

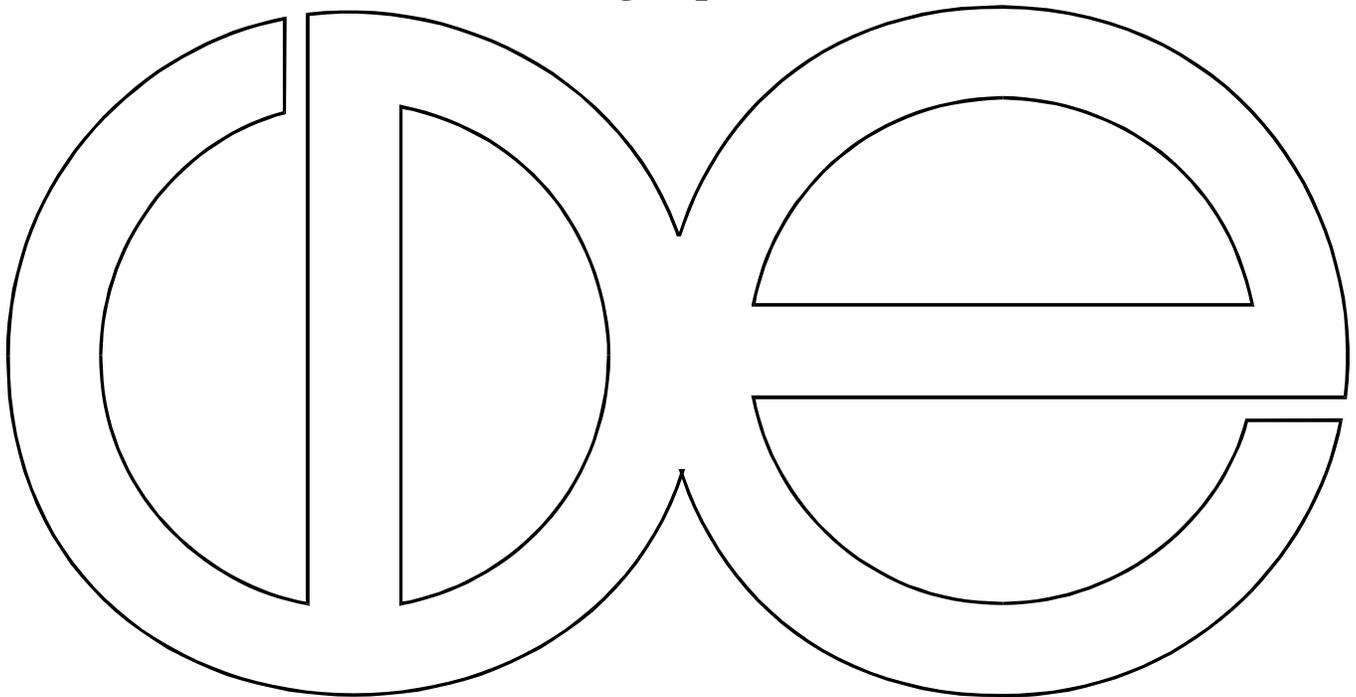
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**Sustaining Families and Communities:  
Nonmigrant Women and Mexico-U.S. Migration Processes**

**Shawn Malia Kanaiaupuni**

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**Abstract**

Prior migration research has failed to take adequate account of the centrality of nonmigrant women to the creation and continuity of international labor migration processes. This study analyzes women's activities in transnational families with life history data collected from Mexican women. The main argument is that the domestic links women sustain in sending communities, in addition to their economic contributions, permit the social institutionalization of migration in many Mexican communities. This research moves beyond prior conceptualizations of migrant social networks by locating women as central actors connecting households across national borders. The analysis reveals that their work to maintain social networks in origins is a fundamental building block of transnational migration. By maintaining family cohesion, mobilizing origin networks, and ensuring economic provision of families, women are central to the initiation and perpetuation of Mexico-U.S. migration patterns. The key position of women in this migration process, however, comes at the cost of labor intensification and marginalized status in origin communities.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Subject to political and economic shifts over time, a stable feature of Mexican migration has been the traditional pattern of repeat migration of men, while other family members, including women, maintain local residence. Despite increasing female migration since the 1970's, Mexican data sources reveal that men still comprise over 80 percent of U.S. migrants (see Durand, Massey and Zenteno 1998). Among married women, for example, a recent analysis found that roughly half of some 6,000 married (and cohabiting) women in Mexico had migrant partners, and that the vast majority of the latter group (74 percent) had never migrated -- some despite their husbands' long (i.e., over ten years) migrant careers (Kanaiaupuni 2000).

One question for social scientists is how and why this split household pattern has endured over time. Three theoretical perspectives discussed in the next section provide some limited answers to this question, including micro-level studies that describe split households as a "survival" or risk diversification strategy (Arizpe 1981; Massey et al. 1987); macro-level studies that focus on structural differences between the two economies and geographic proximity (Alba 1978; Piore 1979); and recent extensions of transnational theories to international migration (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1992). None of these perspectives, however, have examined critically the experiences and contributions of nonmigrant women in split households, despite much recent research on women's international migration.

In prior work, I have argued that Mexican migration is a profoundly gendered process and that conventional explanations of men's migration in many cases do not apply to women -- for example, providing little hint about why most Mexican women do **not** migrate (Kanaiaupuni 2000). Here, I seek to extend current conceptualizations of migration by locating nonmigrant women as central actors that connect transnational households spanning Mexico and the United States. Specifically, I argue that

women and their labors in origin villages are crucial to the migration process -- *they make men's migration possible and ensure its continuity across space and time*. As such they form the invisible backbone of this transnational migration process that has endured for over a century.

Men's migration intensifies women's labor in Mexico. For many families, women's economic labor, though often unrecognized, sustains families and helps finance migration, providing funds to cross the border in addition to interim earnings necessary for family sustenance (Kanaiaupuni and Fomby 2000). This paper, however, centers primarily on an even less-discussed component of nonmigrant women's labor, the social networking activities that ensure family cohesion and enduring social ties across borders. Often taken for granted, these links are fundamental to the web of economic and political relations that undergirds transnational labor systems.

Using life history interview data, I explore women's experiences in divided households. During men's absences, women cultivate *family relations*, working to generate a sense of family unity and cohesion that includes absent members. In addition to reinforcing loyalty to absent individuals, women also work to mobilize *origin networks* in local environs. Together, these networking activities are crucial to the survival of nonmigrant and migrant members of the family, however, they also imply new tensions that require careful conduct and constant negotiation.

## **INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION THEORIES AND RELEVANT RESEARCH**

Macro-level theories of migration discuss the role of migrant labor in the structural processes of development and capital accumulation. Traditional economic theories ultimately view the process of migration as a mechanism that reduces spatial and market disequilibrium manifested by "push and pull" factors in origin and destination economies (Borjas 1989).<sup>1</sup> In the case of Mexico for example, U.S. immigrants are attracted by higher wages and per capita income, and also by U.S. industry's strong demand for labor (Piore 1979). Historical structuralist approaches link global labor flows from low to high wage regions to a hierarchical system of capitalist production in which migrants provide the cheap labor supply that industrialized "core" economies demand (Sassen 1998). Such theories shed little light

on the individual and household-level implications of such processes, including women's experiences in these economic relations. However, they raise some provocative insights about divided households, which are encouraged through host-society political and legal tactics for their cost-utility.<sup>2</sup>

On the one hand, renewal processes are dependent on income left over from **maintenance**, which is remitted home by the productive worker. On the other hand, productive workers require continued support from their families engaged in **renewal** at home, because they have no permanent legal or political status at the place of work... The interdependence establishes the cohesion of the family (Burawoy 1976: 1052-3, my emphases).

