolas, Pronjag) in the area. Most of the population of villages near the county seat, or best connected boroughs with a long tradition of migration, go to the U.S.A. Conversely, communities further away from the county seat, the most marginalized, are migrating to fields in the northwest.

In San Juan Mixtepec, which belongs to the Juxtlahuaca district but adjoins the town of Tlaxiaco, more than a quarter of the population lives in the U.S. legally (Runsten and Kearney, 2004). According to Conapo (2006), migration from that municipality was 1981 in the period 1995-1999 and 4 338 in the period 2000-2004. The municipality has a negative growth rate of -4.41 percent. The population residing in the town in 2000 was 9 543 and 7 423 in 2005: 23 percent of the population left the town during the first five years of this century.

Impact of Migration on the Lázaro Cárdenas High School (PPLC) in Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca

The Lázaro Cárdenas High School located in Tlaxiaco welcomes students from dozens of communities near this city. Most of the students hail from San Juan Mixtepec, San Miguel del Progreso,

San Juan Ñumí (Mixtec) and San Martín Itunyoso (Triqui). In early 2009, we decided to conduct an intervention and applied research in this school, due to the strong impact of international migration on living conditions and social environment of teenage boys and girls of this school. In addition to several recorded interviews with staff and students in all three grades, we also conducted four focus groups on emigration to the United States.

The students' main problems, identified by authorities and teachers in interviews, are the high failure and dropout rates, both caused primarily by the migration of young people (mainly males) to the United States. Many of them return after traveling north, either because they failed to cross the border, because they were deported or because they did not enjoy the experience on "the other side." In a sense, from my first conversation with the students I had the impression that they are young people waiting on the edge of a threshold that sooner or later they will have to cross. For many of them, attending middle or secondary school is not really a stage in their training, but merely a moment in time between the community and the migratory adventure.

The PPLC does not receive public funds from any institution, so it is sustained only by the registration fees of its students (1100 pesos per year). Because it does not take boarders, teenagers seek rooms for rent on their own; almost half of them work to support themselves, while others receive support from their relatives, almost always from the United States. Most young students are alone and without any support or supervision from their parents at an early age. They have little incentive to study, and have witnessed in their own communities how the most moneyed people are migrants, while teachers or professionals find it hard to find work and survive on low salaries.

Although a number of students express their desire to emigrate and hardly any of them perceive any real socio-economic opportunities for personal development in their community or their region of origin, most school dropouts are male. Moreover, in the town of Tlaxiaco, migration remains a predominantly male

phenomenon. There is a low sex ratio (80.8)¹⁶ and a very large number of female-headed households (27.4 %) that results, above all, in the large number of tasks, commitments and family and community obligations that women have to fulfill and that also become obstacles to further study.

It is happening a lot that many kids here meet up in high school, go to the United States and then say it's awful getting across to the other side. All of my father's side of my family have gone to the United States, my dad, my uncles, my cousins [...].

Many of our classmates studying in their first year, suddenly up and go. About sixty of us started out the year, and now there are only 45 of us. Why do they chase after money? To build a big house in their town? I don't see that as fun. How can you enjoy yourself in a place so far away? All just for the sake of building a big house. A number of kids have dropped out of their first or second year of school. Many of them cross the border, others don't and come back and continue to study. Others don't study (Angélica, 17 years).¹⁷

Youth Identities and the Migration Culture

The issue of youth identities in rural and indigenous areas in Latin America has not been addressed by researchers until very recently.¹⁸ The vast bulk of the abundant research on youth cultures, both in Europe and in America, shows them as urban phenomena, typical of large cities or university campuses. Somehow, the discovery of youth in the Latin American countryside corresponds to the extension of the mercantile economy and

¹⁶Instead, one's attention is drawn to the relatively high male population among minors under the age of 15 (102.77), and even minors under the age of five years (102.48).

¹⁷Interview with Angélica, secretary of the Technical Council of the Lázaro Cárdenas High School, conducted by Carmen Cariño and Sindy Hernández, February 16, 2009.

