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MALE OUT-MIGRATION AND THE WOMEN LEFT BEHIND: A CASE STUDY OF
A SMALL FARMING COMMUNITY IN SOUTHEASTERN MEXICO

by

Jamie P. McEvoy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Sociology

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Logan, Utah

2008

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ABSTRACT

Male Out-Migration and the Women Left Behind: A Case Study of a Small Farming
Community in Southeastern Mexico

by

Jamie P. McEvoy, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2008

Major Professors: Dr. Peggy Petrzela and Dr. Claudia Radel
Department: Sociology

Until recently, rural households in southeastern Mexico have survived on subsistence and chili farming. But over the last decade, male out-migration to the United States has also become a popular livelihood strategy. This case study used data from semi-structured qualitative interviews to assess the effects of male out-migration on women's lives in three areas: households' financial and material situation, issues of infidelity and women's vulnerability to abandonment, and the gendered division of labor.

Overall, this study found that male out-migration had both positive and negative effects on the women left behind. First, the financial outcomes of migration were mixed. A few women received large, steady remittances while the majority received minimal, sporadic remittances. These various financial outcomes had different effects on women's lives. Second, some women experienced marital separation or abandonment, and many others feared this could happen to them. Women also experienced increased "policing" of their actions. These outcomes had a negative effect on most women by placing them

in a financially precarious position and limiting their freedom and mobility. Third, women's roles in agricultural production changed in two ways: 1) increased attendance at the monthly community meeting and 2) increased contracting and supervising of day laborers. For most women, however, their agricultural field labor participation did not increase.

Women's new roles created a shift in gender relations, but most women said that they were more "uncomfortable" with, than empowered by, these new roles. Despite the lack of empowerment noted by the women themselves, it is important to consider that, over time, these changes in gender roles and gender relations may influence gender ideologies (e.g., perceptions of what women can and should do) and increase women's empowerment. The contributions of these findings to the literature and policy are discussed in the conclusion.

(140 pages)

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First, I thank my committee. Their willingness to work as an interdisciplinary team allowed me to engage in a research project in a region of the world with which I have long been fascinated. I thank them for making the process a positive learning experience. I thank Peg for the time and energy spent revising the thesis, for being so accessible and helpful, and for the boost of confidence and reassurance when I needed it most. I thank Claudia for her introduction into the study region, insights in the topical area, and a glimpse into the discipline of Geography. I thank Susie for her enthusiasm and ideas on productive and reproductive labor.

I thank Birgit Schmook and Dalia Luz Hoil who provided tremendous help in the field. If it were not for these wonderful women, I would probably have found myself lost in the forest or stuck in the mud. They gave me a warm welcome, a place to live, and essential transportation. Thank you!

Of course, *muchísimas gracias* to the community members of Villanueva. It is their stories that are told here and I appreciate their willingness to share these stories with me. They were gracious, friendly, and patient, allowing a complete stranger to enter their home and ask about their lives. I will forever hold their stories and our interactions near to me.

Last, but far from least, thanks to my family for their constant support and to the many great friends who have made this process not only bearable, but fun!

Jamie P. McEvoy

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LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Spanish	English
Asamblea	governing body of the ejido
Chicle	a tree resin used in chewing gum
Chol	Mayan dialect
Comisario ejidal	local commissioner
Combi	bus service
Coyote	a guide who leads migrants across the U.S. border for a fee
Ejido	farming community
Ejiditarios	male ejido members with land use rights
Ejiditarias	female ejido members with land use rights
Ingrata	thankless or worthless woman
Jornalero	day laborer
Junta de la Asamblea	monthly community meeting in which ejidal decisions are made
Juntada	a couple that has gotten together
La Casa Ejidal	a small community center
La Casa de Salud	one-room health center
Machismo	cultural trait that emphasizes male virility and dominance
Mestizo	a racial category referring to persons with mixed European and indigenous ancestry
Milpa	intercropping of maize, beans, and squash
Oportunidades	state welfare program
Parcela	piece of agricultural land to which an ejiditario/a has usufruct rights; typically 40 hectares.
Poblador	members of the ejido without land use rights to ejidal land
Promotora de salud	the community's health educator
Solar	home garden
Tzelzal	Mayan dialect

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Driving down the narrow road, I maneuvered to avoid the potholes. I passed by openings in the dense jungle forest with evenly spaced rows of maize. Turning off the main road, a half-dirt-half-paved road led to Villanueva,¹ one of the many small *ejidos* (farming communities) in the region. The first house I saw was old, small, wooden, and one-room. The old door, which hung partly off its hinges, was swung open. The floor was dirt. The frame of the house was slightly off-center, leaning up against an adjacent cement structure. This cement structure was a second house—an addition, which appeared to be much newer and sturdier. At least three times the size of the wooden house, it had modern windows with metal bars and a sturdy metal door, which was also swung open.

“*Buenas,*” I said as I approached the front door. A quiet, young mother named Yazmín stepped out to greet me. I explained that I was interested in hearing the story of her husband’s migration to the United States (U.S.) and how this experience had affected her. She told me how her life had changed since her husband migrated in 2004. The first time, he was gone for a year. Then he came back and built their cement house. He went back to the U.S. in 2006 to earn more money so they could invest in cattle. He sent her \$1,600 USD a month and she saved as much of the money as she could. While he was away she supervised hired laborers to plant pasture. Although it had been hard having him gone, Yazmín said, so far things have worked out well for them.

¹ Villanueva is a pseudonym for the community used to protect the confidentiality of respondents.

Amaranta lived just down the street. It was difficult to find a time to talk with her because she left to work in the fields very early in the morning. This had not always been part of her daily routine. But since her husband's ill-fated attempt at using migration as a survival strategy, she was now the primary agriculturalist in the family. Her husband also migrated in 2004. He posted his land, the only asset he had, as collateral on a \$2,500 USD loan he received from an informal money lender. Unable to pay back the loan, the family lost their land. They now borrowed land from their in-laws and Amaranta grew maize and beans for the family's consumption.

As illustrated by these two stories, male out-migration in Mexico can have various outcomes for the women left behind. The overall purpose of this thesis was to examine how male out-migration had affected the women left behind in Villanueva. I focused on three areas of women's lives: the households' financial and material situation, issues of infidelity and women's vulnerability to abandonment, and the gendered division of labor.

Given recent neoliberal political and economic changes in Mexico, it is both particularly timely and important to understand the phenomenon of male out-migration and the impacts on women left behind. In 1994, Mexico entered into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and it was predicted that the policy would cause severe rural job losses in Mexico that could result in the out-migration of as many as 400,000 rural residents—in addition to the 1.1 million that would have migrated anyway (Levy and van Wijnbergen in Young 1995; see also Pastor and Wise 1997; Kelly 2001; Appendini 2002; Wiggins et al. 2002; Klepeis and Roy Chowdhury 2004). From 1980 to 1994, Mexican migration to the U.S. increased by 95 percent, but from 1980 to 2002,

migration increased by 452 percent (Deere 2005:43). This appears to be the story that was playing out in Villanueva, a community of 35 households located in southeastern Mexico. Male out-migration commenced in 2002 and had taken off by 2004. By 2007, half of the male heads-of-households in Villanueva had migrated to the U.S. for at least some period of time.

This research addresses various gaps in the literature. Although gender has been incorporated into some migration research in the last twenty years, the main focus is on the women who migrate (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Pedraza 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Salazar 2001; Gamburd 2002; McKay 2005). There is a lack of research on the women who are left behind (Pedraza 1991; Posel 2001; Taylor, Moran-Taylor, and Ruiz 2006; Kiriti-Nganga 2007; Menjívar and Agadjanian 2007). In addition, the existing studies on the women left behind are inconclusive in terms of the impact on women's status and empowerment (Connell 1984; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Menjívar and Agadjanian 2007; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (b)). Furthermore, there is a call for social scientists to exchange work with other researchers working at different scales of analysis (Chant 1991; Fitzgerald 2006; Mahler and Pessar 2006). This study, conducted in part to complement Radel's 2007 quantitative study on migration, land-use change, and gender in the region,² provides for multiple scales of analysis. This qualitative study also provides a more detailed description of the various outcomes of migration, which helps to illuminate why migration has such mixed and inconclusive outcomes for the women left behind. In addition to filling gaps in the

² This study, conducted by Dr. Claudia Radel in 2007, surveyed 150 households in four communities. This study is referred to here as Radel's 2007 survey.

literature, it is my hope that the findings may be useful to policy makers and non-government organizations interested in issues of rural community development, transnational migration, and women's well-being.

I begin by situating this study in three bodies of literature, including the gendered division of labor in rural Latin America, outcomes of migration, and women's status and empowerment. Next, I give a brief overview of the history of the region and background of the community and describe the various methods I used in collecting and analyzing the data. I then provide biographical profiles of the main respondents whose voices and experiences form the basis of this thesis. I also give an overview of the main factors that motivated residents of Villanueva to migrate to the U.S. I present three separate analysis chapters focusing on: 1) changes in households' financial and material situation 2) issues of infidelity and women's vulnerability to abandonment, and 3) changes in the gendered division of labor. Within each chapter, the findings are compared to previous research and implications for women's status and empowerment are discussed. I conclude the thesis by summarizing the major findings, discussing the contributions of these findings to the literature, and suggesting practical implications.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given women's persistent subordinate position in the patriarchal system, studies on gender relations and women's empowerment in areas of social change and development are important areas of scholarly work (Tinker 1990; Chant 1997; Chant and Craske 2003; Mahler and Pessar 2006). One area of social change that impacts gender roles and gender relations is male out-migration (Connell 1984; Chant 1997; Sardenberg, Costa, and Passos 1999; Bever 2002; Chant and Craske 2003; Katz 2003; Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006; Rudel 2006; Taylor et al. 2006; Kiriti-Nganga 2007; Menjívar and Agadjanian 2007; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (b)).

Early migration research focused on the male migration experience (Pessar and Mahler 2003). By the mid-twentieth century women were increasingly involved in migration and were outnumbering males in most cases, but were largely ignored in migration research (Pedraza 1991; Pessar and Mahler 2003). In the last twenty years, there has been more research on gender and migration, but most of this work focuses on the women who migrate (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Pedraza 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Salazar 2001; Gamburd 2002; McKay 2005). In comparison to the number of studies on men and women who migrate, there are fewer studies on the women left behind (Pedraza 1991; Posel 2001).

In general, gender and migration is an area that is under-researched. As recently as 2006, Mahler and Pessar argued that gender is "still not viewed by most researchers in the field as a key constitutive element of migration" (p. 27). That's to say, gender and

migration research needs to go beyond looking at both men and women as migrants and further address how gender changes as a result of migration, and how migration changes as a result of gender. Chant (1991) suggests that our gendered understanding of migration can be improved through the use of qualitative household level studies and calls for more exchange between quantitative and qualitative researchers working at different scales of analysis.

This study is informed by three interrelated bodies of literature: 1) the gendered division of labor in Latin America 2) general outcomes of migration on rural households, focusing specifically on agricultural changes, changes in the family structure, and economic changes, and 3) women's status and empowerment. I now turn to the three areas.

Gendered Division of Labor in Latin America

I begin with literature on the gendered division of labor in Latin America in general and rural Mexico in particular. Understanding the traditional division of labor is useful because it provides a baseline against which migration-related changes in the division of labor can be assessed. Chant and Craske (2003) suggest that the experience of the traditional Latin American woman is similar to that of the traditional North American woman. They state, "In terms of dominant imagery, the women's sphere [is] the secluded, private world of the house (*casa*), men's domain [is] that of the public realm of the street (*calle*)" (p. 168). Despite recent trends showing that women are participating more in the labor force in both urban and rural areas in Latin America, women are still

almost exclusively in charge of the reproductive work while men are still viewed as the primary breadwinners (Arizpe and Botey 1987; Chant and Craske 2003).

The gendered division of labor in rural regions of the developing world has been studied by many scholars (Boserup 1970; Deere 1982, 1990; Arizpe and Botey 1987; Sachs 1996; McGee and González 1999; Bolland, Drew, and Vergara-Tenorio 2006). Boserup (1970) was a pioneer in the field of women's work and women's contributions to economic development. In her analysis, Boserup divides the world up into male and female systems of farming (p. 16). Her summary indicates that "most African and some South East Asian countries (Thailand, Cambodia) have a high percentage of female participation in agriculture and very few agricultural wage labourers; in contrast many Arab and Latin American countries have a small female participation and agricultural wage labourers form a large part of the agricultural labour force" (Boserup 1970:30).

Deere (1990), using historical data, provides an outline of the traditional gendered division of labor by peasants on hacienda farms in Peru dating back to the 1940s. She notes that, "Peasant men were generally considered the principal agriculturalists, and women considered the 'helpers'..." (p. 105). Men were in charge of agriculture, "deciding when, where and what to plant, directing the work process, and taking part in all work activities in the field" (p. 102). Women participated in the most labor-intensive agricultural tasks (i.e., weeding, harvesting, and threshing) and helped with the planting. Women were also in charge of the livestock, all food-processing and preparation tasks, along with wood gathering, hauling water, washing clothes, and childcare.

According to Arizpe and Botey (1987), "The gendered division of labor [in rural Mexico] tends to be rigid, based on traditional cultural norms" (p. 76). They note women

are “exclusively” in charge of reproductive work including “storing, preserving, processing, and preparing food, socializing and educating children, providing medical and psychological care; and performing domestic chores” (p. 76). Women are in charge of reproducing social networks through “visits and exchanges with family and extended kin” and “performance of community ceremonies and collective rites” (p. 76). Women are also always in charge of such agricultural tasks as “carrying food to men working in the fields, planting and harvesting (especially corn), and caring for the smaller livestock (chicken and pigs)” (p. 76). Whether women are involved in other agricultural activities, including plowing, weeding, irrigation, transportation, and caring for larger livestock (i.e., cattle and horses) depends on the household demographics and availability of male labor within the family and community. They note that when there is extra “men’s work” to be done or a lack of male labor, “women are naturally expected to fill the gap” (Arizpe and Botey 1987:77).

Bolland et al. (2006) provide a detailed description of men’s work and women’s work in a community outside the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve in southeastern Mexico, near Villanueva. In this community, they found that women are generally in charge of household tasks (e.g., preparing food, cleaning the house, washing clothes), house administration (making sure they have the basic goods they need), and the *solar* (home garden), along with water and wood collection. Some women tried to earn money by selling embroidered cloth or making hammocks. Men are in charge of the *milpa* (agricultural production of maize, beans, and squash), raising cattle, honey production, *chicle* (a tree resin used in chewing gum) collection, and felling trees.

In summary, previous studies have shown that the traditional gendered division of labor throughout rural Latin America, including Mexico, assigns the productive tasks of agricultural production to men. Women may be considered agricultural “helpers,” but their main tasks are in the reproductive realm and include cleaning, cooking, and childcare. However, this traditional division of labor—particularly agricultural labor—is one of the areas that can be affected by male out-migration, as I will now discuss.

Outcomes of Migration

A second body of literature that informs gender and migration research comes from studies on the outcomes of migration, including agricultural changes, changes in family structure, and economic changes. The impact of migration on agriculture production in the sending region has received significant scholarly attention. The findings of these studies are mixed (see Jokisch 2002 and Radel and Schmook forthcoming (a) for literature reviews; see also Connell 1984; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Katz 2003; Deere 2005; McKay 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006; Rudel 2006; Taylor et al. 2006; Schmook and Radel forthcoming). The various outcomes of rural out-migration on agricultural production are shown in Figure 2.1 and discussed below. Actual outcomes might be a combination of these various theorized paths.

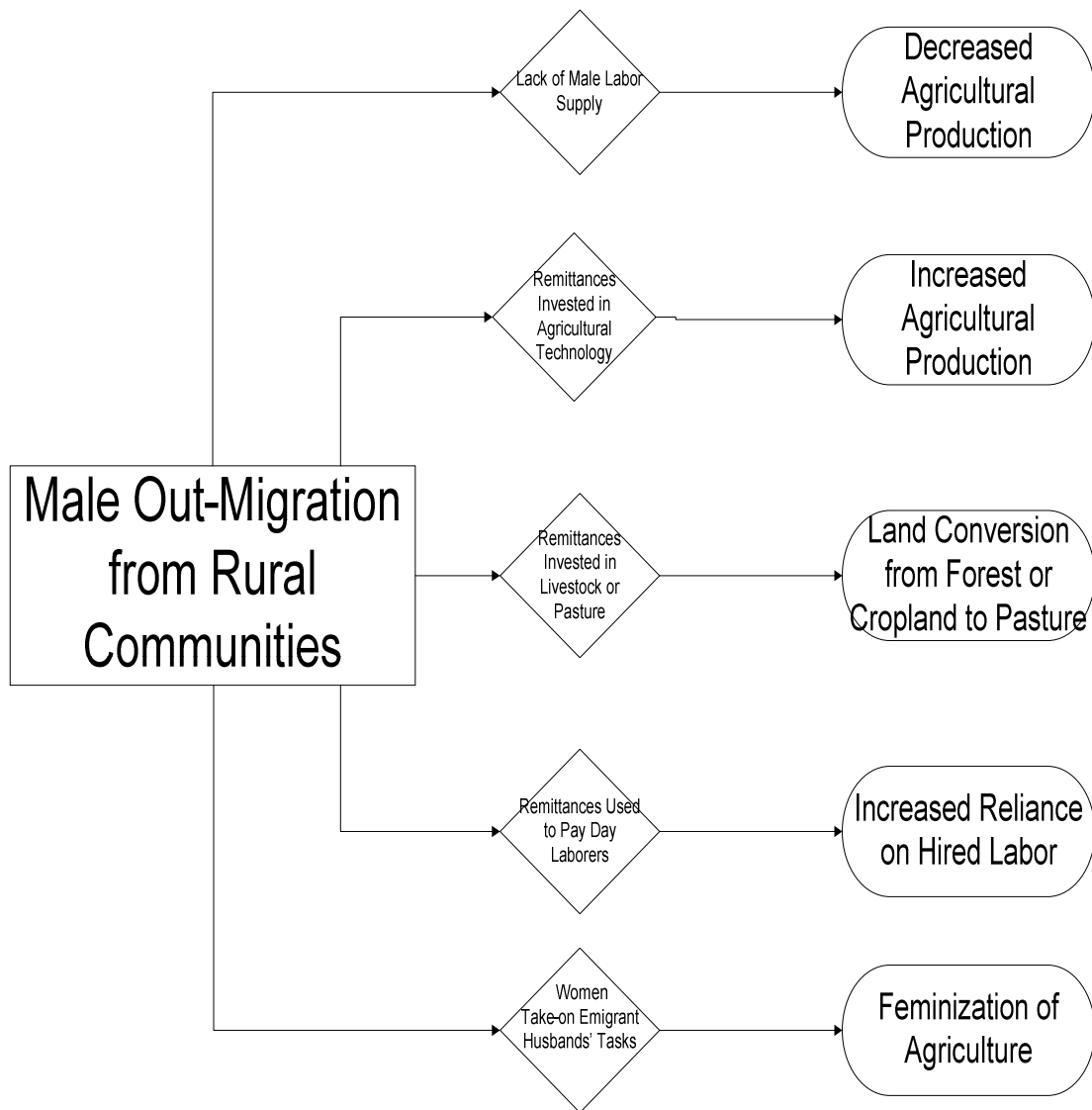


Figure 2.1 Potential Agricultural Outcomes of Male Out-Migration

In some cases, agricultural production might decrease or be abandoned due to a lack of male labor supply. In other cases, crop production might increase as remittances are invested in agricultural technology, which makes up for the lack of male labor supply. Alternatively, remittances may be invested in cattle rather than crops, which leads to the conversion of cropland and/or forest to pasture. Remittances might also be spent on day laborers to complete the tasks of the emigrant husbands. In other cases, women might

take on the agricultural tasks, resulting in the feminization of agriculture. This final potential outcome, to which I now turn, has received considerable scholarly attention, particularly in Latin America and represents a radical shift in the traditional gendered division of agricultural labor discussed earlier.

Feminization of Agriculture. Unless male out-migration results in changing agricultural patterns or agricultural abandonment, someone must take on the tasks that the male migrant leaves behind. This can be accomplished by paying other males (i.e., day laborers) to do the work, assigning the tasks to children or other family members, or changing the traditional gender roles of women. Deere (2005) notes that when male out-migration occurs and the men remain absent for long periods of time, married women typically become the farm managers, picking up many of the agricultural tasks that were traditionally defined as “men’s work.” This process is part of a trend known as the “feminization of agriculture,” which refers to the increasing rates of women’s participation in the agricultural sector. This trend has been noted throughout the developing world, including Latin America and Mexico (FAO 1999; Katz 2003; Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006). Katz (2003), for example, shows that in Mexico, women’s share of total rural employment increased from about 16 percent in 1980 to 26 percent in 2000. Katz argues that this implies an increase in women’s participation in the agricultural sector (p. 36). This previous research focuses on women’s agricultural participation in the paid labor sector (Katz 2003), which is one of two pathways leading to the feminization of agriculture. The second pathway is through changes in smallholder agricultural production (Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006). I discuss the causes of each in turn.