As such, the impact of the increasingly hostile, anti-immigrant climate of late "does not so much deter labor migration as aim to deter (or in any event restrict) family migration and settlement," so that most migrants continue to return home (DeGenova 1998: 101).

Micro-level perspectives examine migration in relation to the household unit, focusing on familial adjustments to agricultural and economic development. Recent economics of migration theories view the household as the decision-making unit, and see migration as a rational household strategy adopted to minimize risk and overcome market failures (Stark and Levhari 1982). Divided household strategies provide higher income at less risk than exclusive investment in either farm production or permanent migration, for example, by allowing a peasant producer to keep farm holdings in a rural area and obtain income from non-farm sources in the migration destination (Grindle 1988). Few household-level studies, however, have undertaken systematic examination of who benefits from the migration strategy (men, women or families) and at what costs (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). My findings below suggest that nonmigrant women bear a significant share of the costs of migration.

Recent perspectives on transnationalism help to draw links between these two literatures, emphasizing individual experiences and agency in broader economic and political globalization processes (Sassen 1998, Glick Schiller, et al. 1992). This approach focuses on how the international circulation of people, goods, and ideas forms new spaces, identities, and communities that span national borders (in most treatments, two nations) (Gmelch 1992, Rouse 1992). Labor migrants become transnationals when they or their families have multiple home bases and ongoing commitments and

loyalties that straddle political territories (Aymer 1997: 146). Thus, this perspective engages research on family and community structures that comprise not only immigrant households in destinations, but social networks that bridge national boundaries, linking families across time and space.<sup>3</sup>

Conceptually, this framework acknowledges the multiple locations of “home” and provides a lens through which to view the multiple, interacting and often colliding layers that influence immigrant assimilation, identity formation, and citizenship. Yet it suffers from several limitations. Most importantly, it is difficult to test, providing little explanatory power about the conditions under which we might expect migration to take on a “transnational” character, how long immigrants will remain “transnationals” in their new destinations, or the social mechanisms that help build and sustain transnational migration. In addition, although arguing that family connections across borders and multiple homes are the basis of transnational networks (e.g., Rouse 1992), most studies focus on migrants in destinations, overlooking the majority of individuals at “home” who are profoundly affected by transnational processes, including nonmigrant women (Weber 1997).

The primary aims of this research speak to some of these problems by first, addressing the gap in the literature about nonmigrant women’s experiences with transnational migration, and second, identifying how women’s activities in split households help to sustain the social fabric of transnational communities and families created by Mexico-U.S. migration processes. It also exposes some of the contradictions involved between ideological views of and/or expected returns to the split household division of labor and the realities of sustaining family members across political territories.

### **Empirical research on Nonmigrant Women and Migration**

The earliest research about nonmigrant women began outside of the field of international migration. The pioneering work of Esther Boserup (1970) first drew scholarly attention to the centrality of women in development, and in this context, some of the earliest efforts appeared analyzing women’s activities in areas heavily affected by men’s migration in Africa (e.g., see Kerven 1979, Obbo 1980).<sup>4</sup> In Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Kenya men’s migration from rural areas was reinforced by specific

colonial policies<sup>5</sup> and labor recruitment contracts, which actively denied employment to women.

Women were left to cope with daily survival needs of families. Meanwhile the capitalist sector benefitted from a cheap migrant labor force at the expense of their intensified labor, which was neither remunerated nor valued sufficiently (Makinwa-Adebusoye 1993). Although this literature has been criticized for its unidimensional portrayal of impoverished, female-headed households caused by migrant labor systems, a key insight was to show that “people who appeared to be only marginally part of markets – like women cultivating subsistence plots – were in fact deeply engaged in the production and consumption of commodities” (O’Laughlin 1998:12).

Not until the mid-1980s did concerted efforts emerge to incorporate gender into international migration theory and research (see, for example, the *International Migration Review*’s special issue on women, 1984). Most studies to date have focused on women migrants (see Willis and Yeoh 2000, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), often to the exclusion of nonmigrant women’s experiences in the same process (exceptions include Findley and Williams 1991; Salgado de Snyder 1993; Kanaiaupuni 1995; Hirsch 1999; Kanaiaupuni and Fomby 2000). One of the central contributions of this research, however, is its wealth of historical and contemporary evidence about women’s work to build family, community and cultural tradition in immigrant destinations (e.g., Kibria 1990, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

Several recent studies of transnational migration also examine the significance of immigrant women’s emotional and social work to build communities and families in host societies. Ho’s study of Trinidad-U.S. immigrants highlights the strategies that women use to cement network ties that span the two countries. Transnational migration brings about a redefinition of women’s roles as mothers and workers, and one strategy that some migrant mothers use includes building strong social relations of support, trust and reciprocity that they can then depend on to care for children in their absence (Ho 1998, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Exploring how Puerto Rican women maintain ties to the island while creating home in their destination, Alicea argues that “through their caring work, mother work, and kin work, women not only symbolically create community but also maintain family ties” (1997: 621). She

also points out the contradictions in the division of labor in which women do a disproportionate share of the emotional and subsistence work, which while providing meaningful social ties for women and their families simultaneously contributes to women's oppression.

These studies highlight the importance – and challenges – that a gendered analysis brings to transnational perspectives. How nonmigrant women experience migration depends on the social structure and gender system in sending areas. They may take on new roles in households and communities, including increased agricultural labor in rural areas of male outmigration.<sup>6</sup> But the opposite is true where gendered labor patterns restrict agricultural work to men. For example, in the Dominican Republic and the Pacific, men resist women's agricultural participation despite falling production levels in their absence (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Connell 1984). Some women improve their household status, relative to men, for instance, by becoming commercially active, controlling earnings from wage-paying occupations, or gaining decision-making powers as farm managers and heads of households. For many, however, these gains are undermined by abject poverty (Ware 1981; Makinwa-Adebusoye 1993). Moreover, maintaining strong social relationships across long distances requires substantial work, constant negotiation and most assuredly, stress. My findings below suggest several consequences for some women, however, further research is necessary to analyze more fully the implications of these activities for women's health and well-being.

## **U.S. MIGRATION: ANALYZING THE MEXICAN CASE**

Mexican immigrants are portrayed frequently by U.S. media and politics as a mass of poor, uneducated people who, forced by rural poverty and oppressive economic conditions, sneak across the border surreptitiously to live and work in the United States. However, Mexican migration is deeply rooted in a history of U.S. capital relations. Following annexation of Mexico's northern territories in 1848 to the present day, U.S. development and industry has relied heavily on a long history of Mexico-U.S. labor migration. Host society politics and labor markets historically have favored temporary male workers and to this day guarantee their dependence on origin families through immigration policies,

limited public assistance and restricted employment opportunities in vulnerable occupations.

Yet, as a “migrant labor system,” the interdependence between labor maintenance and renewal builds on the intersection between normative gender structures and sex-specific labor and migration opportunities. Widespread men’s migration from Mexican households is based not only on historical labor recruitment practices and U.S. immigration policy, but also on social norms and traditional family ideals that value male breadwinners and female domesticity (Kanaiaupuni 2000; Crummett 1987). This division of labor is reinforced by women’s inferior status in Mexico’s state politics and labor markets, where they command lower status, wages and occupational mobility than men (Benería and Roldán 1987; Re Cruz 1998). Over time, this practice has developed into a marked phenomenon that transforms many villages into what one author described as “a village of women, alone, silently working and waiting” (Hérmendez Santiago 1985: 61, translated by author).

