

Farming *Ejido* in Calakmul, Mexico

CLAUDIA RADEL

Utah State University

BIRGIT SCHMOOK

El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, Mexico

ABSTRACT

As one of Mexico's last agricultural frontiers, southern Mexico's rural farming municipality of Calakmul has long been marked by rural in-migration. In the last few years this process has given place to an explosive growth of primarily male labor out-migration, particularly to the United States. The authors trace the outlines of the migration process from the perspective of one rural Calakmul community, to explore effects of men's transnational migration on the household and community status of the women remaining behind. Analysis is based on quantitative data collected in 2004 from 25 households, and on in-depth qualitative interviews in 2005 with women whose husbands engage in transnational migration. The authors find preliminary evidence for changes in gender roles and responsibilities, as these adjust to accommodate men's absences. The evidence for women's increased participation in household decision-making is much less clear. This, combined with the words of the women, suggests that gender ideology is defended even as gender responsibilities flex. Women's spatial mobility also appears to improve, but this must be weighed against greater gains in migrating men's mobility, as well as some women's unhappiness with the lack of livelihood improvements.

Keywords: transnational migration, gender relations, Mexico, division of labor

RESUMEN

Una de las últimas fronteras agrícolas mexicanas, Calakmul, un municipio del estado de Campeche, estuvo expuesto por décadas a una fuerte inmigración. En los últimos años, este fenómeno fue reemplazado por la emigración creciente de varones a los Estados Unidos. Los autores describen las características de este proceso desde la perspectiva de una comunidad específica de la región. Analizan los efectos de la emigración transnacional sobre las unidades domésticas y sobre el estatus de las mujeres en la comunidad. Para este fin, en el 2004 encuestaron veintiséis

unidades domésticas y en el 2005 entrevistaron a varias mujeres cuyos maridos habían emigrado. Los resultados preliminares indican una modificación en los papeles y responsabilidades de género, aunque la evidencia para una mayor participación de las mujeres en las decisiones familiares es menos clara, lo que combinado con las opiniones de las mujeres sobre el tema sugiere que existe una tendencia a mantener la “ideología” de géneros en esta situación de cambio. Con las nuevas tareas, las mujeres parecen obtener un aumento en su movilidad espacial, si bien esto se contrapone a la movilidad aún mayor de los hombres migratorios y la frustración de algunas de ellas por la falta de mejoras en su nivel de vida.

Palabras claves: migración internacional, relaciones de género, México, división de trabajo

Introduction

THE FARMING REGION surrounding Mexico's Calakmul Biosphere Reserve, in the southern Yucatan Peninsula, is experiencing steady growth in out-migration since the start of the 21st century. This region has long been characterized by rural in-migration as one of Mexico's last agricultural frontiers, but in recent years there has been an explosion of both temporary and potentially permanent out-migration of primarily male labor, particularly to the United States. The processes of migration emerging in the Calakmul municipality are similar to those well established and with a much longer history elsewhere in the country (Durand and Massey 1992; Conway and Cohen 1998; Cohen 2004). Migration is emerging in the last half decade as one component of an increasingly diversified bundle of household livelihood strategies in this particular rural region of southern Mexico, in part as an outcome of the increasing difficulty of making a living from small-scale agricultural activities during the current ascendancy of the neoliberal project in Mexico (Gravel 2007). The recentness of the emergence of these migration processes provides an opportunity to follow the effects of migration on various aspects of social and agricultural change from an early stage.

The goal of our work is to contribute to the understanding of the multiple connections between migration processes and one important aspect of social change—changes in gender relations. Specifically, we address the question of the effect of men's migration to the United States from one rural southern Mexican *ejido*¹ on the household and community status of the women who remain behind. Do gendered divisions of labor and decision-making change with men's migration, and if so, how? This research question is situated within the context of our broader research on the effects of migra-

tion on rural “sending” communities—effects on social relations, land use, and agricultural change within the community (Radel and Schmook 2008; Schmook and Radel 2008).