¹⁸An interesting anthropological compilation with a focus on indigenous youth, is the book edited by Maya Lorena Pérez Ruiz (2008), *Jóvenes indígenas y globalización en América Latina*. Worth noting is the reflection of Maritza Urteaga (2008), "Jóvenes e indios en el México contemporáneo".

individualistic culture worldwide. According to Olivier Galland, young people begin to be thought of as autonomous subjects, with specific problems of social integration when experiencing the breaking of ties with the patrimonial logic; in other words, with ties to the land, the house and the household economy (Galland, 2009:11). The capitalist logic and its widespread dissemination throughout the globalization period transforms the economy of symbolic assets in the most remote regions and locations. In this process, it promotes a culture based on autonomy and individual consumption.

But the idea of youth is not only based on new forms of cultural consumption, but also a transformation of social roles caused by the prolongation of schooling. Neither is this phenomenon exclusive to cities or developed areas. Currently, most teenagers attend school in both urban and rural areas. In 20 years Mexico went from having a national average of 3.4 years of schooling (3.1 in women) in 1970 to 8.1 years of schooling (7.9 in women) by 2005 (INEGI, 2009). Certainly the statistics conceal a huge regional inequality between rural and urban areas. The state of Oaxaca rates the second lowest nationally, with an average of 6.4 years of schooling. Even so, the education dynamic of young people has changed dramatically over the last generation. In other words, most teens now attend school and many live near it during the week, separated from family. So, they spend more time in peer groups than with their parents. Peer groups are reinforced both within the school and in leisure areas; they promote the adoption of musical fads, clothing fads and consumer trends widely disseminated by television, the Internet and radio. In Latin America, inequality and poverty have nuanced young people's cultural consumption. The consumer frenzy encouraged by the constant bombardment of advertising has brought pirated products out of the woodwork. "Apparently" famous name-brand clothing and accessories, CDs and DVDs are sold everywhere in villages, provincial towns and cities at very low prices. Something else typically linked to young consumers in regions that were until recently isolated from urban centers, is access to the Internet. In

the Oaxacan Mixtec region, the municipal capitals almost always have several Internet cafés, while computers with Internet access are increasingly prevalent in primary and secondary schools. This allows youngsters to have interpersonal contact (especially in chat rooms) with young emigrants or their peers thousands of miles away.

On the other hand, if they do emigrate, then return to their native town with knowledge of the “northerners” values and consumer patterns, they find certain status in their places of origin. Young migrant returnees stand out for their very obvious changes in appearance and cultural expression: language, dress, music, dance, use of electronic devices:

The ones who return use different speech patterns and idioms; now they say things in English. They make out like they’re vandals, and try to dress like those who are called “homeys” up there. Up there, people who aren’t local (i.e. “homeys”) but are from Mexico are called *chicanos*. They all dress as *cholos*. There is one homey here, who was born up there in the United States, but then came down here. They all love hip hop. (Angélica, 17 years).

But also, the returnees bring other values of prestige associated with money and consumerism. In many ways, they transmit them to children and youngsters in the community and elicit admiration, envy or rejection.

They come back more boastful and bring with them a little more money and stuff like that. Then it’s like they forget where they come from and they feel they’re better than before, and are a bit stuck up. I don’t know, but I feel like the money changes them, and they get on their high horses.¹⁹

The migration culture consists mainly of symbolic capital, accumulated through the round trips to the United States: to see

¹⁹Interview with Francisco (22 years), graduate of the PPLC, conducted by Prisca Martínez and Armando Martínez, February 14, 2009.

the North, to have crossed over illegally, to earn dollars and exhibit certain consumer patterns associated with migration. Moreover, this culture is shaped by stories (mostly stories about the crossover, dodging the *migra* [INS] or the *cholos*), myths, heroes (the *coyotes*, or guides that sneak people over the border, those “that made it in the north”) and rituals associated with migration. Other elements are subject to influences of both the migration and the mass media and socialization in peer groups: the transformation of language with the adoption of terms of Anglo or Northern origin, and consumer culture (clothing, music, ipod or mp3, cellphones, etc.).