Although migrant men are undeniably bound to a sense of “home” in Mexico -- and the vast majority in fact do return home, most studies have treated nonmigrant women as passive, if not invisible, elements in this process. Even as subsistence workers or as wage-earners during men’s absences, women are considered “secondary” actors. They do not seek to maximize income, but work to supplement their husbands’ incomes when necessary, or “are incorporated into the labor market” rather than actively pursuing job opportunities (e.g., Balan 1981; Weist 1983; Cornelius 1989).

My work challenges this image by analyzing the theoretical and practical importance of women’s contributions at “home” to the Mexican migration process.<sup>7</sup> The basic approach is outlined in Figure 1, which shows a diagram of labor migration patterns involved with the exchange of capital and technology from developed nations and raw resources and labor from developing nations. I address the gender division of labor in split households by explicitly linking the micro-level dynamics of women’s subsistence, networking and economic activities in origin households (thick box) to macro-level migration processes that typically involve men.<sup>8</sup> This approach makes women’s labor a critical link in the social construction of transnational households and institutionalized migration processes connecting

Mexico and the United States.

This research moves beyond prior conceptualizations of migrant social networks (Massey 1990a, 1990b) by accounting for the role of women's networking activities and origin social networks in sustaining migration. I argue that in addition to supplying migrant labor, split households are key to the social fabric of Mexican transnational communities and families. In the construction of these social relations, women shoulder much of the costs of migration and of maintaining family cohesion in origin villages. Together, the domestic links that they sustain in sending communities, in addition to their economic contributions, permit the social institutionalization of migration in many Mexican communities.

At the micro-level, however, gendered analysis of women's experiences in transnational households reveals a complicated picture of strength, endurance and initiative, and at the same time, women's subordinate status in a patriarchal society. I argue that men's migration results in intensified labor and social costs for most women. As a result of their class location and limited structural opportunities, nonmigrant women frequently engage in underpaid, labor-intensive employment and/or farm work (see also Kanaiaupuni and Fomby 2000). Both their paid and unpaid work reflect the gender structure of the labor market and the cultural primacy of the domestic sphere for women. Typically, the easiest jobs to justify in the eyes of husbands and neighbors involve inadequately compensated work at home, which alleviates childcare needs and usually deflects husbands' objections to women working away from home. Moreover, most women take responsibility for the tasks that their husbands normally occupied. In doing so, they cross traditional lines drawn between men and women by assuming men's responsibilities while their husbands are absent. This may be a sign of empowerment in some perspectives (and my initial expectations), but for many poor women in rural Mexico, the added responsibilities are unwanted and exacerbate their already marginalized position in society.

On the whole, the evidence presented below suggests several crucial tensions implicit in the migration process and reflected in the intensification of women's labor -- temporary or permanent

economic hardships; limited employment opportunities for women that reinforce their economic dependence on men; worries about migrant husbands and abandonment; and social vulnerability and isolation. These tensions reflect the fact that labor migration is not a perfectly reproducing system that unilinearly benefits households with earnings from abroad. The departure of young, able-bodied men is disruptive and requires significant changes and adjustment in communities and households, especially on behalf of women who suddenly must cope alone with previously shared work and responsibilities. For successful households, the initial problems eventually smooth out over time. For less-successful households, poverty and hunger are routine, as migrants toil across the border and women struggle at home to keep their families going between remittance checks.

Two empirical facts initially motivated this research: one, Mexico-U.S. migration continues to rise each year despite restrictive policies such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 and, two, most migrants continue to be men. The questions for me as I set out to Mexico were about the experiences of women on the other side of this migration process. How do women in migrant-sending households perceive U.S. migration? How does it affect their lives? I began by gathering information from the archives of several Mexican educational institutions (El Colegio de México, El Colegio de Michoacán, La Universidad Autónoma de México, DF), where I was able to access scholarly work not widely distributed in the United States. Then, between 1991 and 1993, I interviewed women of varying economic status and migration experiences while residing in three different villages in the states of Morelos, Guanajuato and Jalisco (the village names remain anonymous).

The first of these villages was a small agricultural pueblo with a fair amount of tourism not far from a very large city. Using “snowball” sampling methods, I conducted informal interviews with thirteen women who had participated in, or were actively part of, split household migration strategies (I obtained a short list from the family with whom I resided of women in several different neighborhood areas, and from these women obtained names of other individuals to interview). After reviewing this work, I sought to expand my study to include women in other parts of Mexico, living in different

villages.<sup>9</sup> One was a tiny rural pueblo located in the high plains region and the other was a larger town located near a major garment manufacturing area and easily accessible from several large cities. In each, I interviewed twenty women who had lived in divided households about their life experiences (ten in each village who represented diverse socioeconomic and prior migration backgrounds). To include some perspectives of current migrants, I also interviewed five women who had lived in divided households but eventually migrated from the two latter villages to join partners in Chicago, Illinois.<sup>10</sup>

To learn about and to gain the confidence of my respondents, I joined the daily life of the community, participated in the major events, attended mass with “my family,” and walked around talking to villagers. Most knew about me through friends, local leaders or personally if they had been interviewed in the survey project that I was conducting at the time. In addition, I drew on the support of friends or members of the families that I lived with to accompany and introduce me and my project to women and their families.<sup>11</sup> In Chicago, I carried letters, pictures and stories to women from their families across the border – they were happy to see a friendly face. About half of the respondents were quite poor, relative to village standards. With five children on average (the maximum was a woman with 19 births, 8 that survived past age 3), about 80 percent had worked at some point in their lives. Consistent with larger quantitative studies, less than 20 percent had ever migrated to the United States (see Kanaiaupuni 2000, Durand et al. 1998). Some had been separated from their husbands very briefly, others for a majority of their married life, but very few women had been abandoned at the time of the survey (self-reported). Although their specific experiences and perceptions are not generalizable to all women, they do provide valuable insights about women as actors in the process of migration and about some of the consequences of migration on their lives.

## **SUSTAINING TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES**

Across societies, individual experiences in divided households are subject to the cultural acceptability of the separation of husband and wife. They are also bound to economic opportunities in the origin area and to the harsh realities of poverty that may necessitate separation. Below, I discuss

women's economic and social networking activities that accompany this division of labor and explore some of its inherent tensions. I argue that nonmigrant women's work preserves families during husbands' absences. Yet, at the same time, the gender system and structure of the labor market limits their employment opportunities and movement, reinforcing women's economic dependence on men and strengthening their ties to absent migrants (Kanaiaupuni 2000). This interplay between social norms and structural opportunities is key to understanding the intensification of women's labor and their continued participation in divided household migration strategies.

Both men and women in Mexico view U.S. migration as a means to "*salir adelante*," to get ahead. Yet migration does not bring immediate improvements to participating households. Despite its expected benefits, the migration of a family member is a disruptive process, and in the short-term, it often means economic hardship for women and families (Kanaiaupuni and Donato 1999). Nearly all families suffered at some point during the migrant career of the household head because of delayed remittance checks, joblessness, deportation, and sometimes temporary or permanent abandonment (e.g., see also Davis 1992; Fernandez 1998; Salgado de Snyder 1993 and others). The responsibility of ensuring family survival if husbands are unable to assist them often urges women to seek paid employment during men's absences. Prior analysis of women's labor force participation in the villages under study shows that women's employment increases during men's absences (cite withheld). These results are consistent with Kanaiaupuni and Fomby's (2000) findings that women work for wages significantly more often when men are away on a U.S. trip (based on nearly 2000 couples in five states in Mexico).