The first pathway to the feminization of agriculture stems from the paid labor sector and is caused by the growth of large-scale agribusiness (particularly those specializing in non-traditional agricultural exports such as fresh fruits, vegetables, and flowers) (Katz 2003; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006). This growth is facilitated by the implementation of neoliberal economic policies. Since these industries are reliant on a temporary or seasonal labor force, they have a preference for female labor, which is considered to be more flexible (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006). Furthermore, because women's work is considered unskilled (compared to men's skilled labor, which usually requires strength or the operation of machinery), women are offered wages that are significantly lower than men's. Additionally, employers in these industries take advantage of the gendered stereotype that women are more "nimble" and "docile" making them ideal workers for processing and packing food stuffs (Salzinger 2003; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006; see also Safa 1992).

The second pathway leading to the feminization of agriculture stems from changes in smallholder agricultural production and is caused by neoliberal economic policies that make it harder for rural farmers to survive on traditional subsistence agriculture (e.g., through decreased access to credit and technical assistance, increased privatization of communal resources, and competition from cheap imports). As large-scale agribusinesses take over *ejidal* lands and as liberalization of agricultural imports lowers the prices of basic foods (e.g., corn), farmers find it much more difficult to maintain their traditional form of rural livelihoods. Household members must seek off-farm employment, which often results in rural-urban or international migration for some or all members of the family (FAO 1999; Katz 2003; Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel

2006). Katz (2003) found that in Mexico, women are more likely than men to migrate internally, but men are more likely than women to migrate to the United States. In 1990, there were about 123 Mexican men migrating to the United States for every 100 women (Katz 2003:46; see also Deere 2005:42). This type of male out-migration leaves many women as *de facto* heads-of-households with increased responsibilities for overseeing and maintaining subsistence agricultural production for the family (FAO 1999; Katz 2003; Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006).

Studies that document women's changing agricultural roles in the face of male out-migration date back to Boserup's (1970) seminal work on women, agriculture, and development. She noted that in regions where men migrated to look for wage labor, women took over the tasks previously performed by men. In their review of studies on gender and migration, Pessar and Mahler (2003) found a similar trend. Looking at the findings of eight recent studies, they concluded that in most cases, "'traditional' rules governing work weaken as nonmigrant women and girls assume the tasks usually performed by the now-emigrant men and boys" (p. 825). Findings by Connell (1984), Arizpe and Botey (1987), Salick (1992), Hamilton (2002), Wiggins et al. (2002), Rudel (2006), and Radel and Schmook (forthcoming (b)) suggest that in many cases, women do take on new agricultural tasks in the absence of their spouses.

There are also case studies that suggest that, even in the absence of the spouse, women's traditional gender roles are maintained whenever possible. This may be because gender norms prohibit women's participation in some agricultural tasks (Chant 1997) or because labor shortages cause households to abandon agriculture altogether. For example, Bever (2002) found that women from migratory households participated

less in agriculture than their counterparts from non-migratory households because their fields had been abandoned. Palmer (1985) also found that women in female-headed households spent less time farming than women in male-headed households. Thus she called for a re-examination and re-definition of the feminization of agriculture.

Another way in which traditional gender roles are maintained is by paying male day laborers to complete the agricultural tasks. Jokisch (2002) notes this is the case in many migratory households that can afford to do so. A final way in which women defend traditional gender roles is by finding a new non-migratory husband. Baxter (in Connell 1984) found that women whose husbands were absent for long periods of time eventually remarried, allowing them to maintain their traditional gender roles (see also Chant 1991, 1997). This final strategy relates to a second outcome of migration, namely changes in family structure.

Changes in Family Structure

The options for women who are left behind are either to remarry or become the *de facto* head-of-household. Both options represent important changes in the family structure. The rise in female-headed households is a trend that has been noted throughout much of the developing world, including Latin America and Mexico. This trend is widely attributed to male out-migration (Blumberg and Garcia 1977; Youssef and Hetler 1983; Elson 1992; Chant 1997; Chant and Craske 2003). With Mexican rural male out-migration increasing over the last twenty years (Levy and van Wijnbergen in Young 1995; Katz 2003, Deere 2005), the sex ratio in rural areas has altered, leaving many women as heads-of-households.

An important distinction between female-headed households is whether they have *de jure* or *de facto* status (Youssef and Hetler 1983; Chant 1997). A *de jure* female-headed household refers to a situation where there is no male partner in the house on a fairly permanent basis and the female receives little to no monetary support. This category includes widows, divorcees, abandoned women, separated women, and single mothers (Chant 1997). A *de facto* female-headed household refers to a situation where a husband is temporarily absent due to labor migration, but the couple maintains contact and the wife receives remittances from her absentee husband, however sporadic these may be (Chant 1997).

Although every case is different, *de facto* female-headed households may be better off economically if their husbands find stable, well-paying jobs and send money home on a regular basis. However, *de facto* female heads-of-households must confront the challenges of maintaining a long-distance relationship or they risk becoming *de jure* female heads-of-households receiving no economic support. The challenges and stresses associated with the new transnational family structure can lead to an increased propensity for both men and women to commit infidelity and/or increased marital problems. As Chant (1997) notes: “Long spells apart and erratic communication can be highly stressful, sowing seeds of mistrust and/or provoking men and women alike to engage in extramarital liaisons” (p. 17). Connell (1984) in the South Pacific, and Gledhill (1995) in Mexico, both found that migration contributed to increased divorce rates, marital instability and family breakdown. In Guatemala, Menjívar and Agadjanian (2007) found that real and imagined infidelities in the husbands’ absence led to family breakdown. Taylor et al. (2006) also note that in Guatemala, issues of infidelity created tensions when

women were left behind for long periods of time. These “social imaginaries” (i.e., how one envisions the day to day activities of the other in a distant place, including their fidelity) are an especially under-researched topic in the gender and migration literature (Pessar and Mahler 2003).

As noted above, the changes in family structure due to male out-migration can lead to increased rates of infidelity on behalf of both men and women—albeit for different reasons (Gledhill 1995; Chant 1997). For men who migrate to the U.S. there are several factors that may lead to an increased propensity to commit infidelity. First, the cultural phenomenon of *machismo*, which emphasizes male dominance and virility, makes infidelity a cultural norm for many Latin men whether they are in Mexico or in the U.S. (Gledhill 1995; Chant 1997; Chant and Craske 2003; Taylor et al. 2006; Menjívar and Agadjanian 2007). As part of this cultural phenomenon, it is not uncommon for men to have a second family, which is “often referred to as the ‘big house, little house’/’*casa grande, casa chica*’ phenomenon” (Chant 1997:123; see also Gledhill 1995).

Second, male migrants are staying in the U.S. for longer periods of time, which increases the scope for starting a new relation (Gledhill 1995; Menjívar and Agadjanian 2007). Third, although Mexico-U.S. migration is still dominated by men, there are more and more Latina women migrating to the U.S., making it easier for Latino men to find a suitable mate (Gledhill 1995). Fourth, starting a relationship with a woman in the U.S. may have advantages for the male migrant such as a possible path to legal residency or more financial security if she has a well-paid job (Gledhill 1995). Fifth, living and working in the U.S. may cause migrants to become disdainful of rural Mexican life, and thereby their rural wives (Chant 1997). Finally, migrant men may come to see their

family as a burden that they would prefer not to maintain (Gisbert, Painter, and Quiton 1992; Gledhill 1995; Chant 1997).

Male out-migration also creates factors that may increase the propensity for women left behind to commit infidelity. First, as already mentioned, the distance sows seeds of distrust, with both men and women more likely to seek a new partner as a result. Second, women's financial vulnerability increases with male out-migration. As noted by Elson (1992), women in much of Latin America are dependent on men to secure resources. If the migrant husband fails to send money, she must look for another source of financial support, in most cases this source of financial support is another man. Feminist scholars have argued that such behavior on behalf of women is explained by the patriarchal system, which undervalues women and women's work. In many cultures it is unacceptable for women to work outside the home. In other regions, women are allowed to work, but their earning potential is not equivalent to that of men (Safa 1992; Chant 1997; Chant and Craske 2003; Salzinger 2003). Due to the patriarchal system, women are dependent on men for their family's survival. As Elson (1992) states, "The core of gender subordination lies in the fact that most women are unable to mobilize adequate resources (both material and in terms of social identity) except through dependence on a man" (p. 41). In short, women commit infidelity as a survival strategy when the economic needs of their households are not met. These economic motivations for infidelity are related to the third outcome of migration, to which I now turn.

Economic Changes

Transnational migration is an increasingly popular livelihood strategy for many poor individuals and households, particularly those in developing countries who hope to

improve their economic status in life (Chant 1991; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Elson 1992; Massey et al. 1993; Gledhill 1995; Durand et al. 1996; Conway and Cohen 1998; Bever 2002; Jokisch 2002; Kay 2004; McKay 2005; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (a), forthcoming (b)). As laid out by Lee (1966) in his seminal push/pull model of migration, individuals are “pushed” away from locations where they are dissatisfied (for economic, political, or other reasons) and “pulled” to areas (for reasons of economics, climate, or others) where they can “better” themselves (Lee 1966; Dorigo and Tobler 1983). This theory suggests that a major motivation for migrating is to improve the economic well-being of the household. However, there is considerable debate as to whether migration is actually a successful strategy for achieving this goal (Durand and Massey 1992; Durand et al. 1996; Conway and Cohen 1998; Grasmuck and Pessar 2001). Several case studies have found that remittances are typically spent on immediate consumption (e.g., improved housing, food, and clothes) rather than productive investments (e.g., small businesses or agricultural technology) (Durand and Massey 1992; Jokisch 2002; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Rudel 2006; Taylor et al. 2006). Mahler and Pessar (2006) add another dimension to this debate by questioning what should be classified as “productive” versus “unproductive” investments. They ask if it is appropriate for things such as food, shelter, clothing, and education to be characterized as “unproductive” (p. 45).

In his ethnography on two communities with high rates of male out-migration in the Mexican state of Michoacán, Gledhill (1995) found that some long-term migrants were able to invest in land and start small or large businesses, but that this was not the case for all migratory households. As he explains: “Most seasonal migrants of the 1960s

and 1970s only earned enough to cover basic social reproductive expenditures, as the people themselves insist—with some irritation—when asked about ‘assets’ they might have acquired with their earnings” (p. 97). Similarly, Durand et al. (1996) found that in Mexico, 76 percent of remittance money went to consumption, 14 percent was spent on homes, and only 10 percent was invested productively. Cohen (2005) found that “92% of remittances went to daily and household expenses, with only about 8% of remittances going to business start-ups or investments” (p. 94).

Although Durand et al. (1996) and Cohen (2005) agree that most remittances are spent on consumption rather than on productive investments, they argue that household level case studies undervalue the positive impacts of remittances at the community and national level (see also Durand and Massey 1992; Conway and Cohen 1998). Cohen (2005) argues that remittances may contribute to community level economic growth—a benefit which is not captured when looking only at the household level. He notes that migrants often form hometown associations and pool money to invest in community projects. Further, Durand et al. (1996) call for researchers to ask *why* some migrants make productive investment and others do not. To do this, Durand et al. (1996) used a quantitative approach and found that investment of remittance money is variable and “depends on factors such as human capital, property ownership, trip characteristics, and community circumstances” (p. 259). Their findings suggest there are both structural and individual barriers that prevent migrants from making productive investments.

Women's Status and Empowerment

All of the potential outcomes and changes in social relations due to migration discussed above (i.e., agricultural changes, changes in the family structure, and economic changes) can have a positive or negative impact on the status and empowerment of the women left behind. Some researchers have hypothesized that male out-migration may create opportunities for gender relations to be renegotiated (Chant and Craske 2003; Mahler and Pessar 2006). As *de facto* heads-of-households, women may have more decision-making power and access to and control over resources. Furthermore, given that gender relations are “fluid, not fixed” (Mahler and Pessar 2006:29), as women take on new roles and responsibilities, it is possible that gender ideologies regarding what women are capable of doing and achieving will also change. Both of these can improve women's status and empowerment (Chant and Craske 2003).

Migration-related changes can also negatively impact women's status. This is particularly true if male out-migration results in an increased work burden for the women left behind, if the women are unable to access or mobilize resources in the absence of their husband, or if the women are abandoned or do not receive enough remittance money to cover basic household needs. It is important to note that changes in household gender relations may not effect change for women if gender ideologies and the larger structures constraining women's opportunities do not change as well. As Elson (1992) points out, the rise in female-headed households is not a sign of “emancipation from male power” if women are still dependent upon men to access and mobilize resources (p. 41).

To evaluate the positive and negative outcomes of migration on women's lives, I use the concepts of status and empowerment. Social status refers to one's position or rank in society and the prestige that comes with that position (Giddens, Duneier, and Appelbaum 2005). Social status is closely related to social roles and the gendered division of labor. As Lorber (1994) notes, different work is assigned to different genders which strengthens the society's evaluation of those statuses—"the higher the status, the more prestigious and valued the work and the greater its rewards" (p. 30).

Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as, "people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (p. 437). Though empowerment is an abstract concept, it is often operationalized by measuring decision-making power, autonomy, agency, personal freedom, mobility, access to and control over resources, and bargaining power (Kabeer 1999; Quisumbing 2003; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (b)).

Pedraza (1991) and Pessar and Mahler (2003) review several studies on how male out-migration impacts women's status and empowerment. They find these studies are inconclusive. Reviews by Radel and Schmook (forthcoming (b)) and Connell (1984) show mixed outcomes as well. For example, Radel and Schmook (forthcoming (b)) conclude that there are three possible outcomes. First, women's status can improve due to remittances, greater autonomy and decision-making, greater flexibility in gender roles, and more personal freedom. Second, women's status can remain the same because, although the gendered division of labor changes, gender ideologies remain unchanged. Or third, women can experience a deterioration in their status. This may be in relation to

men's increased status as a rich or worldly migrant or it may be a result of marginalization from the larger community.

Connell (1984) notes both the positive and negative effects of male out-migration on women left behind in the South Pacific. In some cases, women maintain their coffee gardens and sell coffee for profit. Through this, women gain decision-making power and prestige. But sometimes the ownership of the money is contested and women do not get to keep the money they earn. Connell concludes, "On the one hand women may gain independence, autonomy, competence in new skills and status, whether they are themselves migrants or remain in villages as household heads when male relatives leave. On the other hand they may lose independence and status...suffer poorer health and welfare...and become subjugated to men" (p. 975). Chant and Craske (2003) concur that in some cases, women left behind may become more assertive and independent, but in other cases, when the husband migrates and fulfills his role as breadwinner, the wife becomes more dependent on him.

In a rural Mexican case study, Radel and Schmook (forthcoming (b)) found that women from migratory households had greater decision-making abilities. Similarly, Bever (2002) found that women from migratory households had greater decision-making authority, control of the household budget, and responsibility for the shopping. Although Chant and Craske (2003) agree that women tend to enjoy greater personal freedom and decision-making power, Chant (1997) notes that this is not always the case. She says absenteeism of the husband does not necessarily translate to increased decision-making and freedom on the wife's behalf. Often, the male can maintain control over many of the household decisions. Furthermore, in some cases, women are not free to go to their fields

or to town for fear of other community member's gossiping about their "moral propriety" (Chant 1997:16). Gledhill (1995) also noted an increased "policing" of women's behavior in the absence of their husbands.

In summary, there is a lack of research on the women left behind when their husbands migrate (Pedraza 1991; Posel 2001; Taylor et al. 2006; Kiriti-Nganga 2007; Menjívar and Agadjanian 2007). In addition, existing studies are inconclusive in terms of the impact on women's status and empowerment (Connell 1984; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Menjívar and Agadjanian 2007; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (b)). This case study was designed to address these gaps in the literature while simultaneously responding to the call for social scientists to exchange work with other researchers working at different scales of analysis (Chant 1991; Fitzgerald 2006; Mahler and Pessar 2006). I turn now to my research question, information on the community, and methods used in my study.

CHAPTER III

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Background and Setting

The research question addressed in this study is: how does male out-migration affect the women left behind in Villanueva? I focus on three areas of women's lives including the households' financial and material situation, issues of infidelity and women's vulnerability to abandonment, and the gendered division of labor. To answer this research question, I conducted field research for five weeks in July and August 2007 in Villanueva, an *ejido* located in southeastern Mexico in the state of Campeche on the Yucatán Peninsula (Figure 3.1).

I used a community case study approach, which looks at how and why a phenomenon occurs within a community and who is part of the phenomenon. A case study approach was selected because it allowed the collection of rich, in-depth, qualitative information on a specific phenomenon in a specific setting (Berg 2007). In addition, I employed a qualitative approach because, as Fitzgerald (2006) suggests, studies that combine quantitative survey methods with qualitative ethnographic methods (e.g., in-depth interviews and participant observation) can yield more valid and representative findings. As noted earlier, scholars have called for more qualitative approaches to the study of gender and migration.

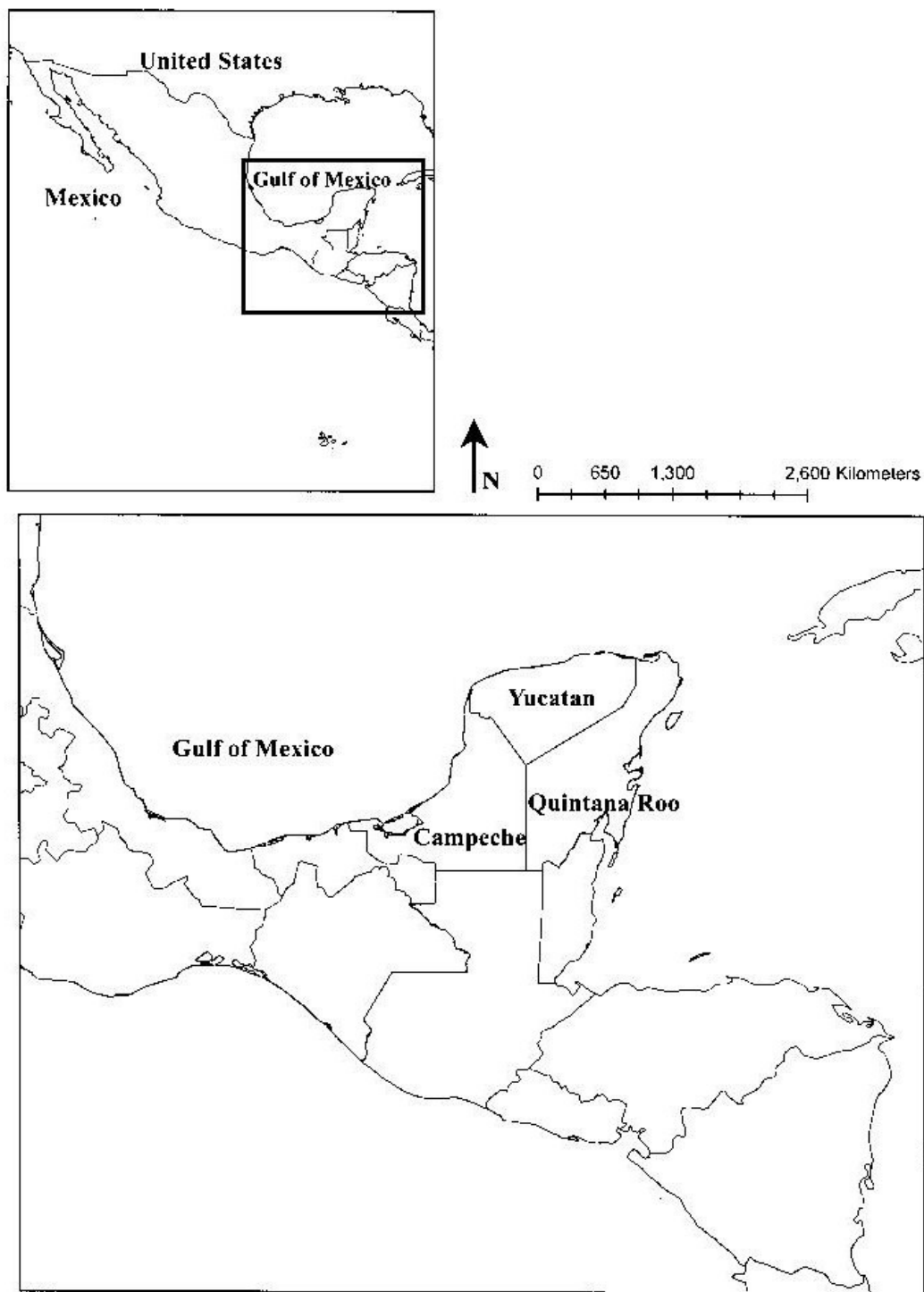


Figure 3.1. Map of Study Area

This study was conducted to complement Radel's larger 2007 survey on migration, land-use change, and gender in the region. This larger study began in June 2007 and surveyed over 150 households in four communities. These four communities were selected to represent the range of communities in the region in terms of size, period of establishment, geographic location, economic and livelihood conditions, and experience with U.S. migration. These communities were also representative of the major ethnic groups in the region. Two of the communities were predominantly *mestizo* (mix of European and indigenous ancestry) and residents spoke Spanish as their first language. The other two communities were predominantly indigenous and most residents spoke either *Chol* or *Tzelzal* (Mayan dialects) as their first language.