Migration can be understood as a gendered process. Numerous scholars have engaged in case-study research on migration as a gendered process since the emergence of transnational migration as a significant phenomenon in rural regions of the developing world in the latter part of the 20th century (e.g., Chant 1992a; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Pessar and Mahler 2003). Much of the research on migration as a gendered process has addressed the experiences of women as migrants (e.g., Radcliffe 1993) and/or the gendered effects of the translocation of entire households. Our research seeks to understand the effects of (male) migration on women and on gender relations, including on the gendered division of agricultural labor and household decision-making, when households are stretched over space (with husbands migrating to the United States). The existing literature on the question of men’s solitary migration contains somewhat contradictory or mixed evidence for the gendered effects on the women remaining behind. This literature can be understood best through a conceptual typology, with three basic categories of outcome for women’s status—improvement, maintenance, and deterioration.

A number of studies have found that men’s migration results in the improvement of the gender status of women remaining behind (e.g., Chant 1992b; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Improvements stem from four areas of potential change: first, women remaining behind may receive remittances, and their status in the community improves along with the accompanying basic improvements in their material wellbeing. Second, women remaining behind often develop greater autonomy or participation in household or family decision-making. This increased participation or autonomy in decision-making is a practical outcome of men’s absences. With their husbands away, women simply find it necessary to make certain decisions on their own—including decisions around the daily use of any remittances received. Third, women may experience an improvement in their status due to changes in gender roles, not only in terms of decision-making but also in terms of labor. With their husbands away, women often assume traditionally male labor tasks, and this can loosen previous rigidity of the gendered division of labor that contributes to women’s inequality. Finally, women may experience an increase in personal freedom or bodily autonomy, with their husbands too far away to monitor their activities and whereabouts.

A second category of literature found that men's migration has resulted in no real improvement in women's status (e.g., Mahler 2001; Bever 2002). Women experienced increased autonomy and participation in day-to-day decision-making, and they necessarily transgressed social expectations around the gendered division of labor in, for example, agriculture. Yet both men and women carried out the ideological work to defend current gender relations and structures. In many cases, this was accompanied by a reality of men maintaining their position as primary household "breadwinner" and women's increasing dependence on remittance income (Georges 1990).

A third group of studies found that men's migration can lead to a deterioration in women's status, particularly within the community (e.g., Zuiderwijk and Schaafsma 1997; Francis 2002). Many of these case studies come out of the sub-Saharan African region, where researchers have found that men's absences can lead to the marginalization of women remaining behind in the sending community (in the resultant female-headed households). Even apart from this potential outcome, there is the issue of the effect on women's *relative* status. Men's migration often leads to an improvement in their personal status in the community and the household, with women's status deteriorating *relative to* men's (Connell 1984; Chant 1991).

This question of the effect of men's migration on women's status is tied up together with how we understand and conceptualize households and how households function in the migration process, especially in terms of the decision of a household member such as the husband to migrate. Recent literature on gender and migration is challenging the whole idea of the "household strategies" model of migration, in which the household efficiently allocates the labor of its members (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Posel 2001). Posel (2001) found in her work in South Africa that migration is not always a maximizing household decision. Men may "over-migrate" when they experience personal gains, such as improvements in their relative household bargaining position through access to wage income.

The Study

We are currently carrying out our research on the role of migration in social and land-use change in various *ejidos* in the municipality of Calakmul, in the southern Mexican state of Campeche. The *ejidal* communities in this region were established at various times, the great majority of them since the mid-1960s. In 1989, Mexico created the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve (CBR), in response to international concerns over deforestation and biodi-

iversity loss. The CBR protects over 700,000 hectares of tropical dry forests and has contributed to the continued international focus on and interest in the nature of land-use and social change in the communities surrounding the park. Our research on migration is affiliated with a larger project on land-use/land-cover change in the southern Yucatan peninsular region (the SYPR project).²

This paper presents preliminary findings on migration and gender change in Nueva Esperanza,³ an *ejido* bordering the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve. Nueva Esperanza has been a leader in various agricultural and economic changes in the region in the past and is assuming a similar role in the local emergence of men's transnational migration as part of diversifying household livelihood strategies. Our research into the impact of men's migration on gender relations is focused on three broad areas of inquiry: gender roles and responsibilities (in both labor and decision-making), gender mobility, and the gendered nature of the migration decision (who migrates). This paper focuses primarily on changes in gendered divisions of labor and decision-making, through comparisons of households with and without migrant husbands.