At times, meeting the "basic needs" of the family means a monotonous diet of beans and tortillas, and sometimes not eating at all. It may mean borrowing money for children's shoes, relying on good will in medical emergencies, and suffering through non-emergencies. The following case provides an illustrative example:

Josefina and her four daughters sit on the two beds, each holding a sombrero, and with a large needle and shiny thread, painstakingly fill in a stenciled pattern. The room is small, dominated by two beds laden with piles of red, blue and green sombreros. Those adorned with

shiny gold and silver embroidery sit apart from the plain felt ones yet to be completed.

She married at age 15 over twenty years ago. Her husband left almost immediately to the United States, intent on earning enough money to build a home. Pregnant when he left, she bore her first child alone. He returned for the first time four years later. During some twenty years of marriage, she lived with her husband for a total of approximately 40 months – he missed the births of all four daughters. She jokes that the youngest denies that he is her father, but still states that he is her husband and she would not think of divorce.

Her husband brings gifts home, but sends money less often (about \$200 USD every four months). So, Josefina took her daughters out of school to help her embroider sombreros for a nearby *taller* (shop). From the shops, the hats are sent to stores in large cities and coastal towns that attract tourists. Each sombrero takes three or four hours to complete and is compensated with N\$ 5 pesos (about \$1.70 USD 1993). When she and her three eldest all work, they earn a combined wage of approximately \$2 an hour. The family also relies on their neighbors, who assisted over the years with small loans and helped to finish the second room to their tiny home.

Josefina's case introduces several points aside from strained family relations and finances. The first is the position of Mexican women on the global production line, their poorly remunerated toils providing commercialized products for tourist consumers. In this case, the work was routinized and atomized, entailing tediously tracing stenciled lines on prefabricated felt hats provided by a shop in a nearby town. Second, these activities are typical of the kinds of behind-the-scenes occupations to which many nonmigrant wives dedicate long hours. Easy to ignore, they are crucial to survival. Third, as we will turn to next, the income garnered through piece-wage work and other typical jobs available to women is usually not enough to maintain a family, thereby indebting families to their social networks.

### **Creating Family and Community: The Ties that Bind**

Extant research on social networks and migration emphasizes networks comprised of prior migrants that provide a crucial source of assistance and information to new and repeat migrants. In the early 1990s, Massey outlined the importance of migrant social networks to the “cumulative causation” of international migration flows (1990a, 1990b). This work broke new theoretical ground for the field, with its conceptualization of migrant networks as a mechanism that transforms migration into a dynamic, self-perpetuating process. More recently, Massey and Espinosa (1997) use a large quantitative database to examine how social capital<sup>12</sup> development perpetuates Mexico-U.S. migration, net of other factors. Their results demonstrate the key role of social capital in sustaining existing migration flows, while

progressively reducing the costs of initiating new ones. However, their analysis is limited in two respects: although acknowledging that Mexican migration is predominantly male (and consequently, it only analyzes male migrants), it overlooks the activities of nonmigrant women that help initiate and sustain the migration process; second, and relatedly, it establishes the importance of migrant networks, but does not discuss the importance of *origin networks*, or social capital at home, the maintenance of which falls primarily to nonmigrant women.

At a superficial level, researchers have often noted the social connections generated by Mexican women in migrant-sending communities, stating for example that migrants “remain linked to their home villages in various ways, but primarily by the fact that their wives and children continue to reside there” (Solien de González 1961: 1269); that “the pattern of temporary migration...is reinforced by the fact that even their (migrants’) long-term economic strategies depend on family relationships” in Mexico (Escobar, González & Roberts 1987: 62); and that “during the [migrant’s] absence, contact with the *pueblo* is not necessarily lost due to family members who remain behind...and periodic visits...for holidays” (López Castro 1986: 104).

Notably absent from these observations are the voices of the women involved. Deeper analysis reveals the intense effort required to create and maintain family solidarity and continuity in origins when men migrate elsewhere. Both at home and in interactions outside the home, nonmigrant women actively construct the symbolic unity of the family. Constant references to absent members socialize children about their fathers and prepare them for the upcoming return home. References to dates of departures and returns are kept explicitly vague, thereby instilling some sense of the migrant’s presence. For example, “*ya viene*” could describe a husband returning next week, next month or during the holiday season six months from now. And in their conversations, women adopt language to qualify any feelings of resentment or anger that emerge toward absent partners, especially those who send money home consistently. Some women said they missed their husbands, others described absences as their children’s loss rather than their own, but nearly all expressed loyalty to their duties as wives and mothers and

respect for the possibilities that migration might offer.

Doña Ramirez' story illustrates her commitment to the integrity of a family separated by 27 years of migration. Sixty-one years old and now living with her husband of 42 years, she remembered that as wife of a longtime migrant, she considered herself 'head of the household' when he was away, but was quick to point out that her husband always was "*el que manda,*" in charge, during his periodic visits home. Her husband returned infrequently, but sent money home as often as possible. Meanwhile, she was busy "fulfilling her obligations as mother, waiting for what God would give her to help her survive," and when money was short, she mobilized friends and neighbors to feed her children or worked selling tamales. Aside from several periods of serious financial hardships, some of the major difficulties of being apart, she said, were lengthy separations, his concerns about infidelity, and sporadic communication. Eventually, his ability to provide eased some of the pressures of their growing family.

In spite of the difficulties of this division of labor, she was always dedicated to her family. Her emotional commitment to maintaining a cohesive family across borders meant that she did not question her husband's decisions during their marriage, despite extended absences (up to four years at a time), and reportedly hostile, labor-intensive living arrangements with his mother. It meant that even though she would have preferred him not to migrate, she supported his decision, remained loyal, spoke well and often of him to her children, and maintained an agreeable disposition when he was home. She mentioned quite frankly that she had always had to repress what she felt and consequently may have been too hard on her children during those years. But she reiterated the point made by several other women that it was ineffective to express anger or discontent during occasional telephone conversations or letters as it only spurred greater problems, which usually could not be resolved due to time, money, and/or distance (note that in many rural villages there is only one telephone located in a tiny grocery or other small business).

The stresses of sustaining transnational families significantly affects women's outlooks. Anxiety about how migrants are faring invades daily life, particularly for families of undocumented migrants. Undocumented legal status, even for those in the process of obtaining legal status, often means lengthier

absences, which are difficult for both migrants and their families. For example, during his eight years in the United States, Silvia's husband sent money home faithfully, but was only able to return twice during that period. For Silvia, his departure was extremely difficult and over the years, during intense bouts of illness for her and their five children, his inability to be with her was a constant source of frustration. But he always feared crossing the border for the risk of being caught by "la migra," which could mean losing the job that enabled him to support his family economically. Meanwhile, she continued during his absence to save the money he sent, shrewdly using it to build a house, buy land and harvest crops. It was a joyful day that he called to tell her he had received amnesty, yet tragically, their final reunion was a disaster. In her words,

*"He said, 'Now I have my permit. Now you will no longer suffer, neither you nor I, because now all the times you tell me to come home, now if you need me, I will come.'"*

*"And nothing. That year, ...The same 15th of December that he came home, the very same 15th of December the following year he died, as if his days had been counted. He had called to say that he would arrive before the 24th or on the 24th, and by the 24th he was already buried, it was 2 days before the 24th when we had buried him. Yes, it was a very hard and sad life for me." [On the road home, her husband died in a car accident].*

Infrequent communication exacerbates the difficulties of separated couples. Telephone calls that cost \$3-6 per minute can eat up a full week's wages and mail can take two to four weeks, if it reaches its destination at all. Most husbands and wives are lucky if they communicate with any kind of consistency. The news one receives often comes via migrants coming and going, who bring an occasional letter, message, and, hopefully, money once a month or so.