For my research, I chose one of the four communities to collect in-depth qualitative information on the effects of male out-migration on the women left behind. Fellow researchers suggested Villanueva as an ideal site for observing the social relationships in which I was interested. The selection of the particular *ejido* was based on two criteria: 1) rate of male out-migration and 2) accessibility of household members. Villanueva had a high rate of male out-migration, with 18 of the 35 heads-of-households choosing to migrate to the U.S. for some period of time. Community members were predominantly *mestizo*, so Spanish was their first language. Because I spoke Spanish, the ethnicity of the residents of Villanueva made this community more accessible to me than predominantly indigenous communities where *Chol* or *Tzelzal* were the primary languages of most residents.

Villanueva, in the state of Campeche, is located in a region that is of concern to researchers interested in issues of biodiversity and deforestation. Campeche shares a

border with Guatemala. The vegetation in this region is predominantly semi-deciduous or seasonal (wet-dry) tropical forest. These forests connect with forests in Guatemala and Mexico's state of Chiapas to form "the largest remaining expanse of tropical forest left in Central America" (Klepeis 2003:544). It is a "hot spot" for biodiversity as well as tropical deforestation (Turner et al. 2001; Turner et al. 2003; Bray and Klepeis 2005; Roy Chowdhury 2006). Rainfall in the region is variable but averages 900-1400 mm (Turner et al. 2001; Foster and Turner 2004; Roy Chowdhury 2006). The karstic topography drains much of the rainfall and surface water to deep underground water tables, resulting in a limited availability of surface water (Turner et al. 2001) and water shortages during the dry season (Turner and Geoghegan 2003).

The first inhabitants of this region were the Maya who arrived in 3000 B.C. (Klepeis 2003; Turner and Geoghegan 2003; Foster and Turner 2004). The Maya developed a sophisticated civilization and had diverse agricultural practices including terracing, agro-forestry, orchard-gardens, and swidden or rotational cropping (Klepeis 2003). For reasons most likely related to environmental strains, the civilization collapsed around 800-1000 A.D. (Klepeis 2003). After the collapse of the ancient Maya civilization, the area was sparsely populated for nearly 1000 years (Klepeis 2003; Turner and Geoghegan 2003). Beginning in the late 1800s, the Mexican government initiated various forestry activities in the region including *chicle* extraction and logging of hardwoods (Turner et al. 2001; Turner and Geoghegan 2003).

The most significant development in the region occurred after the Chetumal-Escárcega road (Highway 186) was completed in 1972. The highway connected this previously remote region to the rest of Mexico (Turner et al. 2001; Turner and

Geoghegan 2003). Migrants quickly moved into the area in search of land. The population in the region ballooned from 2,174 in 1960 to over 40,000 in 2000 (Klepeis 2003). A survey by Vance et al. (2004) found that 40 percent of settlers came from one of the three Yucatán Peninsula states (Campeche, Quintana Roo, or Yucatán), 24 percent from Veracruz, 17 percent from Tabasco, 13 percent from Chiapas, and four percent from Michoacán. The number of *ejidos* grew from 14 in 1967 to 45 in 2000 (Turner et al. 2001; Turner et al. 2003). Over half the land in the region is now *ejidal* land (Roy Chowdhury 2006) and the region is considered Mexico's "last tropical forest-agriculture frontier" (Turner and Geoghegan 2003:32).

*Ejid*os are an outcome of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, which called for land reform. Most *ejidos* are based on a parcelized tenure structure where each *ejido* member gets a fixed number of hectares, which are usually managed individually (Roy Chowdhury 2006). The original laws governing *ejidos* did not allow for the sale or lease of these lands, since *ejido* members had only usufruct rights, not private ownership of the land. However, *ejido* members have long been renting, selling, and borrowing the land (Appendini 2002; Vance et al. 2004; Radel 2005). In 1992, a new law (Article 27) was passed allowing for the privatization of *ejidos*. But Klepeis and Roy Chowdhury (2004) note that, as of 2004, no *ejido* in this region had yet undergone the process necessary for privatization. They also note that most *ejidos* in this region are no longer accepting members, only *pobladores* (residents with no *ejidal* land-use rights, who can only rent or borrow land and work as day laborers) (Klepeis and Roy Chowdhury 2004).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Mexican government invested in large-scale rice and cattle production projects in this area, most of which failed due to mismanagement

(Turner et al. 2001; Klepeis 2003). The most recent wave of development in the region is coming from international institutions, government, and non-government organizations (NGOs), which are promoting archaeological and ecological tourism in the area (Klepeis 2003; Turner and Geoghegan 2003). Additionally there are some government- and NGO-sponsored agroforestry, beekeeping, and gardening projects (Turner et al. 2001). Due to high biodiversity and high rates of deforestation, international attention was drawn to this area and recent efforts are being made to promote sustainable development. In 1989 Mexico created the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve for conservation purposes under the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and Biosphere program (Klepeis 2003). Additionally, El Mundo Maya (The Maya World), an international development plan to develop eco-archaeo-tourism in the region, began in 1993 (Turner et al. 2001; Klepeis 2003). The Mesoamerican Biological Corridor has also been established to help facilitate the migration of animals (Turner et al. 2001; Klepeis 2003).

Economy of the Region

A household survey of 188 households in the region by Vance et al. (2004) found that 71 percent of houses in the region had electricity, 66 percent had potable water, 53 percent had cement floors, 37 percent had television, and 11 percent had cement walls (p. 173). Most residents practiced subsistence agriculture known locally as *milpa*, which includes an intercropping of maize, beans, and squash. This type of agriculture is also called maize swidden or slash-and-burn (Turner et al. 2003; Klepeis et al. 2004).

Chili production was introduced to the region in 1975 by settlers from the Chiapas/Veracruz border region where chili production is common (Keys 2004). As chili production proved to be one of the few economically viable agricultural activities, more and more farmers began engaging in chili production. By the mid 1990s, over half of the households in the region were growing chili (Turner et al. 2003:8081; see also Turner et al. 2001). Turner et al. (2003) estimate that in a good year, chili farmers can earn about \$1,800 USD, but as they note, chili crops are vulnerable to drought, hurricanes, pests, and disease and it is not uncommon for farmers to lose all of their investment.

Chili farming was not only a source of cash for the farmer, it was also a source of seasonal employment for others in the region. Vance et al. (2004) note that because chili production is labor-intensive, it provided one of the main sources of employment in the region. Eighty percent of the wage work in the region was on farms. Some residents sought temporary wage work in the cities of Campeche, Chetumal, Playa del Carmen, and Cancún, particularly in times of hurricanes and drought.

Villanueva

Villanueva was established in 1983 by families from Chiapas and Tabasco who came looking for land. When Villanueva was established, the houses were clustered in a village with individual agricultural parcels on the outskirts. Today, some people live just 10 minutes from their parcels while others must walk over an hour to reach the land to which they have usufruct rights. Villanueva was a small, quiet *ejido*. The main road was half-dirt-half-paved and infrequently used since only four households owned a vehicle. There was a *combi* (bus) service that ran twice a day from Villanueva to the main town of

Xpujil, 40 minutes away. There was a cement schoolhouse for grade school children, but students who wished to attend high school had to travel daily to Xpujil by *combi*. There was a small community center (*La Casa Ejidal*) and a one-room health Center (*La Casa de Salud*). However, for serious medical issues, residents had to travel to Xpujil where there was a hospital. The only church in town was Jehovah's Witness. These four buildings were clustered together near the entrance of the community.

There were no telephone services in Villanueva. A few women with husbands in the U.S. had cell phones, but the reception was not very strong and women had to walk 45 minutes to the local highway where reception was stronger or take a *combi* into Xpujil. Villanueva also lacked a real store or market. On two of the side streets, a couple of residents had opened up very small storefronts in portions of their homes. They sold *Big Cola* (generic soda pop), chips, candy, and few small household items like soap and laundry detergent. The nearest markets were in Xpujil. Xpujil had a population of approximately 2,135 and was the largest town in the vicinity. It was located at the crossroads of two major highways in the region and was comprised of a few truck stops, restaurants, markets, a bus stop, a couple of hardware stores, two internet cafes, three Western Union offices, and a few hotels. It also served as the municipal seat with various government offices.

Data from Radel's 2007 survey show that of the 12 households in Villanueva that provided a response for the place of birth of the male and/or female head-of-household, eight were from Chiapas, three were from Tabasco, and one was from Campeche. The data also show that in 33 of 34 households surveyed, Spanish was the first language of

both the husband and wife. The male head-of-households averaged 3.97 years of education and their female spouses averaged 3.34 years.

This community's experience with male out-migration to the U.S. began in 2002 and took off in 2004. In half of the households, the head-of-household had migrated to the U.S. for some period of time (18 of 35 households). Villanueva was composed of extended families, so an even larger percentage of the households were affected by the migration of a son, brother, or other member of the extended family.³ Community members frequently cited lack of job opportunities and crop failures as reasons for migrating. The first migrant went to Indiana in 2002. The next two migrants went to Alabama in 2003. In 2004 seven men left the community, and others left in 2005 and 2006. Eight of the migrants have gone to Alabama. Two migrants went to North Carolina, one to Kentucky, one to New York, and an additional migrant went to Indiana. The length of stay of each migrant varied, but eight men have still not returned.

Sixteen of the 18 migratory households provided U.S. employment information in the survey. Seven migrants worked in the service industry (restaurant, small business, etc.), four in construction, one as a gardener, and four in unspecified off-farm activities. Of these 16 households, four reported that the male head-of-household had a second job with two in service (security guard and restaurant employee), one in construction, and one in an unspecified off-farm activity.

Although much of the literature suggests that members of rural Mexican households, particularly women, are migrating to urban centers (Katz 2003), this did not

³ In this study, I use the term migratory household to refer only to those households in which the male head-of-household migrated (i.e., the husband, rather than a son or other relative).

seem to be the case in this community. I have only anecdotal evidence that suggests that younger, single children (both male and female) migrated seasonally to Cancún and Playa del Carmen to work service jobs related to the tourist industry. Some married men sought construction work in these resorts towns, as well as other surrounding *ejidos*. But, other than one widowed woman, women from Villanueva did not appear to be migrating. The out-migration phenomenon that has developed in this community within the last six years is dominated by males going as undocumented workers to the U.S.

Methods

Gaining Access

I was able to gain access to Villanueva through a fellow research assistant who had already conducted surveys there and had an excellent rapport with community members. She had been granted permission to conduct migration research by the *comisario ejidal*, or local commissioner, the “gatekeeper” of the community. When I arrived, she introduced me to the *comisario* and asked if I could follow up her work with a study on the changes in the lives of the women left behind. He consented and welcomed me to Villanueva.

The research assistant also introduced me to Reina, the *promotora de salud* (community health educator). She felt Reina would make a good key informant because her husband was the first member of the community to migrate to the U.S. and she was quite involved in community issues.

Multi-Method Strategy

In this case study, triangulation of methods was used. Triangulation is a multi-method strategy in which, “every method is a different line of sight directed toward the same point, observing social and symbolic reality” (Berg 2007:5). This strategy is useful for providing a fuller picture of the phenomenon, reflecting various perspectives on a phenomenon, expanding the depth and breadth of the study, and overcoming biases and threats to validity inherent in each individual method (Creswell 1994; Neuman 2006; Berg 2007). Other measures taken to help ensure validity and reliability include providing a minimum of two quotes to support each theme discussed and using clearly defined concepts.⁴

The primary methods employed in this study include: semi-structured qualitative interviews, participant observation, a focus group interview, and a short survey on the gendered division of labor. As previously noted, Radel’s 2007 survey on migration, land-use change, and gender in the region was also used as a source of secondary data.

Respondents were selected using a combination of purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling. Neuman (2006) defines purposive sampling as “selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind” (p. 222). My primary purpose was to select women whose husbands had migrated to the U.S. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a total of 31 respondents including women and men from both migratory

⁴ There is debate in the qualitative research literature regarding the applicability of the terms validity and reliability to qualitative research (Gibbs 2002; Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Neuman 2006; Berg 2007). Regarding reliability, Neuman (2006) notes, “[Qualitative researchers] accept that different researchers or researchers using alternative measure will get distinct results. This is because data collection is an interactive process in which particular researchers operate in an evolving setting and the setting’s context dictates using a unique mix of measures that cannot be repeated” (p. 196).

and non-migratory households (Table 3.1).⁵ Sixteen of these were with women from migratory households. For 13 of these women, I was able to collect additional information through my short survey.⁶ Two of the 31 in-depth interviews were with returned male migrants (both of whom were spouses of women I had interviewed). Additionally, I used snowball and convenience sampling to identify 10 women and three men from non-migratory households who were willing to participate in an in-depth interview. I conducted interviews with members of non-migratory households in order to gain an understanding of the larger community's views on the migration phenomenon.

Table 3.1. Interviews Conducted

Type of Interview	Number of Interviews
Semi-structured with women from migratory households	16
Semi-structured with returned male migrants	2
Semi-structured with women from non-migratory households	10
Semi-structured with men from non-migratory households	3
Total semi-structured interviews	31

The majority of the information presented in this thesis comes from the semi-structured qualitative interviews. I used a semi-structured format because it allowed me to begin with some predetermined questions but also move and/or digress from the interview schedule through probes and new insights that emerged during the interview (Berg 2007). All interviews took place in Spanish and lasted from 30 minutes to four

⁵ For each interview, I introduced myself to the potential participant and explained my project. I then asked for permission to conduct and record the interview, but reminded the participant that their participation was completely voluntary and he or she could refuse to answer any question or chose to end the interview at any point. Because I was working with some semi-literate or illiterate individuals, I requested a waiver for written consent from Utah State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). However, I did leave each respondent with a paper that included a picture of my advisor and me, our contact information, the contact information for USU's IRB and contact information for a local researcher at *Ecosur* University (Appendix A).

⁶ For three of the women who did in-depth interviews, I was never able to get back with them to do a survey. And one woman who completed the survey was not interested in doing an in-depth interview.

hours. Each interview was recorded,⁷ then translated and transcribed. After each interview, I wrote a brief description of the interview, my subjective reflections (i.e., personal observations, opinions, or comments about the interview), and analytic notes (i.e., links to other interviews or theoretical connections) in my field notebook.

My second method was to engage in participant observation on farms, in homes, and in the community over a five-week period. I lived 45 minutes away from Villanueva and went to the community nearly every day for four weeks. My observations were recorded in a field notebook during or immediately after the observation period. I would often accompany a community member to his or her *parcela* for the day. While I was in Villanueva during the primary agricultural season, it was a period of less-intensive labor demand, so people were available to talk. When we went to the fields, I offered to carry water, chop weeds with a machete, carry and care for young children, and participate in any way I could. This helped to break down barriers and establish a rapport with respondents. It also gave me a better idea of what tasks were done in the fields and how they were done. Although I was not able to observe a full agricultural cycle, I gathered information about the full cycle through the interviews.

I conducted participant observation in the homes. Typically I stayed in the community from seven in the morning to seven in the evening. Therefore, I had plenty of time to talk with people after the farming workday was over. In most cases, after conducting an interview with the female head-of-household, I felt welcome to come back to hang out and chat with the family. There were three houses where I felt particularly

⁷ Interviews with three respondents were lost due to low-batteries in the microphone, which resulted in poor recording quality. However, field notes taken during the interviews captured much of the data. I was able to conduct and tape a second interview with one of these respondents.

welcome and comfortable. I spent the majority of my evenings at one of these three houses.

I also conducted participant observation at two community meetings. I attended the monthly *Junta de la Asamblea* in order to hear the types of issues discussed in this meeting and to observe women's participation in the meeting. This was a meeting held on the last Sunday of every month. The *asamblea* was the governing body of the *ejido*. All 20 *ejiditarios* (male *ejido* members with land use rights) and 11 *ejiditarias* (female *ejido* members with land use rights) were required to attend this meeting. During this meeting, *ejidal* rules were made and community issues were discussed and voted on. The meeting I attended lasted over five hours and covered a wide range of community issues, such as how to maintain the schoolhouse and roads. The *comisario* who directed the meeting also used it as a time to introduce me to community members and see if they had any questions or concerns about the research I was conducting in their community. I also attended the monthly meeting that all women who receive state welfare checks through the *Oportunidades* program were required to attend. This allowed me to watch the women interact with each other and observe their obligations that were associated with this welfare program.

In addition, I conducted a focus group interview mid-way through my field experience in order to gather more information on the gendered division of labor in this community and to draw out responses and ideas in a group setting. A fellow research assistant and native Spanish-speaker with some experience in conducting participatory workshops agreed to act as moderator. Her linguistic ability and familiarity with the community and topics were crucial to the success of the focus group interview. She was

able to keep the conversation dynamic and tried to draw in all six invited participants. While she facilitated the discussion, I recorded and took notes.

We asked the group to first create a list of activities in which women in Villanueva engage. We then asked them to create a list of agricultural tasks associated with growing maize, noting who was involved in each step. These exercises helped me to gain a sense of typically “male tasks” versus “female tasks” in this community. The discussions associated with these questions produced useful data and provided an important way to double check my findings. Other questions addressed during the focus group included how the women imagined life in the U.S., the fears they had about their husbands’ migration, and the goals they hoped to achieve with this strategy. I asked these questions because they were emerging in the semi-structured interviews as important themes. The lists generated in the focus group were also used as the basis for creating a short survey asking about various agricultural, household, and community tasks, as I discuss below.

I used the short survey to assess the traditional gendered division of labor in Villanueva and how this division had changed since the men began migrating to the U.S. Based on the information I gathered during the focus group, I had a better sense of the different tasks that were required on the farm and in the household. From this information I created a short survey that listed 11 common agricultural tasks and 27 common household tasks (Appendix B). Respondents were asked who did each task when their husband was in Villanueva versus when their husband was in the U.S. If they hired day laborers to help with the task, I asked how many workers they typically

employed. I was able to get surveys completed by 14 of the 18 women from migratory households.

Conducting the survey created a clearer picture of what each woman did when her husband was in Villanueva versus when he was in the U.S., which helped to clarify and quantify changes in gender roles. It also showed which families were able to maintain traditional gender roles by paying someone else to do the husband's work while he was away.

Theoretical Approaches

Before entering the field, the research question I intended to explore was: How has male out-migration affected the gendered division of labor of the women left behind? This question was based on the theoretical model of the feminization of agriculture, which suggests that when men migrate, women typically take on many of the tasks of the emigrant husband and become the *de facto* farm managers (FAO 1999; Katz 2003; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006). Based on this model and the literature on women's empowerment (Kabeer 1999; Quisumbing 2003; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (b)), my expectation was that, in the absence of their husbands, women would take on the agricultural activities of their emigrant spouses and these new roles would give them greater decision making ability, freedom, autonomy, and greater access to and control of resources (e.g., money, food), resulting in increased empowerment.

However, my study was not entirely deductive. I also used an inductive approach and remained open to the unexpected or unanticipated questions that might arise. As I

conducted my semi-structured interviews, two additional aspects of women's lives that were affected by male out-migration kept emerging: 1) changes in the households' financial and material situation and 2) issues of infidelity and women's vulnerability to abandonment. Given the importance of these themes to both the respondents themselves and to issues of women's status and empowerment, I adjusted my semi-structured interviews to include questions that also focused on these aspects of women's lives.

Analysis

Data from the in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group interview were analyzed in the following manner. All field notes and transcribed interviews were entered into a word-processing program. Open coding of these documents was used to systematically look for initial themes, topics, and issues and record patterns (Berg 2007). As themes emerged, I bracketed and highlighted my thoughts in the text and kept a list of the dominant themes. After open coding, I re-read all field notes and transcripts and attached all supporting quotations and observations to the appropriate label. After all coding was completed, there were three dominant themes including "financial and material situation," "infidelity and abandonment," and "traditional gender roles and tasks when the husband is gone." After coding, I linked the patterns in these themes to the literature.

To assess the affect of male out-migration on women's lives in terms of changes in households' financial and material situation, I asked respondents how much remittance money they received, what they used (or hoped to use) the money for, who decided how that money was used, and if they felt like their financial situation was better, worse, or

the same. To address impacts related to issues of infidelity and women's vulnerability to abandonment, I asked if they had any fears related to their husbands' migration, what the hardest thing about having their husband gone was, and how their husbands' migration had affected their family life. Lastly, to address impacts in terms of the gendered division of labor, I used information from the semi-structured interviews, focus group interview, and results from the survey which asked about participation in 11 different agricultural tasks before and after the husbands' migration.