Our preliminary findings are based on a triangulation from three different data sources in the community. In 2002 we interviewed 50 women identified through a random sample of all the households in Nueva Esperanza. At that time, the *ejido* had a total of approximately 600 resident individuals in 130 households. Of those 50 women interviewed, 9 had a husband absent in the U.S. whom she expected to return within roughly a year (another 5 had a son in the U.S.). The 2002 interviews collected a wide range of information on household demographics, wealth indicators, cultivation, and farming practices, but the primary purpose of the interviews had been to collect information to further understanding of women's community-based group activity in Nueva Esperanza and the relationship of this activity to the conservation projects and programs targeted at the *ejido* due to its proximity to the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve. These interviews provided important baseline information at a very early stage in Nueva Esperanza's experience with migration as a household livelihood strategy.

Almost two years later, by January 2004, 76 community members were resident in the U.S., and in May of that same year, an additional 30 community members left for the U.S. in two separate groups, the vast majority of them men. It was rapidly becoming apparent that for Nueva Esperanza, transnational migration had become an important phenomenon for a

significant portion of the households. That year (2004), we carried out a second set of semi-structured follow-up interviews with the women from 26 of the original 50 households from 2002, to specifically explore the causes and effects of migration, particularly in the agricultural sector. We selected the follow-up households in the following fashion: we requested interviews with the women from all households with a direct family member in the U.S. in 2002, and 10 of these women agreed to participate in the follow-up interviews. We then randomly selected another 16 households from the 2002 50-household sample. Six of these additional 16 households had become migrant households by 2004, with a husband or son migrant to the U.S. for purposes of employment and income generation. In three of these six cases, the new migrant was the woman's husband. Becoming increasingly interested in the potential changes in gender relations accompanying the growth in the transnational migration of men, we returned again to Nueva Esperanza in 2005 for a small number of further follow-up, in-depth qualitative interviews with 9 of the women whose husbands were actively engaging in transnational migration. These qualitative interviews provided us with further insight into women's experience of men's migration and its effect on their lives, in terms of not only practical changes during their husbands' absences but also the emotional aspects of the separations.

Here, we analyze and present findings from the 2004 interviews. We unified the stratified sample of 26 households with appropriate weights, in order to then compare households based upon the absence or presence of husbands. This was necessary, as the original sample had been stratified to compare migrant and non-migrant households, defined more broadly by the migration of any household member, including both husbands and sons. For the purposes of better understanding the effect of men's migration on gender relations, we wanted to examine differences among households based upon *husbands'* absences. The unified sample from 2004 was therefore divided into two groups, defined by husband's status in 2003 during the previous year's planting and harvesting cycle, and again a second time, defined by the husband's absence in 2004. We then analyzed interview data relevant to four different areas of investigation into household gender roles and responsibilities: the gendered division of agricultural field labor, the gendered nature of land-use decision-making on the part of the household, the generation of household income, and women's participation in decision-making for household consumption and spending. For these quantitative analyses, we employed statistical tests appropriate to samples of small sizes such as ours.

The 2002 and 2005 interviews provide context and depth to our understandings, as well as functioning to help triangulate our findings.

Our goal is to understand change within households, yet as is the case with much research on migration effects in sending communities, our current analysis is based upon the comparison of different households as we have only a single “snapshot” in time. More importantly, we need to point out that the small size of our 2004 sample constrains our ability to achieve statistical significance in the differences between households and limits our ability to generalize these findings. Of our 26 households, 9 had husbands away in 2003, 7 had husbands away in 2004, and 1 had no adult male member and was subsequently excluded from the analysis, leaving 25 households in the sample.⁴ Nonetheless, our different data sources serve to complement each other, pointing us in similar directions. Fundamentally, we recognize a need both to collect data from a larger group of women, as the migration experience of Nueva Esperanza deepens and more and more households are drawn into transnational migration, and to follow a subset of women and their households over an extended period of time to improve our understanding of change within social relations such as gender.