Under these conditions, women devote considerable energy to reassuring themselves and their children that fathers will return. Carmela's story exemplifies the frustration involved for women who receive no money, and even worse, no word from their husbands. Carmela had heard from her husband personally only twice in two years. She showed me a letter that had finally arrived six months ago with a little money and news that her husband was still jobless and looking for employment. Meanwhile, she and her seven children lived on the edge of town, on an unpaved street with limited services -- no street lights, telephone or drainage. Adobe and wood shacks scattered the side of the steep hill overlooking a

laguna void of all life. A hand-operated sewing machine and piles of material crowded one half of their one room home, and the other, a bed and an old television. The floor was swept dirt, a bathroom would have been a luxury.

Like some of the other migrants' wives, although Carmela's husband did not want her to work, she did so without his knowledge. Otherwise, they would not survive. Her oldest daughter, now 12, helped by working at a nearby sewing garage while Carmela toiled at home sewing piece-work for a factory. Scraping by on earnings of roughly \$33 USD per week, this was not a job that she liked but definitely one that she needed.

Migrants' returns, on the other hand, bring a mixture of happiness and relief, but also constraints in the form of greater demands and control over wives' activities (Kanaiaupuni 1995: 231). For example, in our interview, Carmela revealed her fear for her children who had been ill in the past year. She felt helpless, lacking money for medicine or medical advice. Medical bills consumed what her husband had sent six months ago and she had to borrow money from a distant relative, which she was laboring to pay off. She waited anxiously for her husband to return and though she would probably have to quit working to please him, it would be well worth having his support at home again. But other women, did not feel the strain so intensely -- some because they had kin to help them. One of these, Lola, whose husband had twice migrated for about six months but was no longer migrating, laughingly echoed the sentiments of several others, "I am better off while he is gone because I only have to do my own work, and I do not have to hurry home to feed him or worry about his clothes."

### **Networking to Survive: Building Origin Networks**

I was not able to follow-up with Carmela after our conversations, but it may be that, like other women I talked to, the hardships she described were temporary. Yet they point to the immense sacrifice required of women and their families to survive. To ease some of this burden, women turn to neighbors, friends and family for assistance. The networking activities that they use to engage the continuity and support of social networks in origin communities are critical to family survival at both a symbolic and

practical level, however, they also require certain sacrifices of women.

In Mexican communities, kinship and *compadrazgo* link households in a system of reciprocal exchange (Lomnitz 1977; Logan 1981). Crucial to the survival and development of households, this system operates in the following way:

A household, by extending hospitality, fiesta assistance, and loans to others in its network, creates for itself a security system which safeguards it against calamitous economic losses in times of budgetary crisis. It maintains its network by responding to other households when they experience such a crisis. These crises can result from sudden illness, sponsoring a baptism, wedding or funeral, or the need to amass funds to send a migrant north (Dinerman 1982: 15).

By providing resources and support, origin networks are a key component to the success of circular migration strategies. Women rely on them for survival, organizing the provision of basic needs by cultivating emotional and economic reciprocity and alliances among friends, neighbors, and kin. On a daily basis, poor women “share, borrow and lend children, cash, goods and services” (Aymer 1997: 37). For example, to survive her husbands’ annual departures for 27 years, Doña Ramirez related:

*“I went out to open the way with friends, obtaining provisions so that we could eat until he sent money, or asking for loans. I battled. Sometimes all his children had to eat was milk.”*

Compadrazgo (roughly translated as god-parenting) relationships often provide families with essential material and moral support. Like others, Justina described meeting medical needs or emergencies by asking for a loan (from friends or community members as opposed to a bank) or help from compadres:

*“No, one must go into debt, ask for a loan. Or, for example, sometimes the children's godparents help me a lot when one of the children gets sick; sometimes they help, or say, “bring him to see this or that Doctor,” and since they know them (the doctors), they do not charge for anything except the medicine.”*

Reciprocity also includes the exchange of labor in such tasks as housebuilding or farming. Josefina described how important it was to have the support and assistance of her neighbors who helped with small loans and to add the walls to her two-room home. Other women, like Silvia, depended on close kin (in Silvia’s case, her brothers) for help with building or harvesting, but tried to pay them

something in return. Silvia also solicited assistance from her father-in-law, in return attending him in old age:

*“I told his father, ‘look we need that,’ or ‘we are going to do this,’ or ‘how can I do this because he hasn’t written to me’... and until the day he died I helped him.”*

Most women that I spoke with moved in with in-laws during the initial years that their husbands began migrating. Even after establishing independent living quarters, however, women might take their children to the homes of relatives to eat if migrant remittances did not arrive, reciprocating the favor with chores and errands. Returning the obligations that these exchanges entail consumes a substantial portion of their daily activities. Some women also helped mobilize revolving credit cooperatives between neighbors. These informal credit organizations (*tandas*) rely on trust and obligation between groups of friends and kin in the community (Stephen 1991; Kanaiaupuni 1995). Other studies report similar activities of nonmigrant women in Oaxaca:

The labor of women was important not only in maintaining household economic production, but also in generating surpluses that could be invested in *guelaguetza*,<sup>13</sup> *mayordomías* (religious hierarchy), and other ceremonial institutions. Women also continued to engage in reciprocal labor exchanges in relation to ceremonial activities. (Stephen 1991: 117).

In sum, while her husband is away, a wife stays at home to maintain the family unit and raise their children. Additionally and importantly, she also sustains the household within a larger domestic setting -- the community. In this way, important social links established in origins are preserved and solidified over time by women and remaining household members.

To their advantage, men remain part of the social support system so fundamental to community life, even despite lengthy absences. Each time a husband returns, he is automatically indebted to the networks that helped support his family while he was gone. In Josefina’s case, because she mobilized neighbors to help her build an extra room, her husband was expected to return the favor on one of his trips home (a neighbor who had overseen the work eventually received payment from Josefina’s husband). And sometimes the accumulated debts may stimulate repeat migration. For example, men often work in the U.S. while sending money to finance the construction of a home, and sometimes the costs

involved may require a second trip or more, especially if other household expenses arise during their absence. But importantly, men and their families continue to draw from social networks in origins as a result of the investments of both migrant and nonmigrant members.

In addition to providing support during men's absences, continuity in the system of social exchange provides a critical form of insurance to transnational families. Because of these networks, men like Don Ramirez, mentioned earlier, are able to move more easily back and forth between origins and destinations for 27 years and then retire in Mexico. Thus, even after they stop migrating, because of women's household management and social networking, men can still depend on mutual assistance and respect from other households within their network system at home.

### **Surviving Networks: The Trade-offs**

The solidarity and long term value of social relationships depend, however, on the reputability of both nonmigrant women and their migrant partners and their conformance with social standards of behavior. Although building social support and reciprocal exchange relationships empowers women to meet the needs of their families, relying on them also has the contradictory effect of restricting their power and mobility. Generally, women are encouraged to remain at home, leaving unchaperoned only as relates to their domestic activities. Expected to adhere to these normative expectations, nonmigrant women often feel socially isolated and lonely during their spouses' absences. And their behavior and movement is watched vigilantly by husbands' kin.