To analyze the survey data, I coded the responses, entered them into an Excel spreadsheet, and tallied them to see how the division of labor had changed since the husbands migrated to the U.S. From this Excel sheet, I could assess each household's reliance on paid labor before and after the husband's migration along with the woman's level of agricultural participation before and after migration for each of the 11 agricultural tasks. I categorized these indexes as low (one to four tasks), medium (five to eight tasks), and high (nine to 11 tasks). Although the survey also asked about household tasks, it was not necessary to analyze the data in this manner since, in all cases, the division of household tasks (e.g., preparing food, cleaning the house, washing clothes, washing dishes, and childcare) did not change after the husbands' migration.

Secondary data from Radel's 2007 survey was also analyzed to illuminate trends in agricultural production since the phenomenon of male out-migration began in 2002. I created an Excel chart that shows the average production of maize, chili, and pasture from 1995 to 2007 for all migratory households. I created a similar Excel chart that shows the total production of maize, chili and pasture from 1995 to 2007 for each migratory household. Migratory households were compared using the individual

production charts, amount of remittance money, the female's level of agricultural participation before and after migration, and reliance on hired labor before and after migration.

Before turning to my analysis of the effects of male out-migration on the women left behind, I first introduce the residents of Villanueva whose voices and experiences form the basis of this study. I also provide an overview of the main factors that motivated residents of Villanueva to migrate, which gives a glimpse into the lives of these residents.

CHAPTER IV
INTRODUCTION TO MIGRATORY HOUSEHOLDS
AND FACTORS INFLUENCING MIGRATION

Villanueva was a small community in southeastern Mexico in which 18 of the 35 heads-of-households had migrated to the U.S. for at least some period of time. Although I was able to conduct in-depth interviews with women from 16 of these migratory households, the bulk of the data presented in this thesis is based on the comments, perceptions, experiences, and observation of 11 women in particular (Table 4.1). Here, I provide a brief introduction to these women and then turn to discussing the major factors that influenced residents of Villanueva to migrate to the U.S.

Yazmín was a 37-year-old mother of four. Her husband, Alfonso, decided to migrate to the U.S. in 2004. He went to Alabama and found work as a cook in a restaurant. He returned to Villanueva after a year and built a new house for his family. Then he went back to the U.S. in 2006. He was still away when I was conducting interviews, but Yazmín said he planned to return that fall. Compared to other migrants from Villanueva, he sent the most money back (\$1,600 USD per month). Overall, Yazmín felt her family had benefited from her husband's migration and she felt her relationship with her husband was fine. However, she did note that it was difficult being alone and she worried that her children were being deprived of a father-figure and male role model.

Table 4.1 Profiles of Respondents

Name	Marital Status	Monthly Income (\$USD)	Paid Labor Before Migration	Paid Labor After Migration	Woman's Ag Work Level Before Migration	Woman's Ag Work Level After Migration	Trend in Maize Production After Migration	Trend in Chili Production After Migration	Trend in Pasture Production After Migration
Yazmín	Married	\$1,600	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Decrease	Decrease	Increase
Gabriella	Married	\$1,200	Low	Low	Low	Low	Decrease	Decrease	Increase
Ana	Married	\$1,000	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Decrease	Decrease	Increase
Sofia	Married	\$600	Low	High	Low	Low	Decrease	Same	Increase
Juana	Married	\$400	Medium	High	Low	Low	Decrease	Decrease	Increase
Maribel	Separated	\$400	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Isabella	Married	\$300	Low	Low	Low	Low	N/A	Decrease	Increase
Monica	Separated	\$300	Low	Low	High	High	Decrease	Decrease	Increase
Reina	Separated	\$200- \$300	N/A	Low	N/A	Medium	N/A	Decrease	Increase
Pilar	Separated	\$200	Low	Medium	High	High	Decrease	Decrease	Same
Amaranta	Married	\$220	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Decrease	Decrease	Increase

Gabriella was a mother of three teenage boys. Her husband Carlos migrated in 2003 and was gone for 27 months. He sent home the second highest amount of remittances (\$1,200 USD per month). Though both Gabriella and Carlos were in the room during our first interview, Carlos dominated the conversation. I was able to have one interview alone with Gabriella. Both felt that they were able to progress considerably due to his migration. They invested in a new house, land, and cattle. Carlos felt that his wife was very good about saving the money he sent her. And he emphasized that he didn't have any "vices" and that was how he was able to send more money home than many of the other migrants.

Ana was a 36 year-old mother with children ranging from their early twenties to a five year-old boy who was born shortly after her husband left for the U.S. Her husband Guillermo migrated to Alabama in 2003 and returned in 2005. Two of her older sons have also been to the U.S. They all worked in the restaurant where Yazmín's husband found a job. Her husband sent home \$1,000 USD each month. He was able to buy a car with this money and also invest in cattle and improve his ranch.

Sofía was a 33 year-old mother. She and her husband Miguel were only able to have one child, a daughter. Miguel migrated to Kentucky in 2004. He worked for a small business, but was only there for seven months. He sent back \$600 USD per month during this time. With this money they built a wooden addition to their house. But most of their money was spent on food while he was gone. She said they ate better when he was in the U.S.

Juana was a 42 year-old woman. Her husband, Santiago, left in 2006. He found a construction job in Alabama, but he only stayed for seven months. He sent home \$400

USD per month, but all of the money was spent on food and *jornaleros* (day laborers). They were not able to make any investments with the remittance money. They were still together and did not experience any marital problems, but Santiago noted that when he left for the U.S., he knew there was a chance their marriage could fall apart because he had seen it happen to others.

Maribel was the daughter of Juana and Santiago. She and her husband, Leonardo, were *pobladores* (landless community members) and he worked as a *jornalero*. He migrated to Alabama in 2003 and found a construction job. He sent her \$400 USD each month and they were able to build a new house with this money. But when Leonardo returned to Villanueva in 2005, he abandoned Maribel and their three young children for another woman in town. She was thinking about leaving her children with their grandmother and migrating to the U.S. herself.

Isabella's husband Juan migrated to Indiana in 2004. He was still there, along with their eldest son. She was not sure what type of work he had there, but he was only able to send home \$300 USD per month. She said she tried to be patient and understand that he had expenses to pay in the U.S. and that is why he did not send very much money. She and Juan were also *pobladores*, but they shared a *parcela* with his father. She had a good relationship with her mother-in-law and was often outside talking to her mother-in-law or her neighbor Ana.

Monica's husband Ricardo had been in New York since 2004. He worked in the service sector and didn't have plans to return home any time soon. There was a period when he did not send much money. Monica feared she had been abandoned and found a new partner to help her with the agricultural tasks. Ricardo found out about her actions

through other community members and they were now separated. But he still sent \$300 USD a month for their children.

Reina was the community health promoter in Villanueva. I was introduced to her early on because she knew most of the families and was very involved in community issues. Also, her husband, José, was the first to migrate to the U.S. from Villanueva. His main motivation to migrate was to earn money for their daughter's education. José left in 2002 and was still gone with no plans to return. She said her youngest children did not even remember who their father was. As in Monica's case, José didn't send money for a period. She thought she had been abandoned and found a new partner. She and José were now separated, but he still sent \$200 to \$300 USD a month for their children.

Pilar was a very strong and fit woman of 48 years. All five of her children were grown and out of the house. Her husband, Manuel, went to Alabama for nine months in 2004 and worked in landscaping. He only sent \$200 USD a month, and even this was sporadic. She said he had always been a womanizer, but he was worse when he returned from the U.S. He had affairs with two other women in the community, including Monica. Pilar had always been very involved in agriculture, but now that her husband had left her, she was the primary agriculturalist.

Amaranta's husband Omar had one of the worst migration experiences. He left for Alabama in 2004 and found a job in construction. However, he was only there for a month when he got in a fight and was shot in the leg. Due to his injury, he could not work and had to return to Villanueva with a \$2,500 USD debt. Unable to pay off the debt, he forfeited his land, which he had used as collateral on the loan. He was now working in Cancún and was trying to earn enough money to buy more land some day. In

the meantime, Amaranta and her children remained in Villanueva and Amaranta had become the primary agriculturalist, borrowing land from their in-laws.

As these profiles suggest, each household has unique characteristics that impacted the migration experience. But, regardless of these differences, there were some general trends and patterns that will be discussed throughout this thesis. I turn now to a discussion on the general trends that motivated the decision for the husbands' migration for many of the households in Villanueva.

Lee's (1966) push/pull theory of migration is useful for understanding what motivated residents of Villanueva to migrate to the U.S. As discussed earlier, this model suggests migrants are "pushed" from areas where they are dissatisfied and "pulled" to areas where they can "better" themselves. Often economic issues are at the root of both the push and pull factors. In my study, two interrelated push factors and two pull factors emerged. These include the dismal employment situation in Mexico, the hope of finding a "good job" in the U.S., the dire agricultural situation in Mexico, and the hope of achieving one's financial and material goals by migrating to the U.S. I turn first to discussing the employment situation.

Most households in this region grew subsistence crops (e.g., maize, beans, and squash) and some grew chilis for commercial sale. Working as a *jornalero* on someone else's farm (particularly chili farms), was one of the few job opportunities that existed in this region (Vance et al. 2004). *Jornaleros* received low wages and demand for workers varied by season. A *jornalero* typically earned 70 pesos (\$7 USD) per day. Most families did not foresee ever being able to get ahead on this salary. For example, one afternoon, after accompanying Pilar to her field, we returned to her daughter's house.

Since Pilar's husband abandoned her after being in the U.S. for nine months, she spent more time with her daughter and grandchildren. We both sat on upturned plastic buckets. She sorted beans while her 11 year-old granddaughter prepared lunch for her three younger brothers. I asked her why more men in the community were migrating. She responded:

They have a plan...they want to progress. They don't want to keep being day laborers because they earn so little... You can't make it on the 70 pesos per day (\$7 USD) that a day laborer earns— it's impossible that they'll make it. One gets tired of working as a day laborer and thinks, "It's better if I go." This is a thought the young people have, "I'll go to the U.S."

On another afternoon, I accompanied Amaranta to the field where she and her 13 year-old son were growing corn. They were borrowing the land from her father-in-law since she and her husband lost their land when her husband was unable to pay back the money he had borrowed to finance his migration. I asked Amaranta what the goal was when her husband migrated. She said, "To be better off. He had to work as a *jornalero*. But what you earn in a month [as a *jornalero*] is not enough."

Sofía's husband migrated for a relatively short time (eight months) and was able to earn enough money so that upon his return, he could add on to their old house, making it newer and bigger. She said, "If he was working here, we wouldn't have been able to do what we did. You don't earn enough as a *jornalero*. There's no one to pay you for a week. There's work, but 70 pesos (\$7 USD) for the afternoon is not enough. Clothes, food—and there goes all the money."

Besides working as a *jornalero*, there were not many other job opportunities in the region. Anecdotally, I spoke with at least three women whose husbands were able, at

times, to find work as masons in the surrounding communities. Reina was the only woman who mentioned that her husband had tried to work in Xpujil (the nearby town) prior to migrating. Her husband wanted their daughter to be able to continue studying high school in a neighboring town, but they needed money. “We didn’t have enough money,” she said. “He went to work in Xpujil—but he wasn’t earning very much. And so he decided to migrate.”

Corresponding to this push factor, the main pull factor that attracts migrants to the U.S. was the idea that they could find a “good” job and earn more money in the U.S. Diego, who had two sons in the U.S. noted, “There’s no work here [in the community] and there’s money there [in the U.S.]” Pilar said, “[The men who migrate] have the idea of getting rich [in the U.S.]. Here you can’t do that.”

Flor was a widowed woman who had recently *juntada*—or gotten together with a new partner. Her partner worked as a mason in the surrounding communities, but she said he talked about wanting to migrate to the U.S. because, “He thinks [he can make money]. What happens is, people say, ‘Oh the U.S., there’s enough money. It will go well for me. I’ll build my house and start a savings account in the bank’—these are the ideas they have. So with these ideas they keep wanting to go.”

Luisa and her husband, Roberto, were *pobladores*. Since Roberto didn’t have his own land, he often worked for others as a *jornalero*. She said now that Roberto had migrated, even though he only sent her \$200 USD a month, it was better than the 200 pesos (\$20 USD) a month he earned as a *jornalero*. Yazmín summed it up by simply saying, “Let’s say my husband works there [in the U.S.], and every 15 days he earns 10,000 pesos (\$1,000 USD) – you can’t do that here.”

The second push factor was crop failure and the frustration associated with being reliant on such a risky livelihood. Crop failures can be caused by droughts, floods, hurricanes, pest infestations, or just a poor growing season. Isabella suggested that many want to migrate so they can earn money to invest in cattle because, “sometimes you plant and it doesn’t produce.” In a similar vein, Sofía described her husband’s frustration with investing so much effort into an activity for which there is no guaranteed return, saying, “According to him, he went [to the U.S.] because he planted chili and he planted *milpa* and it didn’t produce. He worked and worked and got nothing when harvest time came. ‘Why do all this work?’ he thought. So he decided to go.”

As Yazmín and her eight year-old daughter led me to her family’s *parcela* where they have been planting pasture for the last five years, Yazmín echoed these sentiments:

In order to get ahead here you have to really work hard in the *milpa*. Work and work and work—a lot of time and a lot of expenses for everything. But not [in the U.S.]—there he works and he’s making money. Here, sometimes you work but there’s no harvest.

The second pull factor—the hope of achieving one’s financial and material goals—was exemplified one afternoon by Carlos, a returned migrant who credited everything he had to his migration experience. As we walked around his *parcela* he explained that he was able to buy this land, plant pasture, buy cattle, and build a new house. He said he felt like he had “achieved something.” This vision of being able to “do something” or “achieve something” was a pull factor for many migrants. This was clearly related to the aforementioned perception of greater job opportunities and earning potential in the U.S. But this pull factor provided greater insights into the specific hopes and goals that served to motivate migrants to cross into a foreign land. The top three

goals, as cited by the migrants themselves or by their wives were: improving the house (n=8), investing in cattle (n=6), and sending children to school (n=4). These goals, if achieved, have the potential to improve the lives of the women left behind. However, as will be discussed shortly, this was not always the case.

When I asked Maribel what her and her husband's migration goal was, she said, "We wanted to improve our life—make a house because we had a small house. This is what we thought when we decided for him to go." Isabella provided a similar response when asked what she and her husband want to do with the remittance money, saying, "We want to fix the house—build a bigger one since the kids are growing." Nydia said her husband's migration goal was "supposedly to work and build a house." But she seemed rather disillusioned because, though he was gone for two years and was now back in Villanueva, he had yet to finish building the new house. It remained half-finished in their backyard. Yazmín's husband had migrated twice. The first time he was gone for 15 months. He returned for a year to build a new cement house. Then he went back to the U.S. in 2006 and was still there earning more money to invest in cattle—the second most common goal.

Roberto, an immigrant in his early twenties, had gone to Alabama with his brother to join their father who was working in a restaurant. Roberto told me, "[The goal was] to improve the family's well-being by improving the house and starting a ranch, which is a good business." They now owned 12 head of cattle, making them the second largest ranching family in Villanueva.⁸ Isabella also noted that her husband wanted to be able to buy more cattle. They currently owned five head, but wanted more. In her opinion,

⁸ The largest ranching family had 30 head of cattle.

investing in cattle was one of the things that most migrants wanted to do because, despite the lack of water in the region, cattle provided a more secure livelihood than crops. She explained:

[Those who migrate] buy their little cow and each year raise another cow. If you were to get sick, you could sell an animal. But if you don't have one, you're going to die! Sell a cow and now you can cure yourself—but this is the only hope. Because with the chili, it almost doesn't produce...[cattle] are more secure.

Just as investing in cattle was seen as an investment for the future of the family, so was the third goal of being able to send the children to school. For example, Miriam and Rolando wanted their daughter to keep studying so that the daughter could “take care of herself.” Miriam explained that their teenage daughter knew quite a bit about electronics and was studying computer science in Xpujil. One of the reasons Rolando migrated was to be able to support her studies. This was also true in the case of Reina and José. She said, “In my case, I had a daughter studying high school. She was studying in Tuxtla and needed to pay [for school], but we couldn't [afford it]... José said, ‘There's not enough money to pay for my daughter's studies.’ We didn't have any support or aid, so he decided to go [to the U.S.]”

In summary, each household had distinctive characteristics and a unique migration story, but there were some general trends that motivated residents of Villanueva to migrate to the U.S. The main push/pull factors that motivated migration were the dismal employment situation in Mexico, the hope of finding a “good job” in the U.S., the dire agricultural situation in Mexico, and the hope of achieving one's financial and material goals by migrating to the U.S. The overall goal for migratory families was to improve the financial and material situation of their household. The most common

specific goals that migrants had were improving their house, investing in cattle, and sending their children to school. These findings are consistent with Cohen's (2004) finding in Oaxaca, Mexico that most remittance money is used to cover daily expenses, construction of a new or improved home, and children's education. But whether or not migrants were actually able to accomplish their goals was a different story, to which I now turn.

CHAPTER V

HOUSEHOLDS' FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL SITUATION

The decision for the male head-of-household to migrate to the U.S. was not an easy one. It involved physical, financial, emotional, and legal risks. Migrants and their families were well aware of this, yet many believed that the benefits would be worth it. Most migrants embarked upon the risky journey across the border to, “improve the well-being of their family.” By this statement, respondents were generally referring to the ability to make investments that would improve the financial and material situation of the household. As discussed in the previous chapter, most migrants had financial and material goals they hoped to achieve with their migration to the U.S. (e.g., building a new house, buying cattle, or paying for their children’s education).

The first analysis looks at the effects of male out-migration on the women left behind in terms of changes in the households’ financial and material situation.⁹ I address this aspect of the research question by comparing and contrasting the hopes and goals discussed in the previous chapter with the actual achievements of various families. I also provide an analysis of the wives’ (and sometimes the husbands’) own perception of whether or not migration has been a successful strategy for improving the households’ financial and material situation and the impacts this has had for women. Since status is, in-part, based on the evaluation of one’s rank or position by others, I also provide the perspectives of other community members and their views on the financial changes of

⁹ I do not take a New Household Economics approach and assume that all members of the household benefit equally from financial changes related to migration. Rather, I take a New Institutional Economics approach, which views the household as a site of competition for resources and thus distinguish between financial and material changes for the household and the effect of these changes on women (Kabeer 2004).

migratory households and the status of the women left behind. I conclude with a set of factors that emerged as impacting the households' financial and material situation.

As I show below, a few migratory families were able to achieve at least some of their goals and improve their material well-being. But for many of these migratory families, the reality of earning enough money to reach their goals and improve the well-being of the family was harder than they had imagined. Respondents from four households said that they were financially "better off." On the opposite end of the spectrum, Amaranta said that her family was financially "worse off." Some women experienced financial vulnerability because they were abandoned by their husbands after his migration and others said that their husbands failed to send money for long periods of time, which contributed to the breakdown of their marriage. In half of the households, the wives' perception was that migration had not really provided much financial benefit to them or their family. To demonstrate these various outcomes, I give two examples of cases that represent each of these possible outcomes. I begin with cases in which the wife (or husband) said that the households' financial and material well-being had improved.

Yazmín, a 37-year-old mother of four, was one of the few women who felt that she and her household were better off financially due to her husband, Alfonso's, migration to the U.S. When I asked Yazmín if she felt that her family had been financial successful with the migration strategy up until now, she said, "Yes, well yes...My husband works there and every fifteen days he earns 10,000 pesos (\$1,000 USD)—you can't do that here...with him working there, I feel like I'm a little bit better off. He's working there and I have my things—I have everything I need."

Though she was rather modest about her new status, others in the community perceived that Yazmín's family had progressed, especially since they had been able to build a new cement house. Elvia, a woman from a non-migratory household viewed Yazmín as one of the only women that she knew who had really benefited materially from her husband's migration. She said:

A lot of people get enthused about going North, but from what I've seen, just the señor here [she points to her neighbor Yazmín's house]. He left and came back and built his house and then left again. [Yazmín] says he is working hard and sends good money back to her. But he is the *only* one.

Lydia, another woman from a non-migratory household, referred me to Yazmín:

Do you know Yazmín? Her husband came back and built the house. And she's good about saving the money. Her house was [bad] like mine before. Water leaks in ...but he built a new house. So I'd say she's good. But in the case of other women...Over there, there's a woman whose husband is in the North and her house remains the same, like mine. It's been awhile since her husband left.

There were only four cement houses in the community, three of which were owned by migratory households. Yazmín's house was one of those. It was one of the nicest houses in the community. It had three rooms, each with a big wooden door and a lock on it. The glass windows were nice and they opened—but they also had metal bars for safety. Outside they had a toilet—you still had to throw in a bucket of water to flush, but the bathroom floor was cement. The new cement house was built next to their old, wooden one-room house. I often found myself using Yazmín's house as a refuge at the end of a long day. I always felt welcome and there was room for me to sit and relax on one of the three love seats or in one of the two hammocks hanging in the living room. This was more comfortable than other homes, which usually had a limited number of plastic chairs.