Maritza Urteaga (2008:675) highlights other relevant factors that have led to the emergence of indigenous youth:

The current demographic importance of young men and women in Mexican society; the waves of emigrants at the end of the 20th century, locally, nationally and globally, where the importance and significance of young *mestizos* and Indians in building the so-called migrant culture is critical; the extension of compulsory secondary school or the introduction of the extramural tele-secondary school in indigenous areas, whose significance is being studied from an ethnographical standpoint; and the close relationship between television and radio and the various ethnic populations in rural and urban areas, a phenomenon that is just beginning to be studied from an anthropological standpoint.

No doubt, more than a demographic process, the emergence of the youth category in the indigenous regions has to do with the emergence of a social, political and cultural actor. Young migrants from these regions have used their mobility to expand their networks and thus have accumulated a large social capital, which often turns into political leadership.

In the Mixtec communities, migration stands out today as a much more attractive life choice than formal education. The young man who intends to continue studying during adolescence or early adulthood, is seen as lazy or simply doomed to failure. Families hope that their sons—and increasingly daughters—

migrate to contribute to family income. In particular, males are expected to quickly obtain enough resources to marry, to build a house in the village and set up their families there, or simply to prove they are adults. Migration is seen as the only route to individual and family success.

Penetration by the media has undoubtedly had an influence, by transmitting the prestigious consumer symbols and brands. The media seem to reinforce and confirm the information obtained by migrants and returnees. Sometimes, they become instruments of communication with the migrants themselves in the U.S. (especially through the Internet and community radios) and dissemination of the migrant culture.

The attraction of the North-American mirage, “youth culture” consumerism, the stream of information coming from relatives living on the other side, from the returnees or friends who left, leads to the fact that not only migrants but also those who remain grow and develop in a migratory culture which creates images and myths about the North (clean, rich, orderly, and where there are “very liberated blondes”).

The information and stories not only contain positive elements. Many references are also made to the price young people pay for migration in terms of health and family abandonment:

There are families where women suffer domestic violence and have to leave. The boys leave to avoid shouldering responsibilities; they get women pregnant, then they leave. Many of us have noticed that when many people go to the U.S. they bring back either sexually-transmitted diseases or cancer or drug abuse issues. People come back already sick but do not know they are bringing a disease, and so they infect the entire community, let's say, with aids, without realizing it, to a certain extent (Gabriela, 17 years).

The cultural importance of migration among males, as a moment of maturation and construction of masculinity, has led the illegal crossing into the United States to be considered as a true rite of passage (García, 2007; Urteaga, 2008). However, this ritual is not exclusively male.

Migration is also an attraction for young women in the absence of males in their communities. They go off in search of new life options. In many communities the *norteñas*, or girls who went north, are beginning to stand out (García, 2007), especially during the community's patron saint fiestas or the holidays:

The “*norteñas*” are women who have acquired another set of values in the economic sphere and in intimate relationships, so many women see “the journey” as a way out of the subordination they endure in family and community relationships, or at least as an option to exercise autonomy.

Study or Emigrate: A Gender Option

Extended schooling promotes coexistence and complicity between peer groups and, simultaneously, a distance from family and community, or autonomy. It also increases young people's educational capital. School promotes aspirations that their parents rarely had, like becoming a doctor, lawyer or architect. However, the generalization of middle school education (which is currently compulsory in Mexico) and the large number of young people entering upper secondary education have also led to a relative devaluation of school certificates, and students are well aware of this fact.

After high school you only get to the level of a road sweeper, whereas before, when my mother was working there in Mexico City, she had colleagues who were given the chance to work before finishing their studies. To get a job nowadays, you are required to have experience, but how are you going to get experience if you're still only studying? (Angélica, 17 years).

The devaluation of school certificates has led to a gap between young people's aspirations and real possibilities of social advancement. Almost all the students of the PPLC express a desire to become a dentist, lawyer, gourmet chef, doctor or nurse. However,

most of them will drop out of school long before becoming professionals, mainly because of family pressure (and often peer pressure) to earn an income. Especially for men, a decent wage can be said to be critical to earning the respect of colleagues, finding girlfriends or simply getting recognition from peers.