Many women contend with negative reactions to their employment, particularly if they work outside the home, and suffer socially, stigmatized as unprotected women vulnerable to gossip and innuendo. Even women like Lola, who never missed her husband during the two years that he was away, admitted that at times it was difficult without a man in the family. Carmela explained the need for caution when men are in the United States. If she left the house to visit anyone, go to a party, even to sit in the *zocalo* (town center), word would get around about her 'bad' conduct. Belina, a middle-class wife who was working hard to save the \$500 - \$800 that her husband sent each month, clarified:

*If someone invites you to a wedding or a birthday party, you do not go...because everyone knows that you are getting into trouble...If you go out in the street you have to look straight ahead, otherwise people will start to say that you are looking in another direction.*

Manuela described the dangers, too, of being a migrants' wife. Married to a schoolteacher who had migrated to pay for a well that they built on their land (in 1991, as a teacher he made about \$150-200 per month, but as a migrant he sent \$350-\$500 home each month while she worked for about \$30 per week in a factory), she declared:

*"Look, the types of changes that a woman experiences when she is alone...for example, in my case, now that I am alone, there is always someone who doesn't respect you...for example, they see me alone or know that my husband is not here and think that one has the disposition where she will accept any man. I don't think it's like that. I don't accept it, it's one thing that my husband is far away, but that doesn't mean I will accept whoever comes up to me."*

Balancing on the edge of social acceptability was not always straightforward. While trying to maintain the image of the "good wife," some migrants' wives simultaneously challenged traditional gender stereotypes by taking over activities characteristically performed by men, such as overseeing household expenses and home construction. Difficulties frequently ensued when relatives or hired workers did not respect women's supervisory authority.<sup>14</sup>

Fernandez (1998) in Zacatecas also reports constrained social activities of migrants' wives. One of her respondents summarized the freedom, on the one hand, and restrictions, on the other, of having a migrant husband:

*At the beginning one feels very bad, but with time, one gets used to being alone and becomes freer, more liberal, and asks permission to no one, and besides, one has money and without working!...but one cannot go out alone because, how can I explain it...without doing anything "bad," because if others see you...Here, the only entertainment are the dances, and men ask you to dance, but how can you go alone? You cannot dance either. And wait until your husband finds out?!...No! Then, there is nothing that we can do...except go to the weekly market and to the dances, but only to watch. Besides, you cannot arrive by yourself. I can also go to the plaza...but accompanied (1998: 18).*

Careful conduct is imperative for poorer women, whose livelihoods depend on social support networks and on migrant remittances. Compliance may isolate women socially during husbands' absences, but their non-compliance risks social ostracism and curtailed social support. In return for

protecting family cohesion and reputations, however, families and children are provided for, and households hopefully experience some economic benefits.

The trade-offs that some women experience in maintaining supportive relationships speak to broader gender relations in Mexico, which condition individual experiences with U.S. migration. For many women, migration may bring eventual socioeconomic benefits, but the increased level of responsibility does not necessarily improve their status relative to men. Although women may have greater control over property, home and family during men's absences, these changes often are short-lived. A few women improve their household status;<sup>15</sup> the majority return to a more traditional and subordinate role when husbands return (Casillas Moreno 1985, Mummert 1988, Kanaiaupuni 1995, Salgado de Snyder 1993). As Loyden Sosa (1986) observes, when a husband leaves, a woman awaits his return, even if he is absent for two or three years, or does not send money. During this time, she makes decisions, orders, and sustains the family. "Through her, the father is present in the family, she maintains his presence and authority; in this manner conserving the integrity of the family unit. Upon [his] return, this self-initiating, active woman who makes decisions for herself, returns immediately to her place, subordinate and obedient" (1986: 285).

Nonmigrant women's household status and their ties to absent husbands depend on a mix of economic and social factors, which plays out in the migration process in several ways. First, reliance on social networks in communities partly explains why women behave in socially sanctioned ways. Continuity in social relationships at home means that one cannot simply shrug off an irresponsible husband or walk away from a marriage that sours. Delia, for example, now living with her four children in her parents' home, expressed considerable disgust with her "irresponsible" husband of 12 years. Unwilling to accept a fate as an abandoned wife, she scraped up the money for herself and her eldest to fly to Las Vegas a few years before we met. There, helped by a relative, she eventually located her husband who was living with another woman. She stayed for four months and then returned home to the two children she had left behind. A year later she again traveled to Las Vegas to see her husband,

leaving all the children behind this time at his request. After an emotional year, she decided to return to her village because she could not bear being separated from her children. The couple had not communicated since then. As with Josefina and others, however, divorce was not an option for Delia. For most women who did not like the split household arrangement, even those who abandoned by men, divorce would only bring reproach, creating suspicions about their own fidelity in place of support and sympathy from community members.

Several other conditions serve to reinforce women's subordinate status in the household, including limited household decision-making power and economic dependence on men. Although migration of male partners depends on women's cooperation, the actual decision to migrate is primarily a man's domain. Husbands decided to migrate without consulting their wives in two-thirds of all households sampled (see endnote 9), and the remaining one-third were couples that shared the decision. Despite having less say in migration decisions, most women were supportive of their migrant husbands, reflecting widespread views of migration as an opportunity to improve life. Some even expressed considerable disagreement with the arrangements, but explained that it was a husband's duty to be "*responsable*" and to provide for the family, and that, even though they disagreed, it was not their choice to begin with.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, personal mobility often was not a choice for women. In fact, over half of the women voiced a preference to be with their husbands, but could not migrate because of financial reasons, destination conditions (e.g., dormitory-style quarters for field laborers), and legal status considerations. Some wives of longtime migrants traveled across the border for a period, but returned to raise children because it was less costly in Mexico. A significant number of women also remained home because their husbands preferred it that way. Opinions expressed by men reflected widely-held views that U.S. employment and society caused undesirable changes in women (ie, more defiant and sexually liberal -- see also Hirsch 1999).

Physical distance also limits any control over men's earnings that women may possess when co-

residing with husbands. This caused concern about spouses' remittance versus spending patterns, and a keen awareness of being dependent on men. Margarita explained:

*“And we can't leave them because how can you support yourself if you don't work? They don't let you, and you don't know how to work...what can you do?”*

The same concerns prompted Dolores and Maria, both interviewed in Chicago, to follow their husbands across the border where they would have greater control over earnings.

Finally, women feared financial or complete abandonment as a result of migration.

Abandonment was the exception, and often temporary. In my larger household study (see endnote 9), for example, most women (about 80 percent) reported income from migrants at regular intervals (usually monthly, bimonthly or semi-annually), and another 10 percent received them irregularly. Regardless, the threat was significant, vividly described in stories of other women they knew. Other research describes cases of abandonment, where husbands form new families across the border (e.g., Davis 1992). Women recognize that migration means that “men were sometimes involved in multiple relationships with children in other households, [which] could further reduce the financial resources sent to their wives” (Stephen 1991: 115). Some live “filled with dread during the whole period that husband or sons are in the neighboring country, as much for their physical security as for whether they (migrants) will maintain their relationship with the domestic unit or abandon it” (Trigueros 1992: 98). Thus, women's reliance on absent husbands and limited decision-making power reflected their economic dependence and the implicit threat of abandonment in a context of few alternative economic opportunities.

## **SUSTAINING MEXICO-U.S. TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION PROCESSES**

Much of the recent literature on Mexican migration stresses the economic returns that migration brings households and communities. Prior research suggests that a divided strategy of migrant and local labor is an efficient way to diversify household earnings and to maintain rural roots and lifestyle preferences (Dinerman 1982; Casillas Moreno 1985; Grindle 1988; Lopez Castro 1986; Massey et al. 1987). The practical value of this division of labor is that families are raised in the less costly Mexican

economy, while other members earn U.S. dollars. And, over the long term, local household assets increase with the help of migrant earnings, or barring an emergency, at least remain intact during men's absences. As shown in Table 1, men's U.S. migration is associated with greater socioeconomic status, and on average, wealth rises as men accumulate greater U.S. experience (see Table 2).

Over time, institutionalized migration processes enhance village economies and well-being (Massey and Parrado 1994). Recent estimates reveal that "Mexicans' monthly *remesas*, or transmissions of money from the U.S. to family members in their hometowns and villages, account for more than \$4 billion a year, Mexico's third-largest source of foreign exchange" (Los Angeles Times, 1998). Thus, entire villages eventually may gain from improved standards of living (Durand et al. 1996; Espinosa 1993; Kanaiaupuni and Donato 1999).