As noted earlier, Yazmín's husband earned \$2,000 USD a month and sent home the largest monthly remittance sum (about \$1,600 USD per month). Besides building a house, Yazmín and Alfonso were able to pay a *jornalero* to plant pasture and build a fence. Yazmín said they had enough money saved to buy cattle. Her husband wanted her to go ahead and buy them, but she thought this task was too difficult for her. She preferred to wait until her husband returned and then he could buy the cattle. Yazmín felt she had been lucky for now. She said, "Many say that the husband goes [to the U.S.] and forgets about his wife and kids. But not us, not now, thank God. Everything has gone well."

Carlos and Gabriella were another example of a couple that felt they were financially better off due to the husband's migration to the U.S. Carlos had been in the U.S. for 27 months and returned to Villanueva in 2005. Although I also tried to talk with his wife Gabriella, who was in the room during our first interview, Carlos was quite dominant and the interview consisted mainly of his opinions, with an occasional reference to his wife to clarify a date or figure. Carlos told me that, "Economically, [migrating to the U.S.] helped us." He explained:

My kids were little when I left. In these two years they developed—grew up a lot. So my wife bought a lot of milk. I wanted her to buy them milk, so that was good. They got fat. It was good. My wife was very fat. It was good for everyone. Economically, it was good. They ate and drank well. Because I was earning a wage, they ate better. And we have the four or five animals and have made advances for our future, so we're not so poor. I think it's better. [Migrating to the U.S.] benefited us.... I achieved something, but not all that I wanted. But I'm happy....

The following day, I went with Carlos and his three sons to see the *parcela* he had been able to purchase and develop into a ranch with his remittance money. Carlos was

the only former *poblador* that I interviewed who had bought land with the money he earned in the U.S. He said, “The little that I earned, we invested. With the little I saved, we bought this land. Then we saved some more, and I said [to my wife], ‘Buy the wire fencing.’ That was another investment.” He planted pasture, built a corral, and purchased five cows. He mentioned several times in our discussions that everything he had was because he was able to go the U.S. and work. He was very adamant that migration had benefited his family financially.¹⁰

After seeing his *parcela* we returned to the village. Carlos, Gabriella, his three sons, and I sat in their new house listening to the radio they had purchased with his remittance money. The new house was twice the size of the old house. Although the new house was made of wood, not cement, Carlos explained that it would be very waterproof when he and his sons were finished. They were going to place more wooden boards over the openings between the present boards, so that no water would get in, even during a hurricane when the wind blows the rain sideways. Carlos also noted that they were able to buy a new stove and refrigerator with the money he earned in the U.S. His self-reported monthly remittances were second highest. He said he normally sent his wife \$600 USD every two weeks, but noted one time he was able to send her \$1,500 USD in a two-week period. On average, he sent \$1,200 USD per month.

The migratory households that were able to achieve some of their goals were the exception in the community. Both Yazmín and Carlos noted that many of their fellow community members have not had their same success. In Yazmín’s opinion, the majority

¹⁰ On a separate occasion, I was able to talk with Gabriella alone. Her comments confirmed her husband’s assessment that the household, including her, had benefited financially from his migration.

of migratory households were not financially successful. She said, “The truth is, there are a lot of people that change, but there’s a lot that don’t. Many go [to the U.S.] and don’t do anything there...The majority aren’t successful.” When I asked Carlos if he thought the majority of migratory households were financially better off or not, he said, “It’s split.”

A small number of women were on the opposite end of the spectrum and stated that they and their households were financially worse off after their husband’s migration. For example, Amaranta said that she and her family were financially “worse off” due to her husband Omar’s mishap during his first month in the U.S., which resulted in the family losing their *parcela*.¹¹ The only furnishing in the house was a ragged old hammock hung in the front room. When I stopped by one evening, the two youngest children were asleep on the hard floor. Their family had not always been this poor. Amaranta said that at one point, before her husband decided to migrate, they were doing so well with the chili crops that they were able to buy an old truck.

In Pilar’s case, when her husband Manuel was in the U.S., he only sent her about \$200 USD each month, and even this was sporadic. When Manuel returned after being in the U.S. for nine months, he left Pilar for another woman. Pilar said that she was “worse off” because now she had to do everything for herself. She had no one to help her at home or in the fields. Her current house had a leaky roof, which made life very uncomfortable during the rainy season. Her husband, a construction worker, had promised to build her a new house. But now that she had been abandoned, she had to do

¹¹ Omar got in an argument with a man who was trying to take his money and got shot in the leg. He could not work because of the injury, returned to Mexico with a \$2,500 USD debt, and had to forfeit his land that he had informally used as collateral on the loan.

it on her own. She started to build herself a new house, but didn't have enough money to buy the nails to finish putting up the walls. She was not sure what she would do when the hurricanes came this year. Also, Pilar no longer had any income from selling chilis. She and Manuel used to plant a lot of chili (five to six hectares), but since he abandoned her she could not grow any chili because it was too much work for one person.

While these were households on both ends of the spectrum, for half of the migratory households, there simply was no real change in their standard of living. In nine households, the wives believed that migration had not really provided much financial benefit to them or their household. Most of these women received \$200 to \$300 USD per month, and for some women even this amount was sporadic. They were not necessarily worse off, financially, but they were not really better off either. Rather, they experienced the same standard of living. These households may have had some new consumer goods (e.g., stove, washing machine, or new clothes), but they had not yet been able to, or had not chosen to, make the investments that others in the community classified as “doing something” (e.g., building a new house, buying land, cows, or a car).

For example, Isabella said, up until now, her family was just “breaking even” with the migration strategy. They were not really getting ahead like she had hoped. Her husband Juan sent home \$300 USD per month. When I asked her if she felt like they were reaching their goals, she replied, “A little bit.” She would like to be able to improve their house, but so far the only thing she had been able to afford was a stove—and even with this, she could not afford to refill the gas tank, so she was back to cooking over a wood stove. She and Juan were *pobladores* and did not own land. They hoped to someday have enough money to buy land and cattle, but even after working in the U.S.

for more than three years, Juan still did not have enough money to do this. She said there were times when he barely made enough to cover his living expenses in the U.S.

Juana was another example of a woman from a migratory household who felt like her and her family's financial situation was "the same." Her husband Santiago was only in the U.S. for three months and sent \$400 a month. She said they weren't able to do anything with his money—partly because he was only there for a short period of time, but also because they spent all the money on food and paying *jornaleros* to do the tasks that her husband used to do. In her opinion, despite her husband's migration, her and her family's financial situation was the same. She and Santiago were not able to make any improvements to their house or *parcela*. They were simply able to cover the daily expenses of the household.

These findings are consistent with the findings of several other case studies that have found that remittances are typically spent on immediate consumption (e.g., improved housing, food, and clothes) rather than productive investments (e.g., small businesses or agricultural technology) (Durand and Massey 1992; Durand et al. 1996; Jokisch 2002; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Rudel 2006; Taylor et al. 2006). In his ethnography of two migratory sending communities in Michoacán, Mexico, Gledhill (1995) also concluded that most remittances sufficed to cover only the basic household expenses.

Durand et al. (1996) and Cohen (2005) reached the same conclusion, noting that 76 to 92 percent of remittances were spent on consumption. However, as mentioned earlier, they feel that household level case studies undervalue the benefits of remittances at the community or national level. Cohen (2005) warns that researchers should be wary

of writing off the value of remittances because, over time the money may be invested more productively. Though the migration phenomenon was still fairly recent in Villanueva, this trend was not yet apparent. José and Ricardo were the migrants who had been gone the longest (nearly five years) and the amount of remittance money they sent was on the lowest end of the spectrum (\$200-\$300 USD per month). Carlos and Guillermo were in the U.S. for just over two years and both were able to make productive investments in land and cattle.

Cohen (2005) also cites examples of migrants who have formed hometown associations and pooled money to invest in community projects. However, this was not yet the case in Villanueva. Durand et al. (1996) make a similar argument, stating that new jobs may be created as more money is brought back and spent in the Mexican economy. There was anecdotal evidence to suggest that this may have been occurring in towns near Villanueva. One respondent noted that in a neighboring community a migrant who had done well in the U.S. now employed several local *jornaleros* on his ranch, which benefited several families in the community.

Previous studies have found that male out-migration can impact family finances in a way that improves women's status and empowerment through increased access to remittance money, increased decision-making about how to invest the money, and greater autonomy in managing the household resources (Connell 1984; Palmer 1985; Bever 2002; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (b)). As these study findings show, a few women experienced an increase in economic status because they received sufficient remittance money that allowed their family to make investments that were seen as "doing something" (e.g., building a house, improving a ranch, buying cattle, buying a car). The

women felt that these investments benefited them, as well as their husband and children. However, it was not clear that their level of empowerment and decision-making had increased. For example, as Yazmín noted, although she and her husband had the money to buy cattle, she was not comfortable negotiating with the cattle broker and picking out the cows herself. She preferred to wait until her husband returned, so he could make that investment.

Other studies found that male out-migration can have a negative impact on women's status and empowerment due to decreased household income, decreased access to resources including food, and a more vulnerable financial situation because of abandonment or divorce (Connell 1984; Chant 1997; Palmer 1985; Kiriti-Nganga 2007; Menjívar and Agadjanian 2007; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (b)). This was also true for a few women in this case study. Amaranta and her family experienced a decline in their access to resources and income. Reina, Monica, Pilar, and Maribel were now separated from their husbands. The former two still received some money from their husband, while the latter two did not receive any money. In these cases, their financial vulnerability increased due to abandonment or divorce, as discussed in detail in the following chapter.

However, for the majority of migratory households, there was no real change in the households' financial and material situation. The small amount of remittances the husbands sent was enough to cover basic household needs, so women did not experience a decline in their material well-being. But these remittances were not enough to make investments that would raise the women's economic status. Furthermore, as will be discussed shortly, some women were blamed for not knowing how to manage the money

that their husbands sent. This resulted in being labeled as “women who can’t think” by other community members.

Whether a household was able to meet their migratory goal of improving the financial well-being of the family or not (i.e., was able to “do something” as many respondents referred to it) depended on many factors. Some of these factors were structural and beyond the control of the migrant or his family. Others were personal factors, over which individuals had some degree of control or agency. The five dominant factors that emerged in the data as affecting the family’s ability to “do something” (e.g., build a house, buy land or cattle, or buy a car) included: the ability to find a “good” job, the high cost of living in the U.S., the debt migrants incurred to pay a *coyote* to take them across the border, the wives’ ability to save the money her spouse sent, and whether the migrant had “vices” or not.

Finding a “good” job in the U.S. was not easy for undocumented immigrants. For the wives back in Mexico, the first few months while the husband was searching for a job were usually the hardest. As Reina described:

When he first went, he couldn’t send money because it’s hard to find a job. They paid him very little money, at the beginning. But he started getting settled after a year. Then another six months and it was a little better. And another year, a little more. And now he’s staying there. It’s been five years and he hasn’t come back.

Isabella echoed similar sentiments, saying:

People say, “Oh, he went to the North. He’ll send money.” But it’s not like that—it takes awhile to earn enough money. There [in the U.S.] they work by the hour. So some days he only works three hours a day and that’s not enough to send money home. When his boss gives him more work, then he sends money.

Carlos pointed out that not only was it hard to find a job, but he was aware that being Hispanic put him at a disadvantage. He said, “You only earn a little...because what they pay a Hispanic there [in the U.S.] is minimal.”

Coupled with the difficulty of finding a good job was the high cost of living in the U.S. Despite the fact that the men usually shared a house or an apartment with many other immigrants to reduce their rent, it still took a good portion of their paycheck. Isabella said, “My husband has to pay rent and pay the telephone and water bills—all that you have to pay for. There’s a little left over for his food. And then to send some [home to Mexico], well, you have to wait.” Even Carlos, who was able to send back the second highest level of monthly remittances, noted that despite his best efforts, it was challenging to be able to send money back home. He said, “[I normally sent] \$600 USD every 15 days. I had too many expenses there [in the U.S.]. It’s expensive to live, even if you don’t have vices, you can only send a little to Mexico.” When Yazmín compared her family’s ability to “do something” with the majority of other migratory households who had not progressed, she said it may be because “there’s no work [in the U.S.]” or that “[the men] work but earn only enough to pay the bills and cannot prosper.”

Not only was the cost of living high once in the U.S., so too was the cost of crossing into the U.S. Many households in Villanueva incurred debt to pay a *coyote* to take the migrant across the border. *Coyotes* typically charged \$2,000 to \$2,500 USD per person to lead a group through the desert and across the border. In order to obtain this amount of money, most migrants had to borrow, or “rent” the money from someone else in the region. The informal money lenders typically charged 20 percent interest. Given the high interest rate, most migrants wanted to pay off this debt first. In many cases it

took a year of working just to pay off the debt, which made it difficult to send home enough money to make productive investments. As Carlos described:

Now, it costs 25,000 pesos or 26,000 pesos (\$2,500-\$2,600 USD) to pay the *coyote*. It's not a small amount. It's not a lot either. But when you don't have anything, it's a lot of money. And then there's the interest. This made it difficult! The person I borrowed from charged me 20 percent interest! That's a lot! But I said, "If I don't have any vices and if God helps me a little, I'll make it...." It took me almost one year of work to pay off the interest and capital...I was paying 4,000 pesos (\$400 USD) a month for pure interest. It was hard to save any money...After working one year, and paying my debt, I could feel good about being in the U.S. and working. I got uplifted because I was making money and I didn't spend much. No vices, little on food.

Amaranta and her family lost their land because her husband was unable to pay back the money he had borrowed to pay the *coyote*. She said, "We had to rent \$2,500 [USD]...he was just starting to work and was going to send money to plant things. He was just paying off his debt, but then he got shot [and had to return to Mexico]...that's why we lost our land. Now we're left without a *parcela*."

Yazmín attributed her family's "success" partially to the fact that her husband was able to save up money in the bank to pay for the *coyote* instead of borrowing the money. She said:

When he went [to the U.S.], he already had money saved from his work and his harvest. He put his money in the bank [to finance his migration to the U.S.]. So when he decided to go, he didn't have to worry about borrowing money. He went with his own money. That's how he's been able to do something and get ahead there. On the contrary, many don't do anything there....If they don't pay their debt quickly, it just keeps growing and growing and growing.

Saving money in the bank was not, however, a common practice in Villanueva. When a household was unable to save any money in the bank, many respondents blamed this on the wives' "inability to think" (e.g., "She doesn't think. If she would think, she would be able to do something with the money."). For example, Lydia, from a non-

migratory household, referred to the case of Carmen whose family had not seen any real improvements since her husband migrated over 40 months ago. She blamed Carmen for not being able to save the money. Lydia said that her husband was friends with Carmen's husband who said she was not saving money he sent. "She doesn't know how to think...there are some that know how to think and they live better," Lydia said.

This was contrasted with Yazmín's case. Lydia noted that Yazmín "saves good."

Yazmín herself felt that she shouldn't "waste" the money he sent. She said:

I know [my husband] is working for both of us and for our kids. I have to buy my things—clothes for the kids and shoes. But at the same time, I know I shouldn't spend it all. I should save some of what he sends so that, well, he went to do something. And if, while he's gone, I waste money and do things I shouldn't do, well, I don't think I should do that.

Carlos described his brother's migratory experience. He blamed his sister-in-law's poor money management skills for their family's inability to "do something." He contrasts this with his wife who saved the money he sent. He said:

In [the case of my brother], his manner of living and the communication with his wife is not good. They aren't in agreement. The husband is earning money. The money comes and she just wastes it. Her administration of the money is no good....I know two cases where the wife wanted him to send money, send money—but [in both cases] the wives' administration [of the money] wasn't good. I felt confident sending [my wife] money—\$1,000 USD or \$600 USD and she'd save it. But [in my brother's case] there wasn't this confidence. He knew that if he sent this money, his wife would spend it all...there wasn't confidence. She spent the money...[This caused] a lot of problems over the phone.

But the wives' difficulties in saving and managing money may have been more than just the individual's "poor choices." First, saving money and money management is a learned trait (e.g., Dominguez and Robin 1992; Castañeda and Castellanos 1999). It may be more complicated than just "thinking" or "not thinking," but learning how to think and knowing what options exist. For example, in Villanueva, going into town for

provisions was traditionally a male task. During the husband's absence, the women had to travel to Xpujil, pick up the remittance money at the Western Union location, do the shopping, and pay back his debt. These were all new tasks that women had to learn to do. As Amaranta said, "I'm not used to having to think, but now that I'm in charge I have to think about how to get everything and how to feed the kids." Sofía made a similar comment, saying that initially she didn't know how to shop in bulk, but she was getting used to it.

Second, the infrastructure in the region does not facilitate bank savings very well. This is true in much of rural Mexico. A World Bank study by Hernández-Coss (n.d.) notes that Mexico has the "lowest banking penetration in the region" with less than 20 million Mexicans having bank accounts (p. 36). He sees "an urgent need to extend these services into rural areas" (pp. 37-38). In Villanueva, the nearest financial institutions were 40 minutes away in Xpujil and there was no full-service bank. There were three Western Union businesses. From 2004 to 2008, there was a *Sistema Cooperera*, or cooperative system, which was mainly a lending institution. This allowed residents to open a savings account, so that they could later borrow up to twice that amount. Fairly recently, a branch of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) opened up in Xpujil, but had limited services.

Sofía and Yazmín were the only two respondents who mentioned using any type of banking service. Sofía said that her husband wanted her to save half of the money he sent back, so she went to the bank to open a savings account after he migrated. She said that the bank staff had to teach her how to make a deposit and show her which papers she needed to fill out. Yazmín mentioned that her husband had started a banking account

before he left. She also used this account while he was gone. In contrast, Carlos said that he and his wife did not open a bank account. He said, “It wasn’t easy to have my money saved [in the U.S.]. It was better to send it to my wife. She helped a lot in this.” But he noted, “Here in this region, there’s no bank. There’s no people with money, except a very few people. The number of people that have money to put in the bank – is maybe one percent—almost nothing.... I never had a savings account. Neither did my wife.”

Carlos was referring to a real situation in the community and an additional reason that money wasn’t being saved. As shown, most households had no money to put in the bank—even if their husbands had migrated, they were “just breaking even.” The majority of the women received only \$200 to \$300 USD per month, which was just enough to cover the basic household expenditures. Furthermore, migratory households faced additional expenditures in the absence of the male head-of-household. In most migratory households, the production of maize decreased and women’s reliance on more expensive store-bought food increased. To complete the agricultural tasks that were carried out, many women relied on hired labor to replace their husbands’ labor—an additional expense that impeded saving in many cases. As Juana said, “We weren’t able to do much with his money because we spent it all on food and day laborers.” Flor noted, “[Women with husbands in the U.S.] buy everything—they buy maize, beans, and don’t go out in the field.” Sofía said that when her husband was in the U.S., they had an “abundance” of food—more than they had when he was in Mexico because she used the money he sent to buy food at the store in Xpujil. As mentioned earlier, Carlos wanted his family to eat better while he was in the U.S., so he told his wife to buy milk—something that they didn’t normally have the money to consume.

These findings address issues raised by Mahler and Pessar's (2006) debate about what types of investments should be classified as "productive." They ask if it is "appropriate" for food, shelter, clothing, and education to be characterized as "unproductive" (p. 45). In Villanueva, improving their home and funding their children's education were two of the goals that many migrants had. Residents of Villanueva considered money spent on these items as a good investment (or "doing something" in their own words). Just because the women were not investing in small businesses or cattle does not mean that they were not making "productive" investments. Additionally, it is important to consider what might have happened to households' financial and material situation if the husbands had not migrated. It is possible that in some cases, without migration, the family's economic status may have declined rather than stayed the same.

The final factor that emerged as an impact on the household's ability to improve the financial well-being of the family, including the wife, was whether or not the men had any "vices." These "vices" included drinking, going out on the town, and women or infidelity. Of all the factors that affected migrants' financial situation, this factor was the most dominant in interviews. Respondents pointed to men's vices (or lack of vices) most frequently as the cause of financial problems (or success) for migratory families.

Lack of vices helped the families who considered themselves to be financially better off. The two men who were able to remit the most amount of money back to their wives did not drink. Yazmín said her husband gave up drinking a few years ago. Carlos claimed he had no "vices." He stated, "I decided to go and I didn't drink or have any

vices—that's how those who succeed are.” He compared this to other immigrants he knows:

There are two people I know who went to the U.S. because they were very poor. But their form of living didn't help them. There are some [men] with vices—they drink and smoke and they don't do anything. On the contrary, they leave their wife and kids alone for a few years, and because of how they live, they are in the U.S. instead of in Mexico, and their life is the same. They don't achieve anything.... For those that drink, smoke, go out dancing, and waste their money, they don't save anything.

The women who received the least amount of remittance money tended to say that their husband “likes to drink” and, in some cases, that he “likes women.” As Carmen described, “According to [my husband], [the reason he migrated] was for our betterment—for the house, but up until now...nothing with the house has improved.” She attributed this to, “He likes to have fun—drink and women.” Nydia also attributed their lack of getting ahead to her husband's drinking problem. When I asked her if they were going to finish building the new house, she said, “I would like to, but he drinks a lot.”