This economic pressure (which in the Mixtec region translates into pressure to migrate) is felt so much more clearly among men. For women, the mere fact of studying away from home, having autonomy and being able to pursue an academic qualification, already represents an important generational advantage. In the communities, the exodus of women to study in the large cities of the region means a loss of control,²⁰ a break with the patriarchal logic that maintained a rigid separation of gender roles and sexual spaces. So, for the first time, Mixtec and Triqui teenage girls and young women have access to peer groups, mixed friendships and short-term courtships.

Reduced pressure to migrate and leave the school has led to a striking effect on the schooling of men and women. Unlike what happened up until a few years ago, girls are staying longer in school and are increasingly pursuing upper secondary education and university. While we still cannot see a breakdown of this investment in the average schooling by gender, we can indeed see it in school attendance of men and women, both in the lower Triqui region and in Tlaxiaco. For example, illiteracy in Copala is much higher among women (61.5 %) than men (32.5 %). The figures in nearby towns are similar. However, currently more than 95 percent of girls and boys alike between six and 14 attend school (INEGI, 2005).

In the town of Tlaxiaco, illiteracy among women remains higher than among men, but there is a trend towards higher education among women, in a kind of gender reversal. Thus, while the illiteracy rate among women over 15 years is 15.82 percent, in other words, more than twice that of males in the same age

²⁰In particular, a loss of control over the virginity of girls, which until now is understood as a fundamental symbolic capital, not only of women themselves but for the whole family (through the honor code) [Bourdieu, 2000].

range (7.61 %), currently almost all children from six to 14 years of age (97 %), boys and girls alike, are attending school. What is more surprising still is that in the school population from secondary school through to higher learning (from 15 to 24 years) the number of women attending school (1 630) exceeds that of men (1 466). This can be explained, of course, by the more frequent migration of males. The schooling at that age is high (45.1 %) compared with the state of Oaxaca in general (35.9 %); the paucity of options for secondary and higher education throughout the region requires young people to move to Tlaxiaco, as is the case for all adolescents interviewed in the Lázaro Cárdenas High School.

In basic education, gender has ceased to be an important factor in determining school attendance. However, it certainly affects the motivation to continue education after high school. Looking at the results from the *National Youth Survey 2005*, José Manuel Valenzuela (2009:120) says: “Surprisingly, youngsters of 12 to 14 years of age have low expectations about the usefulness of education, with 34.9 percent believing that studying is useless, a perception shared by 19.1 percent of women and 51 percent of men.”

Indeed, men anxiously await finishing secondary school to get out of the community or region of origin and to look for jobs. Some who go on to 10th-grade in high school do so, according to their own testimony, in the absence of other alternatives “for the moment.” In other words, while they wait to collect enough money to migrate.

Throughout the Oaxacan Mixtec region, thousands of teens each year make the dangerous journey to the U.S. undocumented. Some get ready with obvious anxiety and excitement to overcome for the first time the dangers of “jumping the line.” Others have a distressed or fatalistic anticipation of migration. Family and community pressures on young people to migrate are strong, as indicated by several authors. The family invests its resources to raise money and send or bring a youth to the north, mortgaging or selling their land or property to get travel money. Sometimes the teenager has little choice in the decision; it is taken by parents

or older siblings who see it as a way to obtain more resources in the north.

The departure of the father, mother or both, leave the weight of education in the hands of grandmothers or other female family members, which tends to significantly relax the transmission of values, control over minors and especially financial and emotional support. Moreover, in the villages it has become increasingly more common to see very young girls (even before age 12, as we have seen in our field research) assuming the role of mother and father of their little siblings. This drastically limits their chances of educational and personal development.