Yet the emphasis on economic returns may overstate the benefits of migration, at minimum glossing over the tensions involved in the migration process and the human costs of transnationalism. My findings indicate that migration also entails periods of suffering and hardship for women and children in origins. In addition, these results reveal how gender shapes individual and household experiences and activities in the Mexican migration process. In doing so, they offer a glimpse of the social relations undergirding circular male migration patterns and transnational families, and the resulting costs, borne primarily by non-migrant women, yet fundamental to the migration process.

The split household division of labor requires that *households are free to send members outside the community* on a temporary basis. For some by choice, and others necessity, nonmigrant women fulfill this function. By assuming the role of household head during men's absence and by preserving family and community across borders, they position households to benefit from the expected economic returns to migration.

Thus, the development and continuity of this social process depend on the anchoring presence of women in origins in three critical ways: First, women's local productive labor permits men to leave their families for extended periods of U.S. migration. Second, women bear the costs of reproducing the

migrant labor supply by ensuring family cohesion and survival during men's absences. Third, they sustain social network ties and exchanges in origins that link transnational migrants and assist non-migrating family members. In so doing, they facilitate the process in which seasonal male migrants return 'home' for short durations of each year and eventually retire in Mexico. Often taken for granted, these links provide assistance, a place to stay, someone to oversee family and possessions, and meaningful social interactions -- in other words, home-base to transnationals. Finally, the maintenance of social links to communities reinforces the strength of social norms and sanctions that help protect the system of remittances between migrants abroad and their families in Mexico. An absence of these sanctions would undoubtedly contribute to a less predictable remittance structure, and an eventual collapse of circular migration patterns as they exist today.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Transnational labor processes fed by temporary or circular male migration are linked to the social structure of sending communities and to the activities of nonmigrant women. Theoretically relating causes and consequences across space and time, the analysis showed that the intensification of women's labor is central to the continuity of transnational households and to labor migration processes linking Mexico and the United States. Mexican migration today may be traced back to fifty years of migrant-specific social and human capital development, through which it evolved into a self-generating, self-feeding phenomenon. Yet the development and continuity of this phenomenon also relies heavily on social capital at home and on the networks that women maintain in origins during men's absences.

Women's work in divided households permits men to more easily move between U.S. destinations, where with the help of *migrant networks* they find employment without assuming the additional costs of bringing entire families to a foreign setting, and Mexican sending areas, supported by *origin networks*. These networks are critical to the survival of transnational families and to the life of the migration process. Over time, this allocation of labor improves living standards, through the construction of homes, local business investments, and expanded employment and wage prospects.

Deeper analysis identified several crucial tensions unleashed by the process of migration that threaten family cohesion and interdependence between labor maintenance and renewal. First, especially in the case of undocumented migrants, increasing uncertainty in the migration process arises from growing public hostility and restrictive policies, unstable U.S. employment, unreliable remittances, and irregular homecomings as migrants spend more time away from home because of deportation fears. These changes may alter the feasibility of split households, and in the future we may see the increasing movement of whole families to the United States.

Second, viewed at the household level, findings suggest that the tradition of labor migration requires significant cost and sacrifice for its migrant and non-migrant participants. It divides households, putting strain on family and social relations. In origin villages, the burden of ensuring family survival falls to women, resulting not simply in a continuation, but an intensification of women's labor. The ethnographic evidence communicated women's economic and networking efforts, as they struggled to maintain family unity and well-being.

Finally, findings also highlight women's relative powerlessness in the migrant labor system. In a context where women's labor market opportunities preclude sufficient earnings to maintain family well-being, the migrant labor system and its remittance structure prey on women's economic dependence. In short, women and children are bound to migrants for survival, however tenuous or laborious that relationship might be, given limited alternatives. Moreover, in addition to economic difficulties, intensified labor, and absent spouses, norms about the "good wife" curtail social life for women. The ethnographic evidence suggests that men's authority and control over women's behavior is maintained in part through remittances and the implicit threat of abandonment. Together these findings imply a much more coercive element in transnational migration processes.

Overall, this paper has analyzed the ways in which women contribute to transnational labor processes linking Mexico and the United States. Structurally, in the absence of women's work, historical migration patterns would have acquired a wholly different character than those that have existed since

the turn of the century. By assuming the responsibilities at home and thereby freeing up the migration potential of male laborers, nonmigrant women were critical to the interdependence that grew between U.S. industry and Mexican laborers; the institutionalization of U.S. migration in many Mexican villages; and the emergence of transnational communities linked socially and economically across borders.

Obviously, many of these patterns are specific to Mexico. Although we expect different patterns where gender systems differ (for example, in the case of Africa where women's productive work is expected, or in the Philippines, where daughters are expected to work in cities and send their earnings home), this study suggests that the interrelations between gender and migration are a critical backdrop to understanding transnational labor migration.

1. Women's participation in migration strategies varies by geographic region, and women migrants often outnumber men. However, most conventional analyses have focused on men's migration.

2. From a Marxist-oriented perspective, these economic relations form a "migrant labor system," where the costs of maintaining the labor supply are borne by the employing economy (the United States) -- and only during periods of employment, while renewal costs are externalized to another economy (Mexico) (Burawoy 1976). Structurally, the cost-efficiency of this system relies on the interdependence generated between the productive work of temporary migrant workers and the reproductive work of their families at home. In the United States, for example, the furious level of current policy debates reflects great reluctance to provide state and/or national support for immigrant workers and their families. Recent legislative reform, including welfare changes that affect legal immigrants, the Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 and California's Proposition 187, evidence the continued struggle over where and how social reproduction of immigrants will take place, in effect reinforcing immigrants' dependence on the home country.

3. In this perspective, migrants are not simply victims of broader forces, but respond to and shape their environment through the formation of new, hybrid political and cultural identities and lifestyles. For example, immigrants may refuse to relinquish their ties to the home country, among other reasons because of uncertain political and legal statuses encountered in destinations as well as their own "myth of return" (Jones-Correa 1998).

4. These efforts documented the structural relationship between state and multinational corporate development and the increasing proletarianization of "third world" women under conditions of poor income and employment security (Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983).

5. For example, the South African government adopted a large-scale male migration program. Women were dissuaded from accompanying their husbands through direct means, such as the Bantu Laws Amendment Act in 1964, which prohibited women from leaving rural areas unless they were employed in town, and indirectly, through specific housing policies that placed migrants in dormitories restricted to men (Makinwa-Adebusoye 1993).

6. Studies in various parts of the world -- Turkey, Egypt, Peru, Portugal, Colombia, the South Pacific -- suggest that women's domestic activities extend to include agricultural work (e.g., Brettel 1986; Boserup 1970; Deere and León de Leal 1981; Connell 1984).

7. Unlike the African example, studies focusing specifically on nonmigrant women in Mexico are fewer and more difficult to find, often unpublished and/or not widely available in the United States. Some of these include Cárdenas 1982; Casillas Moreno 1985; González de la Rocha 1989; Trigueros 1992.

8. Although women migrants are important to transnational migration (e.g., see Alicea 1997), the diagram reflects my present focus on non-migrant women. Their work reproduces the migrant workforce and also benefits the U.S. economy by producing a labor-source free of the costs associated with its reproduction. Historically, U.S. agri-service and manufacturing industries have depended on women's reproductive labor in origins to meet their demand for migrant labor (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Crummett 1987).