Amaranta mentioned that a couple of families had done really well because the husband migrated to the U.S., but that's because “they don't drink.” “They don't drink,” she repeated, “That's why they've done well.” She didn't disclose that her husband had a drinking problem, but others in the community told me that they were not surprised that he got into a fight and got hurt because he had a drinking problem and was often causing problems in Villanueva.

Edgar had two sons and one son-in-law in the U.S. and was therefore in a unique position to judge why one son was more successful than another. He said, “If they don't

have vices, they make something, like a ranch. But that one [referring to one of his sons that migrated and wasn't able to do anything with his money] liked to drink. He likes his beer." Edgar's wife, Blanca, was also sitting on the porch during the interview. She chimed in, "Many do well because they send their wives the money and they buy their little things. But others drink and don't buy things. I say don't go and waste it. If you're going to go, go and work, so you can support your family. But some go and don't do anything."

These findings on the factors that impacted the household's ability to make productive investments help to answer Durand et al.'s (1996) call for researchers to ask *why* some migrants make productive investment and others do not. These findings are consistent with Durand et al.'s (1996) findings in that the amount of money remitted is affected by both structural and individual factors. These findings also show how migratory households were perceived by other community members in terms of being a financially "successful" or "unsuccessful" migratory household. Financially "unsuccessful" households not only suffered a decline in their economic status, but they were also given negative labels by other community members. These labels were used to explain the financial failures of some migratory households (e.g., "she can't think, and that's why their family has not been able to do anything" or "he drinks too much").

Conclusion

This case study shows that the financial impacts of male out-migration on the women left behind are mixed. Some women, particularly those who received a steady and high level of remittance money (e.g., \$1,000 to \$1,600 USD per month) had clearly

improved their financial and material situation. These women benefitted from improved housing, productive investments in pasture and cattle, and big-ticket consumer goods (e.g., car, washing machine, stove). They were also able to buy more nutritious food at the store that they could not afford before their husbands' migration. Other women experienced a decline in their financial and material situation. Amaranta's husband lost his land because he was unable to pay off the debt he incurred to facilitate his migration. This resulted in a decline in the family's and Amaranta's economic status. Besides losing the land, the family had no furniture in their house and Amaranta was now physically overburdened with all of the agricultural and domestic chores.

The majority of women survived on minimal and sporadic remittances of about \$200 to \$300 USD per month. Though they may not have been financially worse off, they were not able to make the productive investments that "successful" families were able to make. Other women were separated from their husbands because he was sending little or no remittances or were completely abandoned by their husbands after his migration. These women experienced a decline in their economic status because they received little to no financial contribution from their ex-husbands. Marital instability (primarily infidelity and abandonment) also caused social problems in the community. It is this theme of infidelity and abandonment to which I now turn.

CHAPTER VI
ISSUES OF INFIDELITY AND WOMEN'S
VULNERABILITY TO ABANDONMENT

I now address a second area of women's lives that was impacted by male out-migration: issues of infidelity and women's increased vulnerability to abandonment. I examine the degree to which international male out-migration was perceived as a factor that contributed to infidelity and abandonment (as opposed to other factors) and describe how abandonment, or the fear of abandonment, affected many of the women from migratory households. I also examine how suspicions regarding women's moral behavior in the absence of their husbands resulted in an increased "policing" of the behavior of the women left behind by other community members. I conclude with a discussion of how these issues of infidelity and abandonment impact the status and empowerment of the women left behind.

Infidelity and Abandonment

In four of the 18 migratory households, the marriage had fallen apart due to infidelity and abandonment. Among other migratory households, the fear that this could also happen to them was pervasive. I explore the degree to which these break-ups were attributed to migration versus other factors. As discussed in the literature review, *machismo* is an important cultural phenomenon in much of Latin America that emphasizes male dominance and virility and is thus associated with the sexual infidelity of men (Gledhill 1995; Chant 1997; Chant and Craske 2003; Taylor et al. 2006; Menjívar

and Agadjanian 2007). Regardless of whether migration is occurring or not, it is common for men to have a second family (Gledhill 1995; Chant 1997). Given this pre-existing cultural phenomenon, it was necessary to also examine instances of infidelity among non-migratory households. This allowed me to compare and assess the impact of migration versus other factors, such as *machismo*, on marital stability and understand if, or how, migration had brought on some of these family problems. I turn first to the cases in which migration was perceived to have directly contributed to marital instability, followed by a case where migration was perceived to play a secondary role, and a case where it was perceived as playing no role at all.

In the cases of Reina and Monica, their separations from their husbands were perceived to be a result of their husbands' migration to the U.S. and the fact that they were not sending the family money or communicating with the family. The women assumed they had been abandoned and began to look for a new partner. Both husbands heard about their wives' actions from fellow community members and the couples argued over the phone and eventually broke up.

As Reina told me, "I never had problems with [my husband, José]. We always got along. We loved each other a lot. But, then he left [for the U.S.] and everything fell apart. As we sat chatting outside her house, Reina in a hammock, and me in a chair, she described what happened:

There was a time when he didn't send money [for almost a year]. Who knows what was going on with him! I thought someone had killed him there. I didn't have any communication with him.... [Then José called and] said, "You have another man!".... After all this, we broke up on the telephone. Later he called...and asked for forgiveness because he hadn't sent any money. I said, "Don't worry, my kids aren't starving to death. Since you haven't been sending

not even a peso, we haven't starved to death. We don't need anything from you. If we did, you abandoned us, now we don't need anything." He said, "Oh, but I want to send money." I said, "Fine go ahead send money. They're your kids. You have the right to send them money—but it's a little late to think of that."

Monica's case was very similar. Her husband was not sending money for a period of time. She became worried that now that he had migrated, he had decided to abandon her. In response to this situation, she found a new partner to help provide for her household and help her with the agricultural tasks. When Ricardo, her husband, heard from other community members that she was cheating on him, there were problems. They argued on the phone and were now separated. Despite being separated, Ricardo still sent about \$300 USD a month for the children. But their marriage was over and she did not know if, or when, her former husband planned to return.

José and Ricardo were the two men in community who had been gone the longest. José was the first person to migrate from Villanueva and had been in the U.S. for 60 months. Ricardo had been there for 56 months. The men I interviewed tended to emphasize the length of stay as the reason for infidelity. Santiago mentioned that migration can break up the family and he knew that this was a possibility when he decided to migrate. He said, "One goes [to the U.S.] knowing that one might come back and that one might not come back...the family can change here, too." But, he said, in his case, it worked out for him and his wife. However he noted, "I was only there for seven months. Some [men] stay for two or five years. That's harder."

Carlos noted that because it was so hard to get across the border without a visa, once a migrant made it safely into the U.S., he was unlikely to come back and visit the family in Mexico for several years. He explained:

This [lack of visa and the difficulty in getting back to visit the family] is a very big cause of why many families are falling apart —the wife, the kids—the family falls apart. Here in Mexico this is happening a lot. It's rare that a couple has the heart to say, "Go and help me"—and they can stand to be alone for two or three years.

But duration of migration did not appear to be the sole determinant of marital breakdown. In the cases of Pilar and Maribel, their husbands were only gone for nine months and 23 months, respectively, and both also ended up being abandoned by their husbands. In Pilar's case, the cause of her separation from her husband, Manuel, was a complicated combination of migration, *machismo*, and the fact that other women in the community were abandoned by their husbands in the North. She blamed migration, but in a different way. She first and foremost blamed the women who had an affair with Manuel, but noted that these women were having affairs because their husbands had migrated to the U.S. Before he migrated, Manuel had been a construction worker and frequently traveled to other communities. Pilar knew Manuel had always been a "womanizer," but it got worse while he was in the U.S. She said:

Unfortunately, my neighbors did a bad thing. She [Monica] was with my husband for a little while and then my husband left me for another woman. So I'm left alone... Sometimes [that's] what the husbands do – even the women do, like the women who screwed me over – they are the reason that I'm widowed. I lost my husband for their fault. They have their husbands in the North. But they like to have affairs with one and another man.

Her voice trailed off and she sat on her bucket and looked off to the side, staring at the ground for quite a while. It seemed her eyes were swelling a bit with tears, but she never cried. Then she continued, "I think I'm the only one that suffers this tragedy. Like I said, because of those '*ingratas*,' those thankless women," she said, referring to the two neighbors.

In the case of Maribel, she did not blame her abandonment on the fact that her husband migrated to the U.S. Maribel was a young mother of three. Though her husband, Leonardo, sent the family money while he was in the U.S. (\$400 USD per month), when he returned, Maribel said he “had changed.” “He was drinking more. He went out with women. And then this happened,” she said, referring to how Leonardo left her for another woman in the community. I asked her if she thought things would be different if he had not gone to the U.S. She said, “I don’t think so. Whether he’s here or whether he’s there, it would be the same. It’s just the way men are here.”

As Maribel’s case suggests, it would be misleading to say that infidelity and abandonment were completely new phenomena that were solely results of male out-migration. As discussed above, there is a long-standing cultural norm of *machismo* in Latin America that is associated with male infidelity, which can lead to abandonment. In conversations with four women whose husbands had not migrated to the U.S., yet still abandoned them for another woman, it was clear that “womanizing” was a problem whether the husband was in Villanueva, Cancún, or the U.S. In one case, the wife was abandoned for another woman in the same community. In another case, the husband left his wife for her cousin. Olivia, whose non-migratory husband left her for another woman, noted, “It’s part of the culture for men to have a second woman. In this country, we don’t have fixed or steady husbands. When another [woman] comes along, he takes off with her. [She laughs]...But one suffers a lot.” The finding that some Latin American women feel like their husbands will cheat on them regardless of where he is or whether he migrates was also found by Menjívar and Agadjanian (2007). A Guatemalan woman in their study echoed one of Villanueva’s women by stating, “As men, that’s what

they do [be unfaithful] whether they are right here in town, in Guate[mala City], in the United States or in China. It doesn't matter where they are" (p. 1253).

But *machismo* did not explain how or why women committed infidelity when their husbands were in the U.S. Instead, it was necessary to look at the relationship between remittances and women's propensity to commit infidelity. Many community members (from both migratory and non-migratory households) saw a clear link between male out-migration, small and sporadic remittances, female infidelity, and abandonment. For example, Yazmín's husband sent her large remittances on a regular basis and therefore she had confidence that things would be "fine" between her and her husband. But she knew that others have had problems. She explained the difference between her situation and that of other women saying, "I think if he keeps sending money, one feels a little better. But if he doesn't send money, then, whew... There are some [women] whose husbands don't send them money, so they get with another man."

Isabella said she had friends whose marriages fell apart after their husbands migrated due to a lack of money. She said, "There are women who go for three or four weeks without [the husband] sending any money. I have some girl friends and [their husbands] don't send money—it all falls apart." She said that in her case, she tried to understand that her husband had bills and rent to pay and perhaps that was why he didn't send money sometimes. "If [my husband] doesn't send me money, I just wait," she said. "But there are some women who don't understand that [he has bills and rent to pay] and they say, 'Oh he's not sending me money' and they look for someone else."

Hernando, a 22-year-old single male with no real desire to go to the U.S., described what happened in Villanueva when husbands did not send enough remittance money. He said:

When the wife sees that her husband isn't sending money or is just sending from time to time, she feels [desperate] and she looks [to see] where she can get money in order to survive—to be able to have food in her house. She looks to have a husband in her house. She looks so that her kids don't live with so much pain [of hunger] in their stomachs. She's responsible for the household, so she looks [for a way] that her family [can] live happily with a full stomach— breakfast, lunch, and dinner...[the women] do it because their husbands abandon them.

That infidelity was committed on behalf of the women who felt like they had been abandoned is not uncommon or unique to this community. Both Gledhill (1995) and Chant (1991) found that when the husband fails to send money, the wife quickly looks for a new partner. As Elson (1992) suggests, this is because of the gross gender inequalities that leave women dependent upon men in order to access and mobilize resources. Menjívar and Agadjanian (2007) conclude, “The issues of unfaithfulness... [expose] the unequal position of women, exacerbated by distance, geography, and social context” (p. 1253). In Villanueva being a woman was a subordinate social position and the larger structures that constrain women's equality and ability to compete for and mobilize resources have not changed. In cases where a woman replaced one patriarchal authority figure with another, there was no indication that their empowerment had increased.

As noted above, in some cases, assumed abandonment led the women to look for a new partner. But such actions (or perceived actions) were simultaneously the cause of abandonment. As Menjívar and Agadjanian (2007) found, “A woman suspected of infidelity could easily be abandoned” (p. 1253). This was true in Villanueva as well. Some women were afraid to leave their house and socialize with friends and neighbors

for fear that their actions might raise suspicions about their moral propriety and give their husbands' a valid excuse to abandon them. Many women from migratory households told me that their husbands didn't like them to "leave the house" because it would "cause problems." It was clear that in several cases there was an increased level of "policing" of the actions of the women left behind. Several women noted that gossip often circulated back to their husbands in the U.S. via other community members. This limited women's freedom within the community and their ability to interact with friends and neighbors and participate in community events. As migratory men's mobility increased, women's mobility decreased in absolute (not just relative) terms.

Even women in non-migratory households had their actions policed by other community members. I had a personal experience with this. One day, during a visit with Reina, she started teasing me. She said she had heard from another woman that I was in town drinking a beer with a male employee of the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve. This was actually not true. My guess was that it was perhaps one of the young, blonde Belgian girls who was volunteering with an NGO in Xpujil. But the comment made me aware of how quickly rumors travel even from Xpujil to Villanueva. For the women whose husbands were in the U.S. the "policing" and "gossiping" of women's actions was even more intense. For example, Sofía's husband, Miguel, went as far as to pay another male day laborer to do his family's community chores (e.g., help clean the schoolhouse yard or pick up trash along the road) so that Sofía would not have to go where she could potentially encounter "problems." Sofía explained that her husband didn't like her to be there and he wanted to make it easier for her because "people talk here."

Yazmín mentioned several times that her husband doesn't like her to talk with other people, including her in-laws, for fear of creating "problems." One day after looking at the new pasture in Yazmín's *parcela*, we went back to her house and each of us lay in the hammocks that hung in the living room. She seemed eager to have me stay. She mentioned how nice our conversation was. She went on, reminiscing about her home state of Veracruz, where there was more water and fruit and flowers on all the trees. She told me how she had married her husband when she was 12 years old, against her father's wishes. As we lay there trying to escape the heat, she said, "*Aye, me aburre aquí*—I'm so bored here. All I do is sit in the house with my children. I don't have anyone to talk to."

I asked her why she did not go out and talk to her neighbors. She said her husband "wouldn't like it." I asked if this included even talking with other women. She said, "No, he doesn't like that." I asked if she could talk with her in-laws. She said, "No not them either." I asked who would tell her husband if she were out talking to people. She said the other women would call and tell him. "What about the men?" I asked. She said, "No the men don't say much— it's the women who talk."

Isabella had mentioned that sometimes when the husband didn't send money, the wife started to look for a new partner. I asked her if she thought these women really were with another man, or if people in the community were just talking. She said, "I don't know if people are just talking. I don't know. I haven't seen it...[But] it's true that people here are very gossipy. If you're talking with some guy, they will talk about you and say, 'Oh, I saw a guy go into so and so's house.'"

Such sentiments are mirrored in other research. Menjívar and Agadjanian (2007) found, “A compelling reason for limiting interactions with nonrelatives...was the women’s fear of gossip, which could reach their husbands and lead to serious problems, including union dissolution” (p. 1259). Chant (1997) and Gledhill (1995) note that women may lose some freedom for fear that interacting socially may cast doubts on their “moral propriety.” Gledhill (1995) notes the conundrum that women in patriarchal societies face:

...Staying in the community can be oppressive...where female sexuality is rigorously policed by the community and its gossip networks, stay-at home women whose husbands are absent for extended periods of time can find themselves in a peculiarly unenviable situation, fearful to participate in any kind of social activity of a public nature, like a dance or *fiesta*, lest a malicious voice accuse them of flirting, or worse, when they encounter potential sexual partners. Even venturing out in the company of other women in a similar situation is not entirely free of risk. (P. 159)

Additionally, women’s increased vulnerability to abandonment affected their financial situation. Hernando described the precarious financial position that some of the women have found themselves in:

Some [men] go to the U.S. They send their wives money and in the first few days the wife feels very happy and proud that her husband is a provider. When the husband sends money they live [happily] with their kids and buy the shoes and clothes that they need. And if [the family] does agriculture, [the husband] sends money to pay for someone to do the work and they get ahead. But later, after a while, the husband—for I don’t know what reason—they stop sending money... Because they have, how would I say, new adventures with their new female companions...they forget about their wife here and they forget about their kids.

His comments highlight the fluidity of women’s status and their economic dependence on their emigrant husbands. Furthermore, as shown, women’s status as a good wife can easily be ruined by community gossip (justified or not) that circulates back to her husband. To avoid any kind of situation which could cause their husbands to be

suspicious of their behavior and abandon them, many women (and their husbands) thought it was better for them to stay at home and not interact with the community. This limited women's freedom and autonomy.

Conclusion

What I found in Villanueva is consistent with findings in previous studies which have shown that male out-migration results in increased stress on marital relationships, increased infidelity on the part of both women and men, and greater vulnerability to abandonment for the women left behind (Elson 1992; Gledhill 1995; Chant 1997; Chant and Craske 2003; Taylor et al. 2006; Menjívar and Agadjanian 2007). However, the findings also suggest, as noted by other scholars, that migration is not the only factor contributing to marital instability. *Machismo* and the cultural norm of having a second lover, or even second family, also played a role (Gledhill 1995, Chant 1997; Chant and Craske 2003).

The fear of abandonment based on suspicions of infidelity, as well as the "policing" of women's behavior greatly limited the mobility and empowerment of the women left behind. Community members found new ways to police and control women, thereby nullifying the emancipatory effects that men's out-migration might have had. Additionally, women's economic status deteriorated if she was abandoned because, without a male, her ability to access resources decreased. In order to maintain their families, abandoned women looked for a new partner, which clearly was not a sign of empowerment or "emancipation from male power" as noted by Elson (1992:41).

Infidelity and abandonment then were two consequences of male out-migration. Changes in the gendered division of labor were another, to which I now turn.

CHAPTER VII

GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOR

I asked Amaranta if I could accompany her as she did her daily tasks. She agreed, but said that I would have to meet her at five o'clock in the morning because that's when she would be finished cooking breakfast and lunch and would head out to the field with her oldest son to weed their fields of maize. Before her husband's migration, she did not go out into the fields very often—she mainly stayed home and took care of their children. But now all of these responsibilities fell on her. “Who else is going to go?” she asked.

The final analysis looks at the effects of male out-migration on the women left behind in terms of changes in the gendered division of labor. Arizpe and Botey (1987) suggest that there is a “rigid” gendered division of labor in rural Mexico, with men being the primary agriculturalists and women being agricultural “helpers” whose main responsibilities are the reproductive tasks of childcare, cooking, and cleaning. However the literature on the feminization of agriculture suggests that male out-migration leaves many women as *de facto* farm managers with increased responsibilities for overseeing and maintaining subsistence agricultural production and picking up many of the agricultural tasks traditionally defined as “men's work” (Pessar and Mahler 2003; Deere 2005). Furthermore, researchers have suggested that male out-migration presents opportunities for women to take on new tasks and learn new skills, which can transform gender relations and improve women's status and empowerment (Connell 1984; Chant and Craske 2003; Mahler and Pessar 2006).

Using the feminization of agriculture¹² as a theoretical framework, I wanted to assess how the gendered division of labor had changed in Villanueva since men began migrating and what impacts this had on the women left behind. To explore this question, I first provide study findings on the traditional gendered division of labor in Villanueva. I then discuss ways in which women's agricultural roles did and did not change. I then turn to ways in which women's roles have changed outside of agricultural production. I conclude with a discussion of the effects of these changes on the women left behind.

Traditional Gendered Division of Labor

To determine if or how agricultural gender roles had changed, it was first necessary to determine what the traditional gender roles were in Villanueva before the phenomenon of male out-migration began in 2002. I assessed agricultural involvement in two ways. First, during the focus group interview, I asked the group of women to list traditional "women's activities." I also asked them to list the major steps involved in the agricultural process of growing maize and tell me who was involved in each step. These lists were used to generate a survey asking about various agricultural, household, and community tasks—the second method I used for collecting data on traditional gender roles (Appendix B). For 14 of the 18 migratory households, I asked women about a range of tasks and asked who did each task before and after the husbands' migration. For this analysis, I focus on the nine households for which I have the most complete data.

¹² For the purpose of this analysis, the feminization of agriculture refers to women's increased participation in the agricultural sector including increased supervisory roles, decision-making responsibility, and participation in field labor tasks.

In all households, results from the survey showed that before the husbands migrated, men were involved in all of the major agricultural tasks including: deciding what to plant, clearing and burning the field, seeding, weeding, harvesting, bagging, and transporting the crops. Eight of the nine men were involved in storing the crop and seven attended the monthly *asamblea* (community meeting). Women described their role in agriculture before their husbands migrated as “helpers.” Three women helped their husband with clearing, seeding, weeding, folding, and storing the maize. Two women said they helped with the harvesting and bagging of the maize. One woman helped burn the field and one helped transport the crop. Additionally, one woman attended the *asamblea* meeting because the land-use right was in her name. All nine of the women were responsible for taking care of the domestic animals (e.g., chickens and pigs).