The massive international migration has led to a change in the values of prestige. To find a wife, whether or not they have to pay the “bridal price,” men must prove their economic success, display a truck and other goods brought from the United States. For those who choose instead to study, there is little chance to marry, find employment or simply acquire a certain prestige in the community. For example, Eliseo, a native of San Juan Copala and recent graduate of the Pedagogical University, says: “I cannot get married to a Triqui. To get married here, you first have to go north, you have to pay lots of money. I have no money because I study and because I am a teacher. I don’t want to go and work up north, so I cannot marry.”²¹

Women certainly find it easier to stay in the region and study, at least up until such time as a pregnancy or marriage (which almost always means leaving the school system). To that extent, their aspirations are more clearly linked to the accumulation of cultural capital, even if they do not give up the possibility of emigrating to the United States:

Well the only thing I’ve thought about is to go see the United States, or go to work there, but not work like this in the fields but work on something, something for myself. For example, as I am planning to study nursing, I can study nursing here, then go work in the U.S.

²¹Comments by Eliseo under the Graduate Education and Empowerment program, San Juan Copala, October 25, 2008.

as a nurse. And as I speak Mixtec and Spanish, well, I will sign up for an English course so as to be able to communicate with people, because, yes, that's important. With three languages it is easier to get jobs, because many people cannot speak English. So by translating for them you can get a job. People who speak three or two languages are worth more.²²

Conclusions

In recent years, migration has become virtually the only expectation for young Mixtecs and Triquis to accumulate economic and symbolic capital. In the Oaxacan Mixtec region it has brought a considerable increase in material resources and a very visible change in the landscape. Along paved or dirt roads, you can see two- or three-story brick and cement houses with gabled roofs, satellite dishes and large garages for the migrants' trucks. But these houses are usually empty or half-built, pending remittances to complete the work or the return of the migrants to occupy them when they can retire.

The high mobility of young people, their desire for adventure and the fact that they have had more schooling than their parents, make it easier for them to establish strategic social ties to migrate and to learn about opportunities available (Lin, 1999:31). Increasingly, adolescents and young adults even speak some English when they embark on migration. This allows them to interact with employers and socialize in groups of Latino citizens and Mexican *mestizos*. They can act as brokers in the migratory networks and accumulate more capital.

On the other hand, migration also changes prestige symbols. When indigenous youths emigrate to the United States, their symbolic capital does not depend, as in the communities of origin, on a capital of honor accumulated over long years of service to the community; it is not based on respect for usages and customs, on collective work and on the responsibilities system,

²²Interview with Yaneth Hernández (18 years), conducted by Sindy Hernández and Carmen Cariño, February 15, 2009.

but rather on the establishment of strategic links in a hostile environment and the bold opening of new routes and new migrant destinations.

Young people returning to the community for the holidays or those who receive remittances and gifts from their relatives living in the United States, acquire consumer styles similar to many young urbanites worldwide. The chance they have to be part of these youth trends, constantly publicized through the mass media, places them in positions of prestige compared to their peers. Thus, the indigenous regions are experiencing a “northernizing” of their culture. Young people reproduce, with some variations, musical tastes, hairstyles, body piercing, and the U.S. dress code. Youth identities are clearly marked by the experience of migration. Those who leave, like those who remain behind, assign a different meaning to their customs, lifestyles and cultural expressions, and they especially value learning and spending time with their peers.

The different roles of men and women in migration processes and their potential for integration into networks, depend on the farmwork structure, as well as assimilation (introjection) by operators of schemes of perception and appreciation, and on historically masculine-type structures (Bourdieu, 2000:17). In the Mixteca, it is common for young men to be encouraged by family and friends to make the journey north. This experience—with all the attendant dangers—has become in many communities, a kind of initiation ritual (Bourdieu, 2000:39), a demonstration of courage and manhood (masculinity). Given the recurrent economic crises, international migration is also one of the few alternatives—sometimes the only one—for young people to land their first paid jobs. The desire for adventure is encouraged in boys as part of their “nature,” in other words, as an unquestionable attribute of their gender.

Life expectancies of teenage females if they stay in their village are increasingly limited to marriage at a distance, with occasional visits from the husband and a multiplication of tasks at home, in the field and in the community. Faced with this prospect, many

young girls try to pursue secondary education in the cities in the region to try to expand their job opportunities and possibly also migrate northwards with better employment prospects.

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