Findings on Gendered Labor and Decision-making

Despite the aforementioned cautions regarding our small sample, our analyses have resulted in a number of preliminary findings on the effects of men’s transnational migration. Numerous researchers on women’s participation in agriculture in Latin America have pointed to the increasing feminization of commercial agriculture, particularly in the production of nontraditional agricultural exports such as fruit and cut flowers, as well as of subsistence and semi-subsistence agriculture with the shift of men’s labor to wage labor (González and Salles 1995; Lara Flores 1995; Valdez et al 1995; Espinosa 1998). One of the causes posited by various authors for the increasing feminization of Mexican agriculture has been the rural economic crises experienced throughout Mexico beginning in the 1990s, which have been accompanied by increases in men’s migration to the U.S. (Fowler-Salami and Vaughan 1994; Lazos Chavero 1995; Marroni de Velázquez 1995; Espinosa 1998). This appears to be the case in Calakmul as well, as suggested by our findings for the 2003 growing season in Nueva Esperanza.

Farming in the case-study community is centered around the production of two primary cultivars: maize and chili peppers. Maize is cultivated as part of a moderately diverse *milpa*⁵ system, although increasingly households

are planting maize as a monoculture. Its purpose continues to be primarily subsistence, with the occasional produced surplus marketed for cash. As we have reported elsewhere, maize cultivation in Nueva Esperanza was maintained by migrant households as a risk-management strategy during these early years in the households' experiences with transnational migration. In comparison, chili cultivation was curtailed during men's absences to the U.S., with migration substituting to some degree for men's cultivation of chili as a cash crop (Radel and Schmook 2008).

These cultivation decisions around maize and chili during men's migration events had a direct impact on women's changing participation in agricultural field labor. Men's absence from Nueva Esperanza during the 2003 growing season was associated with increased rates of participation by their wives in the field-labor tasks associated with continued household cultivation (Figure 1), particularly of maize. Of the 25 households in the sample, 4 did not have access to land (no *ejidal* parcel or borrowed land) for the 2003 growing season. In comparing

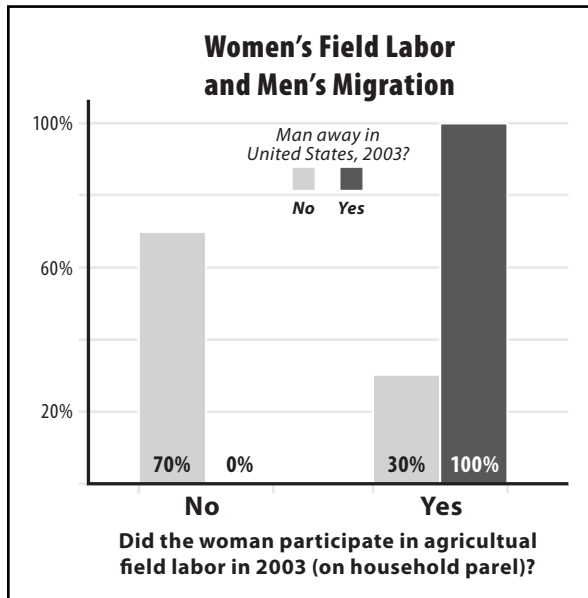


Figure 1. Women's field labor and men's migration.

households in terms of women's participation in household agricultural field labor, we restricted the analysis to those 21 households with land access in 2003. In all these cases with an absent husband, the women reported participating in one or more of the following labor tasks: vegetation clearing, planting, weeding, spraying with chemicals, harvesting, or the supervision of wage labor. This compares with a rate of only 30 percent for women with a husband at home (Fisher's Exact test $p=0.01$). The supervision of wage labor (*jornaleros*) proved particularly important, as one strategy adopted by

several migrant households was the hiring of primarily male day-laborers to complement women's increased field labor and to substitute partly for the labor of the absent husband. As Figure 2 illustrates, 43 percent of the Nueva Esperanza women with husbands away supervised agricultural wage laborers, whereas none of the women with husbands at home did so (Fisher's Exact test $p=0.06$). Another field-labor task with significant difference between women with husbands at home and women with husbands away was harvesting (Figure 3). This labor task is one that many women participate in throughout the Calakmul area, but in Nueva Esperanza, those with husbands away did so at a significantly higher rate in 2003: 71 percent of women with husbands away contributed labor to harvesting, while only