This traditional gendered division of agricultural labor was also indicated qualitatively in the semi-structured and informal interviews with community members. Carlos talked about all the work he and his three teenage sons have done in the field since he returned from the U.S. two years ago. “We’re four males,” he said. “We cleaned this *parcela* [felled the trees and cleared the brush and weeds], fed the cattle and built a corral.” When I asked Carlos if his wife ever worked in the fields he said, “No. [My wife] works here in the house for us making tortillas and *pozole*, raising chickens and pigs...There are four men in the house. Her work is to take care of us.”

I asked Isabella to describe what a typical day was like before her husband migrated. She said, “I got up early—about 5:30 in the morning. I started the fire and made *pozole* so that he could take it [to the field]...prepared special food that he liked to take to the field. And then I started my chores...[like] washing dishes, sweeping,

mopping the floor, washing clothes. Then he would come back [about 2:30 p.m.]. I had to grind maize and make tortillas and make food.” I asked her if she ever went to the agricultural fields. She said, “Yes! At harvest time to harvest the chilis.”

Mimi was an elderly grandmother who had a son in the U.S. When I asked her to describe her daily chores, she said, “Everyday we get up at four in the morning to study [the bible]. After studying, then I make tortillas, grind corn, sweep, do dishes... everything in the kitchen...I chop the weeds [in my home garden], I wash, clean my patio...and I take care of the grandkids...I make breakfast, lunch and dinner...I butcher the chickens.”

Amaranta also rose early to make her husband food to take to the field. She said she woke up at 4:30 a.m. to make “tortillas, breakfast and food for him to take to the field.” She said, “When he was going to work for others [as a *jornalero*], I would stay in the house. If he was working in our field, well sometimes I would go, but not all the time...I had a lot of animals to take care of—the pigs and chickens.”

In summary, before the migration phenomenon began, men were primarily in charge of the agricultural tasks, while women “accompanied” their husbands to the field. Miriam, Isabella, and Ana all mentioned that they went with their husband, “just to keep him company.” But all women said that their primary roles and responsibilities were those of reproductive labor (childcare, cooking, and cleaning). The traditional gendered division of labor in Villanueva, before male out-migration occurred, is consistent with previous studies on the gendered division of labor in rural areas in Latin American and Mexico (Deere 1982, 1990; Arizpe and Botey 1987; Sachs 1996; McGee and González 1999; Bolland et al. 2006). However, with the onset of male out-migration, this

traditional division of labor in agriculture had changed somewhat. The main shifts that have occurred include: women's increased attendance at the *asamblea* meeting and women's contracting and supervision of *jornaleros*.¹³

Attending the *Asamblea* Meeting

One of the new tasks that many women from migratory households had taken on was the responsibility for attending the monthly *asamblea* meeting where important community and agricultural issues were discussed and voted upon. The *asamblea* was the governing body of the *ejido*, or farming community, and established the rules of the *ejido*. All *ejiditarios* (male *ejido* members with land use rights) and *ejiditarias* (female *ejido* members with land use rights) were required to attend this meeting. In Villanueva, if the named *ejiditario* or *ejiditaria* was unable to attend (e.g., because he or she was in the U.S.), then he or she had to send a representative to the meeting. Failure to do so could result in the loss of one's *ejidal* rights. However, a representative did not have the right to vote or express his or her opinion.

Before the husbands' migration, only one woman surveyed attended the meeting. In their husbands' absence, seven of the nine women attended the meeting. Sofía thought going to the meetings was "fun" because she got to see how it worked. As discussed in the previous chapter, Sofía's husband, Miguel, did not like her to go out and socialize because he was afraid there would be "problems." Miguel went as far as to pay a *jornalero* to complete his family's community chores so that Sofía did not have to interact in these community events. However, because they did not have a son who could

¹³ There is also some indication that women also had greater agricultural decision-making responsibilities. However, I did not have sufficient data to assert this as a third way in which women's agricultural roles were changing.

attend the *asamblea* in Miguel's place, Sofía was required to complete this task. It is possible that she thought attending the meeting was “fun” because it allowed her to socialize with community members in a legitimate setting.

I attended one *asamblea* meeting and was surprised to see that nearly half of the attendees were female (23 men and 21 women). Not all were there as “representatives” of their emigrant husband. Some may have had their name on the title and others may have been simply accompanying their non-migratory husbands. The five official heads of the *asamblea* who sat in the front of the room and directed the meeting were all male. The seating arrangement was clearly segregated by gender. The women all sat in the center of the room, while the men either sat up against one side of the wall or milled around outside the door sticking their head in when an issue caught their attention. Only nine of the 21 men were inside the building and participated in the discussion. Of the 23 women, four spoke rather frequently. Two of these women had land-use rights and were official voting members of the *asamblea*. The other two were “representatives” for their husbands and were not technically allowed to give their opinion during the *asamblea* meeting.

Given that there was a greater female presence in these *asamblea* meetings since men started migrating to the U.S., I asked several women and men if they felt that the topics that were being discussed were changing due to the presence of more women. Most respondents just looked at me rather confusedly and said that the topics that they discussed were the same. As Carlos put it, “Whether the man is here or not, the issues are the same—the roads, the lights, the cleaning of the communal areas—the issues are the same, as far as I can tell.” If community priorities were changing as a result of male

out-migration and women's increased participation in the *asamblea*, this was neither apparent in the meeting nor in the community members' perceptions of meeting agendas.

Contracting and Supervising *Jornaleros*

The second way in which women's agricultural roles had changed was that women had an increased responsibility to contract and supervise *jornaleros*. Before the husbands' migration, some households relied on a *jornalero* to help with one or two labor intensive tasks. But it was always the husbands' job to find and supervise the *jornalero*. Now, in the absence of the men, this responsibility fell to the women, representing a sharp change in gender relations and presenting a unique set of challenges for the women.

Several women noted that, because many men were already in the U.S. or were busy with their own fields, it was hard to find a *jornalero*. Reina felt that it was hard to find someone who was willing to work:

Sometimes people already have all their work. Above all, the men have their families here—they have their work—and they don't always have time to help you. They say they would help, but they already have their obligation to do their own work. So, as a woman, sometimes I feel desperate because sometimes people don't want to do this work. Well, it's not that they don't want to, it's that they can't—they already have other obligations. If I had my husband, he would oversee these things. *Him*. It wouldn't be my responsibility. I would go [to the field] too, but it wouldn't be *my* responsibility. I would just be one more person to help work. But, well, you have to deal with it. The truth is, it isn't easy.

Juana made a similar observation, "There's almost no one here who works [as a *jornalero*]. They're all in the North. If they are here, they are working on their own parcel. They don't have time." Although Isabella's father-in-law oversaw most of the contracting of *jornaleros*, she had to do this from time to time. She also felt that this task

was difficult. “I have to find them and ask them to do this or that and ask how much they will charge me...I’m not accustomed to that.”

Women were also now in charge of supervising the *jornaleros*. In all cases, before the husbands’ migration, the responsibility of supervising always fell to the men. Now this was some of the women’s job. There were two tasks in particular for which women’s supervision of *jornaleros* increased most after their husbands’ migration: plowing of the field and transportation of the harvest. Three women now oversaw the plowing and five women now oversaw the transportation. Beyond the tasks of plowing and transportation, four of the nine women said that they used *jornaleros* to complete the majority of the other agricultural tasks such as felling trees, planting, weeding, folding maize, harvesting, and bagging the crops. Juana, Sofía, Ana, and Yazmín frequently hired day laborers to carry out most agricultural tasks, rather than doing the tasks themselves (Table 4.1).

Some respondents noted that, as a woman, it was uncomfortable and unusual to have to supervise a male. This sense of “discomfort” can be understood as a sign that women were being pushed out of their comfort zone and that traditional gender relations were being challenged. Although the use of *jornaleros* to carry out agricultural tasks does require a shift in gender roles and gender relations (i.e., women become supervisors of male workers), it can also be thought of as a more subtle role change that individuals adopt to keep other roles from changing (e.g., women’s increased participation in field labor).

As mentioned above, Juana, Sofía, Ana, and Yazmín hired day laborers to carry out the majority of the agricultural tasks in the field, rather than doing the tasks

themselves. Yazmín's response was typical of this group of women. When I asked Yazmín if she felt like she had to work harder in the field now that her husband was gone, she said, "Well, on one hand it was more work when he was here because I had to help him in the field and get up early and get food for my kids and go to the field. But not now. With the money he sends me, I can pay someone to do the work, and it's different." These women were, not surprisingly, the women who received the most remittance money (\$400, \$600, \$1,000, and \$1,600 USD per month, respectively). Of these four women, Juana received the least amount of remittance money (\$400 USD), nearly all of which was spent on *jornaleros*. She noted that her family was not able to "do anything" with the money because they spent it all on food and *jornaleros*. In contrast, the women at the opposite end of the remittance spectrum relied very little on hired labor. Isabella (\$300 USD) used a *jornalero* to help only with the transportation process. Monica (\$300 USD) hired someone to help with burning the field. Amaranta (\$220 USD) relied on someone to help with seeding and transportation (Table 4.1).

During the time I spent with women in Villanueva, regardless of their income level, working in the field did not appear to be a dominant part of these women's workloads in contrast to previous research findings (Connell 1984; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). Except for two women (Pilar and Amaranta), those at the lower end of the remittance spectrum who were unable to pay for day laborers to complete the tasks of their emigrant husbands were able to find an alternative strategy that allowed for the maintenance of traditional gender roles. For example, Isabella relied on her father-in-law to carry out the field labor tasks. She said she did not go out to the field very often or do much agricultural work. She said her daily chores were basically the same now as they

were when her husband was in Mexico. Monica and Reina found new partners to help them with the agricultural chores. In Maribel's case, they were *pobladores* (landless community members), so even though she was abandoned and had not remarried, she had no land to attend to. (She did mention that she tried to find a job in Xpujil and was considering migrating to the U.S. herself.)

The reliance on hired labor helps to explain why women were only taking on farm manager roles and were not taking on additional field labor tasks, at least in the households that were receiving sufficient remittance money. Except for Pilar and Amaranta, women receiving less remittance money came up with alternative strategies (e.g., relying on the help of a father-in-law or remarrying). However, something else was occurring that was impacting the rates of women's agricultural participation in field labor tasks. This was clarified by looking at levels of agricultural production for migratory households.

Decreased Production of Maize and Chili

As discussed previously, one possible outcome of male out-migration is decreased agricultural production, or even abandonment of agriculture, due to the lack of male labor supply. Five households indicated that because the husband was in the U.S., they only planted maize. (Previously they had also planted chili). For example, Miriam said now she and her daughters only planted maize, which does not require as much work as chilis. Isabella and Yazmín also said they only had maize planted this year.

As seen in Figure 7.1, since the onset of male out-migration in 2002, the average production of maize and chili decreased among migratory households in Villanueva.

Using data from Radel's 2007 survey, I calculated the average production of maize, chili, and pasture over the past 12 years for all migratory households. From 2003 to 2007, average maize production dropped from four hectares to just over two hectares per household (minimum of 2.13 hectares, maximum of 3.93 hectares). Average chili production dropped from nearly two hectares to under 0.5 hectares per household (minimum of .33 hectares, maximum of 1.78 hectares).

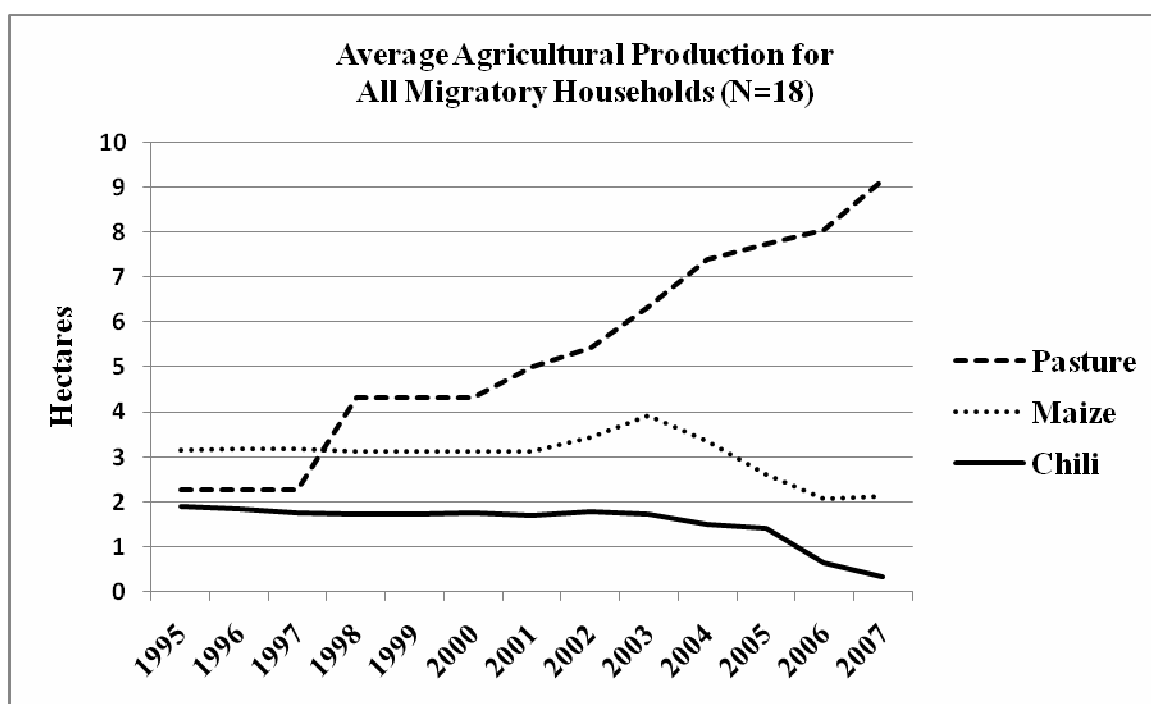


Figure 7.1 Average Agricultural Production for All Migratory Households

I also looked at the production of each crop for individual migratory households and found that regardless of the amount of remittance money they received, all households (except one) had decreased their production of maize and chili. For example, Yazmín received \$1,600 USD per month and hired day laborers to help with six of the 11

agricultural tasks related to maize production. Her family's maize production was sporadic, but it sharply decreased with her husband's migration in 2004 from five hectares to zero hectares. It had since steadily increased to three hectares. (Her husband returned for a year in 2005, which may have helped to bring production levels back up.) Chili production remained constant at 1.5 hectares until 2006 when they completely abandoned chili production.

Amaranta's case represented the opposite end of the financial spectrum. Her husband migrated in 2004 and returned to Mexico a few months later. He then moved to Cancún in search of wage labor, leaving Amaranta in charge of the agricultural work back in Villanueva. He sent the equivalent of \$220 USD from Cancún. She relied on hired labor for seeding and transportation of the crops. Their maize production went from three hectares in 2003 down to one hectare in 2006. (Since they lost their land in 2004, production after this date occurred on land borrowed from their in-laws.) They consistently produced two hectares of chili before her husband migrated. After they lost their land, this dropped to zero hectares.

In summary, in all migratory households, regardless of the remittance income level, production of maize and chili declined after the husbands' migration (the one exception was Sofía's case, where chili production remained the same). These findings are consistent with studies which have found that male out-migration can result in decreased production of agricultural crops (Connell 1984; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Bever 2002; Rudel 2006; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (a)). Such changes in agricultural production can impact women's well-being in at least two ways. First, if production of subsistence crops decreases, the family could experience malnutrition as

found by Connell (1984). However, because the women in Villanueva received remittances, they were able to rely on store-bought goods to meet their needs. As Sofía said, “We bought everything—maize and beans.” Both Sofía and Gabriella said their families ate better when their husbands were in the U.S. Even in households where remittances were as low as \$200 or \$300 USD per month, this appears to have been sufficient to maintain the basic food needs of families left behind. For example, Luisa only received \$200 USD a month, but she said this was enough to buy groceries for her and her seven year-old son. She pointed out that it was a lot more than the 200 pesos (\$20 USD) he used to earn as a *jornalero*.

A second way in which changes in agricultural production can affect the women left behind is by increasing their workload. Connell (1984) found that some women were being worked to the point of exhaustion because they had taken on heavy agricultural tasks. In Villanueva, women who received sufficient remittances paid *jornaleros* to complete the majority of the agricultural tasks. Except for Pilar and Amaranta, even those households that received low levels of remittances were not taking on additional field labor tasks as suggested by the literature on the feminization of agriculture (FAO 1999; Katz 2003; Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006). This was in part due to alternative strategies that allowed them to maintain traditional gender roles (e.g., relying on a father-in-law or remarrying). It was also due to decreased production of maize and chili in all migratory households and an increased reliance on store-bought food. With the increased reliance on store-bought food, there was less agricultural labor required and most women were not required to take on additional field labor tasks.

Although production of maize and chili decreased from 2003 to 2007, the production of pasture increased during the same period from an average of 6.5 hectares to over nine hectares (minimum of 5.44 hectares, maximum of 9.15 hectares) for most migratory households. However, this did not result in a significant increase in women's agricultural field labor because planting pasture was a less labor intensive activity and in many cases it was carried out by *jornaleros*. Although increased pasture production did not affect women's workload, it did impact their family's status. As noted in chapter four, for many migrants, one of the main goals of migration was to finance a shift to cattle production, which required an accompanying investment in pasture production. Given that cattle ranching was thought to be more lucrative and more secure, "ranching" families had a higher status than either "chili" farmers or "subsistence" farmers.

Amaranta and Pilar were exceptions to the conclusion that women left behind in Villanueva had not taken on additional field labor tasks. As noted earlier, before her husband's migration, Amaranta stayed home and took care of the children, cooked, and cleaned. Since her husband's failed attempt at migrating to the U.S., she was now involved in nearly all aspects of agricultural production. She regularly went to the field with her oldest son, while the next oldest son stayed home and cared for his younger siblings.

Pilar was already very involved in agricultural production before her husband migrated. In Mexico, he was a construction worker, and he often worked outside of the community. Pilar was left in charge of the agricultural tasks. However, before he migrated to the U.S., he decided what to plant and helped Pilar with all of the agricultural tasks. Now that he had abandoned her, Pilar had no one to help her in the field. She said

she hired day laborers when she could afford to, or traded her labor with others, but mainly she worked in the field by herself.

Both Amaranta and Pilar now had what Hochschild (1989) refers to as a “second shift,” because they were both the primary agriculturalists, but also maintained full responsibility for all domestic chores. As Pilar said:

I don't do anything else but work. I go to my field...When it's time to harvest the *milpa*, I harvest the maize, put it all together, and lift it up on the horse and tie it up for the horse to carry. I [can't] say, “Hey, you do it.” Who am I going to ask? I do it myself...[Then] I come back, make my food, and rest a bit. Then I weed the *solar* and fix the fence...

In sum, although Amaranta and Pilar were the only women in Villanueva who experienced such dramatic changes in their field labor responsibilities, most women experienced the feminization of agriculture, at least to some degree, through their increased farm management responsibilities of attending the monthly *asamblea* meeting and contracting and supervising *jornaleros*. In addition, women from all migratory households experienced changes in the gendered division of labor in two other areas: childcare and shopping. Women did not experience much change in the traditionally “female tasks” of cleaning and cooking.

Most women felt that their childcare responsibilities had become more difficult since their husbands' migration. Several women, including Yazmín, Reina, and Isabella, noted that they felt like the “mama and papa.” When Reina and her ex-husband were breaking up over the phone, she told him how hard it was trying to take care of the children alone. She said, “The responsibility is on just one person...You're not here. You don't know what it's like to be responsible to be the mother and father at the same time.” Yazmín mentioned that she did not feel “competent” with her kids. She was

worried about her children because they needed their father to give them advice. She said it was hard being the “mother and the father” at the same time.

Yazmín’s father-in-law, Edgar, also noted that she was the “mother and father” now. He felt that women like Yazmín were responsible for a lot more now, saying, “Women are in charge of more ‘business’—buying clothes, going to the doctor and such—which the men used to do.” He didn’t think that migration had caused women to increase their workload in the fields because they have money to pay someone else to do the work—but he did note that they have expanded gender roles. “They’re the mother and father,” he said. In reference to Yazmín, he said:

She’s the papa and mama because she manages everything. She takes care of the food, clothes, shoes, medicine. She does everything. If she needs money from the bank, she has to go. If the kids need clothes and shoes, she has to go out and get it. If one of the kids gets sick, she has to go out—day or night—she has to go out and take care of the kids. This is the ‘business’ and all of the responsibility falls on her.

Isabella also mentioned feeling like the “mother and father.” She said it was hard because “you have to do to everything.”