9. The two additional villages were identified through a larger survey project studying migration processes (Mexican Migration Project, 2000). Working from a random sample of households in each village (n=100 and 200, respectively), I revisited all households with at least one prior or current U.S. migrant to gather supplemental labor and migration histories from wives and daughters (yielding about 500 women in 216 households). From these latter households, select women were asked to participate in a second -- and sometimes third -- longer, more informal interview. I had no refusals. The informal interviews consisted of one to four hour conversations in Spanish that were guided by a set of questions asking respondents about their childhood, their migration experiences, when, where and why their partners began migrating, about daily activities at home, how often they communicated with absent members, the nature of these communications, goals or expectations for the future and for their children, information about household decision-making processes, and so on. The interviews were tape-recorded where possible by permission of interviewees and fully transcribed while in the field. Because women were reluctant to voice their opinions in the presence of husbands or other relatives, I made every effort to interview women alone, although one interview was eliminated because of a husband's presence (he answered most of the questions for her).

10. I took surveys with 25 women in Chicago, and informally interviewed five women. However, unless specifically noted, all the references and quotes from women are from those living in Mexico.

11. Regional differences were apparent -- people in two of the villages were extremely open and accessible while the third required several months before people began to accept me and invite me into their homes. From my travels and contacts, I had expected this and began my informal interviews after about three months in the field in that village, after working hard to network and to pick up the dialect and common expressions used by locals. I was gratified when at the end of my stay people were guessing that I was from another part of Mexico rather than the United States.

12. Defined as "ties to current or former U.S. migrants [that] represent a valuable social asset since these connections can be used to acquire information and assistance that reduce the costs and risks of entering the United States and raise the odds of getting a good U.S. job" (p. 951).

13. *Guelaguetza* refers to a system of economic exchanges in which interest-free loans of goods, cash and labor are made from one household to another over long periods (Stephen 1991).

14. See Grasmuck and Pessar (1991: 146) for similar findings in the Dominican Republic.

15. For example, one study suggests that some migrants' wives gain limited but lasting control over domestic concerns, like food expenditures, which are less threatening to their partners (Fernandez 1998). See also Re Cruz's (1998) study of Mayan women.

16. One woman, however, actively encouraged and helped save money to pay for her husband to migrate (see also Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

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Table 1. Household Well-being and Men's U.S. Migration:  
7504 Married/Cohabiting Couples in 52 Mexican Villages\*

Percent of Households that Own a...	Male Partner has...	
	No U.S. Experience	Any U.S. Experience
<b>Home</b>	60.54	64.39
Second home/property	5.90	10.51
<b>Vehicle</b>	24.63	26.33
Second vehicle	5.35	9.53
<b>Business</b>	26.72	25.44 <sup>†</sup>
Second business	5.62	7.50
<b>Land (5+ hectares)</b>	10.03	17.60
None of the above	17.42	11.82
N	4356	3148

\*All differences statistically significant ( $p < .000$ ), except where noted.

<sup>†</sup>Not statistically significant

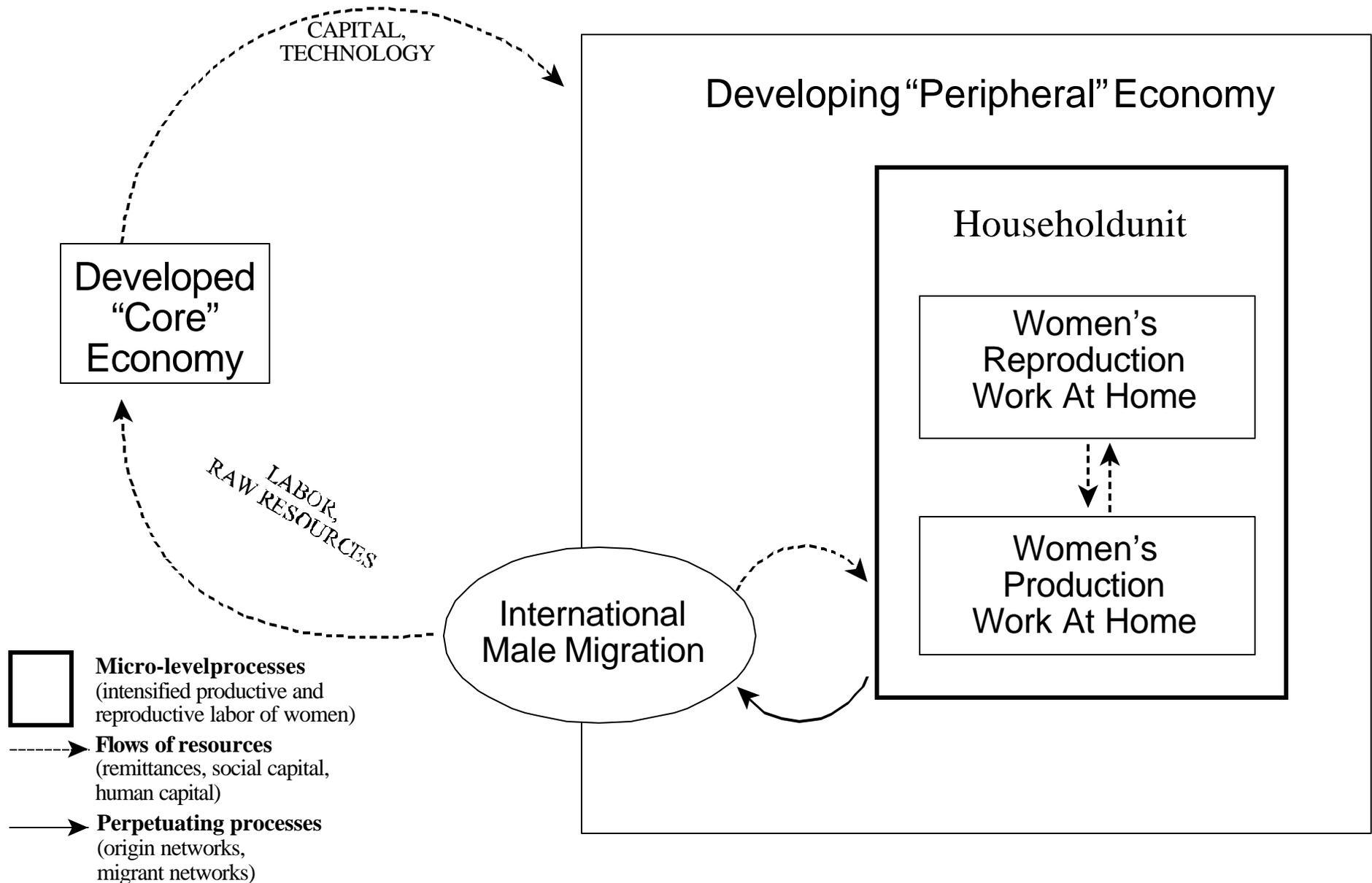
Source: Mexican Migration Project 2000, HOUSFILE

Table 2. Household Well-being by Men's Accumulated Experience in the United States:  
1910 Couples in Randomly Sampled Households in 16 Mexican Villages

	<b>No U.S.</b>	<b>1-5 yrs U.S.</b>	<b>6-10 yrs U.S.</b>	<b>11+ yrs U.S.</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Experience</b>
Home	54.1	60.8	69.9	78.2
Ownership				
Tile	14.3	13.9	21.8	37.4
Floors				
Five or more	22.3	26.7	47.0	45.2
Rooms				
Land Ownership	16.9	24.7	32.8	24.2
(5+ hectares)				
Business	10.7	10.6	15.3	17.1
Ownership				

Source: Kanaiaupuni and Fomby, 2000

**Figure 1. Nonmigrant Women in Transnational Labor Migration Processes**



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