These changes in childcare responsibilities were also evident from data in the survey I conducted. From a list of domestic chores, I asked who was responsible for completing each of the chores before their husbands’ migration and who was responsible for those chores when he was in the U.S. In all cases, the domestic chores of feeding the animals, cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and washing dishes have always been the responsibility of the women. However, when it came to certain aspects of childcare, many men did help out in important ways before their migration. For example, in all households surveyed, the fathers had either been primarily responsible for taking the

children to the hospital or emergency room when they were sick, or had at least helped out during medical emergencies. In seven cases, fathers also helped their children with their homework.

The second area in which the gendered division of labor changed was shopping. Throughout much of Mexico, shopping and provisioning for the family was typically a “male task.” In 12 of the households, shopping was a new task that the women had taken on since their husbands’ migration. As the literature suggests, being in charge of the shopping can increase one’s access to and control of resources—a key element of empowerment (Kabeer 1999; Yunus 1999; Quisumbing 2003; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (b)). If the women are in charge of the shopping, they can determine what they need and get it. Additionally, it provides them with a legitimate opportunity to get out the house and socialize.

Indeed, 11 of the 14 women stated they enjoyed this new task of shopping because it allowed them to “get out” and because they could get what they needed. But they also noted that it was another chore to worry about. For example, Isabella said she liked to do the shopping because she could go and bring back everything they need: “I know what I’m going to get and I go and get it.” But she also noted, “I have to buy everything we need. I’m the mother *and* the father because I have to do all the shopping.” Nydia, Carmen, and Monica also agreed that they can “get what they want,” and Monica and Maribel were glad for the opportunity to get out. As Maribel said, “You can leave the house and not be bored at home.” Juana and Gabriella agreed that it was “fun.” Pilar agreed with others that it was “fun” and provided an opportunity to “get out,” but also noted that “it’s more work than fun.”

In contrast, Yazmín and Luisa stated that they did not like shopping because they had to go out, which they did not like to do. Yazmín said she really did not like having to do the shopping in Xpujil. Before, her husband did the shopping and sometimes she would accompany him. But normally, if she needed something, she could just tell him. But now she had to do the shopping and she did not like it. She said, “It’s a little hard because I’m not accustomed to doing it. I’m used to when he is here, he goes out and brings everything to the house. I feel obligated to go out because he’s not here.” For Luisa, this new chore was the hardest thing about having her husband gone. Now she had to go to Xpujil to do the shopping – a task which she never had to do before. She said that her husband didn’t like her to talk to anyone, so she was not used to going out and talking. I asked her if she enjoyed the new opportunities that shopping had given her to go out and talk. She said, “No, I don’t like it.”

Although Quisumbing (2003) suggests that being in charge of shopping can increase one’s access to and control over resources, most women did not feel such a change. As Sofía said, when her husband was in Mexico, they both decided what to buy when he went shopping. She said it was no different when he was in the U.S. and she did the shopping on her own. Similarly, Luisa said that when her husband was in Mexico, it was easy to ask him for the things she needed. Yazmín actually mentioned that she felt a *loss* of access to resources. She thought it was harder to get what she needed because she didn’t like to go out and do the shopping.

Despite the apparent lack of change in women’s access to and control over resources, the new task of shopping still played an important role (or at least potential role) for the empowerment of women. As noted above, most of the women thought

shopping in Xpujil was “fun” and provided them with a legitimate excuse to get out of the house. This was one way to increase women’s mobility, which, as discussed in chapter six, had otherwise been limited by the “policing” of women’s behavior. Furthermore, as with women’s new role as supervisors, becoming the primary shopper pushed women out of their comfort zone and forced them to gain new skills. As mentioned in chapter five, Amaranta felt that she had to learn how to “think” now that she was in charge of everything, including feeding the children. Sofía said that she learned how to shop in bulk. Although the women may not have been comfortable or confident with these new roles, they represent important changes in gender roles and gender relations. Over time, it is possible that gender ideologies—ideas about what women can and should do—will also change.

Conclusion

In this study, I found that before men migrated, they were the primary agriculturalist in charge of all aspects of the agricultural process. Women were agricultural “helpers” who assisted in the seeding, weeding, and harvesting and took care of the small livestock (e.g., chickens and pigs). Women’s main responsibilities were the reproductive tasks of childcare, cooking, and cleaning. These findings fit with previous studies on the gendered division of agricultural labor in Latin America (Arizpe and Botey 1987; Deere 1990; McGee and González 1999; Bolland et al. 2006).

Women’s agricultural roles changed in two ways: increased responsibility to attend the monthly *asamblea* meeting and increased responsibility to contract and supervise *jornaleros*. These findings fit with the literature on the feminization of

agriculture which suggests that, when men migrate, women become the *de facto* farm managers (FAO 1999; Katz 2003; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006). However, most women in Villanueva were not taking on the agricultural field labor tasks of their emigrant husbands. I found three explanations for this. First, in some households, particularly those that received adequate levels of remittances, the women hired another man to complete the agricultural tasks. This is consistent with findings by Radel and Schmook (forthcoming (a)) who found that women in a nearby *ejido* also hired day laborers to assist with agricultural tasks when their husbands were in the U.S. Second, some of the women who received less remittance money had alternative strategies for maintaining traditional agricultural gender roles (e.g., the help of a father-in-law or remarrying). Third, production of maize and chili decreased in most of the migratory households. To meet their basic food needs families were relying more on store-bought goods, including maize and beans, so there was less agricultural labor required. These findings are consistent with studies which have found that male out-migration can result in decreased agricultural production or agricultural abandonment (Connell 1984; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Bever 2002; Rudel 2006; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (a)). But the findings on women's field labor participation are not consistent with parts of the literature on the feminization of agriculture which suggest that when men migrate, women take on the field labor tasks of their emigrant husbands (FAO 1999; Katz 2003; Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006).

Women's new roles as participants in the *asamblea* meeting, supervisors, sole childcare providers, and primary shoppers have implications for women's status and empowerment. First, given that there were now more women attending the *asamblea* as

“representatives” for their emigrant husbands, there was an opportunity for women to have a greater voice in community decisions. At the very least, women had an increased physical presence at the forum where important agricultural and community decisions were made. Increasing women’s voice could be aided if women’s names were on the title to the land-use right so that they could attend as official voting members, rather than as representatives. Deere and León (2001) found that joint titling has led to increased female ownership of land as well as more equitable control over communal land. Alternatively, the *asamblea* (governing body) of Villanueva could choose to give representatives a formal voice by allowing them to vote during their husband’s absence.

Second, as supervisors and shoppers, women were now sharing in “formerly male responsibilities,” a process which Deere and León (2001:25) suggest can lead to women’s empowerment. Although women were “uncomfortable” with their new roles, it was clear that gender roles and gender relations were shifting. Perhaps, over time, changes in gender ideologies will follow suit.

Finally, my findings are inconsistent with parts of the literature on the feminization of agriculture which suggest that women take on the field labor tasks of their emigrant husbands (FAO 1999; Katz 2003; Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006). There are at least three explanations for why my findings regarding women’s field labor participation differ. First, Villanueva was in the very early stages of the male out-migration phenomenon. The first male to migrate left in 2002 and it was not until 2004 that the majority of men had left. It is possible that over time more women may be forced to take on additional field labor tasks. This could happen because, as noted, women already found it difficult to contract *jornaleros*, as a shortage of male labor was

emerging. If the trend continues and more men leave the community, it could become even harder. Additionally, some of the women who weren't receiving enough remittance money were able to find a new male partner to help with the agricultural tasks. But again, as time passes and more men migrate, the remaining men may no longer be available and more women may have to take on the field labor tasks themselves.

Second, as noted above, women were able to use remittances to buy more food. In other studies this may not have been possible if men did not send enough money or if there were no markets nearby where women could buy food. Alternatively, in Villanueva purchasing food, as opposed to growing one's own, may be viewed as a superior lifestyle choice, and this may not be true in other socio-cultural contexts.

A third reason that my findings may differ is that chili farming was an important agricultural practice in Villanueva prior to men's migration. Chili production was much more labor intensive than subsistence production and required heavy application of chemical fertilizers. There was a strong sense that applying fertilizers was a "man's job" and was "dangerous," which may have further deterred women in Villanueva from becoming involved in agricultural production. Many women said growing chili was too hard to do in the absence of their husbands, so they abandoned this practice all together. Perhaps in other regions, barriers to women's participation in the agricultural field in the absence of men were not perceived to be as great.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The overall purpose of this thesis was to examine how male out-migration had affected the women left behind in Villanueva in three areas: the households' financial and material situation, issues of infidelity and women's vulnerability to abandonment, and the gendered division of labor. Beginning with financial outcomes, I found that for most migratory households it was difficult to earn enough money to meet their financial goals. Although a few women received sufficient and stable remittances and improved their economic status, the majority of women were either financially worse off or the same as they were before their husbands migrated. These households were unable to make investments that community members considered "doing something." Instead the small (\$200 to \$300 USD per month), and sometimes sporadic, remittances they received were just enough to cover the daily household expenses. However, it is important to note that it was unclear what would have happened in some of these cases if the husbands had not migrated. It is possible some households' financial situation may have declined rather than stayed the same.

These findings are consistent with previous research which has found that most remittances are spent on immediate consumption rather than productive investments (Durand and Massey 1992; Jokisch 2002; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Rudel 2006; Taylor et al. 2006). However, Durand and Massey (1992), Durand et al. (1996), and Conway and Cohen (1998) argue that individual and household level case studies undervalue the positive impact of remittances particularly at the community and national level. Conway

and Cohen (1998) suggest that remittances may be invested in large public works projects, such as sewer systems, which benefit the community at larger. While this may be true in some places, in Villanueva there had not been any investments in public infrastructure as a result of migration to the U.S. However, there could be other means by which migration was financially benefiting the region that were not captured by this case study; this is an important issue for future research.

Will this lack of “success” from migration affect other residents’ decision to migrate? Kandel and Massey (2002) suggest that in many communities with high rates of male out-migration, a “culture of migration” develops. If migrants are successful, others in the community wish to emulate them. However, their study does not address what happens in communities where the overriding sentiment is that migration has not been a successful strategy for getting ahead for the majority of families. It may be possible that negative perceptions of migration could stave off the mass exodus from the countryside that was predicted to occur after NAFTA (Levy and van Wijnbergen in Young 1995). It is important to note that I conducted interviews with primarily female respondents who were also concerned that their husband’s migration could lead to infidelity and abandonment. Given this fear, women may have been more reluctant to espouse the virtues and benefits of migration. I have anecdotal evidence from interviews with men in Villanueva that suggests that these men still view migration as a good strategy for improving the financial well-being of the family.

With regard to issues of infidelity and women’s vulnerability to abandonment, this study found that male out-migration increased the propensity of men and women to commit (or the assumption that their spouse was committing) infidelity. This led to

marital instability and abandonment in some cases, and to an increased “policing” of women’s behavior. Both of these outcomes had a negative impact on the women left behind.

The findings on the gendered division of labor show that women’s agricultural roles changed in two ways: increased responsibility to attend the monthly *asamblea* meeting and increased responsibility to contract and supervise *jornaleros*. These findings are consistent with parts of the literature on the feminization of agriculture which suggest that male out-migration leaves many women as *de facto* farm managers (FAO 1999; Katz 2003; Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006). However, in Villanueva, most women were not taking on additional agricultural field labor tasks. This finding is inconsistent with previous research on the feminization of agriculture which suggests that male out-migration leads to the women’s increased participation in agricultural field labor (FAO 1999; Katz 2003; Deere 2005; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006). Given these contradictory findings, it may be useful for future research on the feminization of agriculture to clearly define what is meant by this term and differentiate between managerial tasks (e.g., supervising day laborers and making agricultural decisions) and field labor tasks.

Women’s roles also changed in two non-agricultural areas: childcare and shopping. These new roles (including *asamblea* participation and supervising *jornaleros*) presented important challenges and opportunities for the women left behind. Women’s “discomfort” with these roles suggests that gender roles and gender relations were changing. Women were pushed out of their comfort zone and required to take on new tasks and learn new skills. Although immediate improvements in women’s

empowerment were not apparent, it is possible that, over time, these changes may influence gender ideologies and influence perceptions of what women can and should do.

The study findings have implications for both academic literature and policy. In terms of the literature, these findings address gaps in the research on gender and migration. First, by focusing on the women who are left behind, it addresses an imbalance in previous studies which have focused on the men and women who migrate (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Pedraza 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Posel 2001; Salazar 2001; Gamburd 2002; McKay 2005). In addition, the existing studies on the women left behind are inconclusive in terms of the impact on women's status and empowerment (Connell 1984; Pessar and Mahler 2003, Mahler and Pessar 2006; Menjívar and Agadjanian 2007; Radel and Schmook forthcoming (b)). The qualitative nature of this study adds context to help understand why these outcomes are so variable. Finally, by complementing a larger, quantitative survey on migration in the region, this study addresses a call for social scientists to exchange work with other researchers working at different scales of analysis (Chant 1991; Fitzgerald 2006; Mahler and Pessar 2006).

In addition to addressing gaps in the literature, there are also three policy implications that emerged from this research. First, for the majority of households studied, there was a lack of productive savings and investment of remittance money in the community. This was in part due to the fact that the men were not sending much money. As Durand et al. (1996) suggest, migrants may have a greater incentive to remit more money if they view their community as an attractive place for investments. They recommend focusing on policies that "yield a stable and propitious investment climate and [making] expenditures on the infrastructure of specific communities which make

investment an attractive, profitable proposition” (p. 261). One way to do this is through the government’s “Peso x Peso” program. A report on migration and remittance money in southeast Mexico by Gestión del Desarrollo S.C. (2005) suggests that this program, which provides matching funds for every peso invested by an immigrant in his or her community, could help provide additional development in the region. An additional factor that may have affected families’ ability to save and make productive investments was the lack of infrastructure to facilitate bank savings. There may be opportunities for government programs or NGOs to provide financial services and training to help women and families save and make productive investments (see Hernández-Coss n.d.).

A second policy implication is the migrants’ legal status in the U.S. Being an undocumented worker not only made it harder to find a good paying, stable job, but it also made it difficult, expensive, and unsafe for migrants to cross back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico. The solution to this problem is of course very complicated. Rodrik (1997) suggests that it is unfair for free trade agreements to open up the borders to the free flow of goods and financing, but not allow for the movement of labor. In his opinion, temporary worker visas would help balance these asymmetries in the market. A more humane migration policy that allows for the legal establishment of migrant workers in the U.S. would not only decrease the physical risks migrants encounter crossing the border, but it would also eliminate the cost of the *coyote*, and likely reduce marital instability and family breakdown in Mexico. A legal pathway to enter, leave, and return to the U.S. would encourage migrants to return home to Mexico for Christmas, birthdays, and other special occasions and help transnational families remain united.

The third policy implication is also related to issues of family unity. As noted, women committed infidelity as a survival strategy because, in a patriarchal society, women are dependent upon males for their material well-being. There are limited job opportunities for women in the region and women are expected to work, without pay, in the home. Valuing women's reproductive roles, as well as providing job opportunities with equal pay and equal status that do not result in women taking on a "second shift" is an issue that must be addressed in the developing, as well as the developed world. The Mexican government's *Oportunidades* program may be a step in the right direction.

The *Oportunidades* program gives money directly to the female head-of-household based on the number of children she has in school (grades 3 through 11) (Bailey et al. 2007). Several women I interviewed commented that their *Oportunidades* money had done more to increase their freedom and financial decision-making than their husband's remittances had. However, there is the concern that a program such as *Oportunidades*, which requires women's active labor participation in exchange for benefits, may put an additional burden on the already stressed women (Skoufias and McClafferty 2001).

Although this study helps to fill gaps in the literature and offers some policy implications, it also has limitations. First, this study could be improved by spending more time in the field. I was in Villanueva for only five weeks. Although I was there during prime agriculture season, I was not there for a full agricultural cycle. I relied on the women's descriptions of their work throughout the year, but it is possible that my observations would have been different during a different time of year. Furthermore, spending more time in the community and more time with each woman would add

greater detail and insight into this phenomenon. For example, greater time in the field would have allowed me to better distinguish between women's self-reported labor participation and observed labor patterns.

Second, because I was only in the field for a short period of time, I had to limit the majority of my observations to the women left behind. The study could be expanded by providing viewpoints from more men (from both migratory and non-migratory households) in the community. This would help illuminate if there are gender differences in perceptions of how successful the migration strategy has been at improving families' well-being. It would also help to suggest if a "culture of migration" (Kandel and Massey 2002) is developing among the men in this community.

Third, the results from Villanueva may be affected by the fact that this community was still in the early stages of the migration phenomenon. It is possible that the findings may change over time. For example, material conditions may improve for more women if the men return home with savings in their pockets, build new houses, and make investments that benefit entire households. On the other hand, it is possible that women's vulnerability to abandonment may increase over time if the husbands forget about their families in Mexico. Finally, over time, women may be required to take on more of the agricultural field labor tasks.

These findings and limitations suggest a need for future research in this area. First, there is a need to study this community and region over time (Radel and Schmook forthcoming (a)). Since male out-migration in this region was a fairly recent phenomenon, it provides a unique opportunity to see how the outcomes of migration change over time. As noted above, it would be interesting to see if the perception of

migration as an “unsuccessful” livelihood strategy curbs the rate of migration. Also, it would be interesting to compare the men’s perceptions of the outcomes of migration to the women’s perceptions.

Finally, as suggested by Durand et al. (1996) and Cohen (2005), it is also necessary to study the impacts of migration at the community and regional level. Are there any hometown associations in the region? Have there been any investments in infrastructure using remittance money? Has the *Peso x Peso* program been initiated in the region, and if so what have been the outcomes? If money is not being invested at the community or regional level, it would be important to understand why migrants are not willing or able to make such investments in this particular region.

This study provides a baseline for future studies outlined above. The strengths of the study are that it captures aspects of the effects of male out-migration on the women left behind when migration was in its early stages. The inductive nature of the study provides an exploration of issues that were important to respondents. The qualitative nature of the study provides context to help explain the various outcomes of migration for different households. Finally, by focusing on the women left behind, it addresses an area of gender and migration research that has not received enough attention.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

¡Gracias!

Gracias otra vez por su participación en la investigación de la profesora Claudia Radel. Ella está muy agradecida por su ayuda.

La investigación es para entender mejor el impacto de la migración a los EEUU en su ejido, mayormente en las decisiones del campo y en las relaciones entre hombres y mujeres—cómo está cambiando la posición de la mujer en la familia y en la comunidad. Estamos hablando mas profundamente con 10 a 15 hogares con un miembro migratorio.

Si Usted quiere comunicarse con la profesora, se puede mandar correo electrónico a:

claudia.radel@usu.edu

o se puede mandar carta a:

Claudia Radel
Department of Environment and Society
5215 Old Main Hill
Utah State University
Logan, UT 84322-5215

Además durante la investigación del campo en Calakmul (hasta la fecha de 24 agosto 2007), se puede comunicarse con Jaime McEvoy _____

También, se puede mandar correo electrónico a Jaime McEvoy:

jamiemcevoy@cc.usu.edu



Si tiene alguna preocupación acerca de la investigación o los procedimientos usados, puede comunicarse con True Rubal-Fox por correo electrónico a: true.rubal@usu.edu. O se puede mandar una carta a: True Rubal-Fox, Utah State University, IRB, 9530 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-9350. Ella es la Administradora del Comité Institucional de Repaso en la Utah State University y es bilingüe.

APPENDIX B

Numero: _____

¿Esposo Migratorio? Si o No

¿Regresado? Si o No

¿Manda \$? Si o No ¿Cuánto? _____

¿Quién(es) hace/hacia? ¿Esposa, Esposo, Jornalero, Nino(s), Papas/Familia, Otra?

Pasos	Esposo Ausente	Esposo Presente	¿Cuántos Jornaleros?
Selecciona Siembre			
Chopeo			
Guardar Raya			
Quema/Agua			
Destronque/Mecanizado			
Sembrar			
Limpiar			
Doblar Maíz			
Cosechar			
Costales			
Transporte			
Almacenar			

1. ¿Quiénes son los jornaleros? ¿De dónde vienen?

2. ¿Es difícil encontrar jornaleros? ¿Cómo lo haces?

Numero: _____

Actividades	Esposo Ausente	Esposo Presente
Alimentar Animales		
Prender Fogón		
Preparar Comida		
Limpiar Casa		
Lavar Ropa		
Lavar Trastes		
Ir al Campo		
Hacer Compras ¿Le gusta o no? ¿Porque?		
Buscar Lena		
Picar Lena		
Buscar Agua		
Colectar Agua Aljibe		
Fajinas Casa de Salud, Escuela, Calles, Otras		
Reparar Casa		
Cercar Solar		
Chopear Solar		
Hablar por Teléfono ¿Tiene celular?		
Urgencia Hospital		
Rediente Tanque de gas ¿Tiene tanque de gas? ¿Usa gas o fogón?		
Ayuda los hijos con tareas		
Asistir en Reuniones Asamblea General Juntas con Maestros		
Ir a Telecom (cobrar dinero)		
Contratar Jornaleros		
Supervisar Jornaleros		
Contrataciones (pj. madera)		
Cuidar niños		