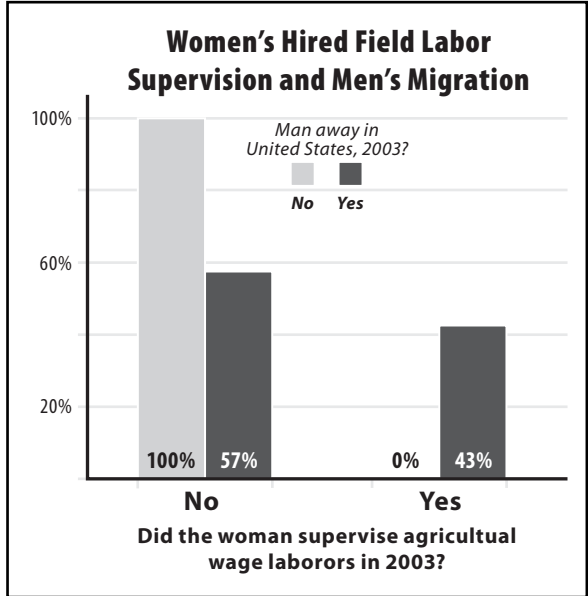


Figure 2. Women's hired field labor supervision and men's migration.

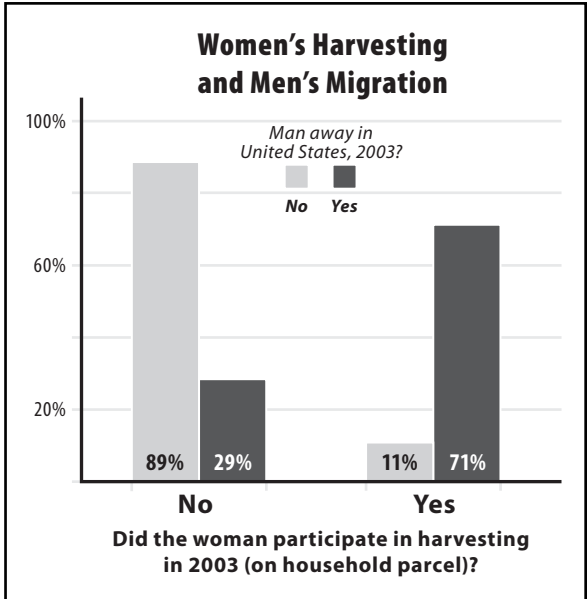


Figure 3. Women's harvesting and men's migration.

11 percent of women with husbands at home did so (Fisher's Exact test $p=0.04$).

Sampled Nueva Esperanza women with husbands away in the U.S. also had increased rates of participation in local wage-labor markets for the harvesting of chili (Figures 4 and 5). Seventy-five percent of the women



Figure 4. Woman cutting chili on a neighbor's parcel. She will be paid by the volume she picks.

interviewed with husbands away cut chili for wages in 2003, while only 57 percent of those in the sample with husbands at home did so (Fisher's exact test $p=0.65$). In this analysis of the differences among women in cutting chili for wages, our small sample size results in an inability to generalize beyond the interviewed women. Yet it does suggest that there may well be an increase in women's participation in this local agricultural labor market while their husbands are away in the U.S. In order to assess this possibility with confidence, a larger sample would be required.

In Nueva Esperanza, the increases in women's participation in agricultural labor (with men's transnational migration) was not accompanied by clear increases in women's participation in household land-use decision-making. As Figure 6 illustrates, in 67 percent of cases with the husband away in 2004, the woman reported that her husband continued to make the deci-

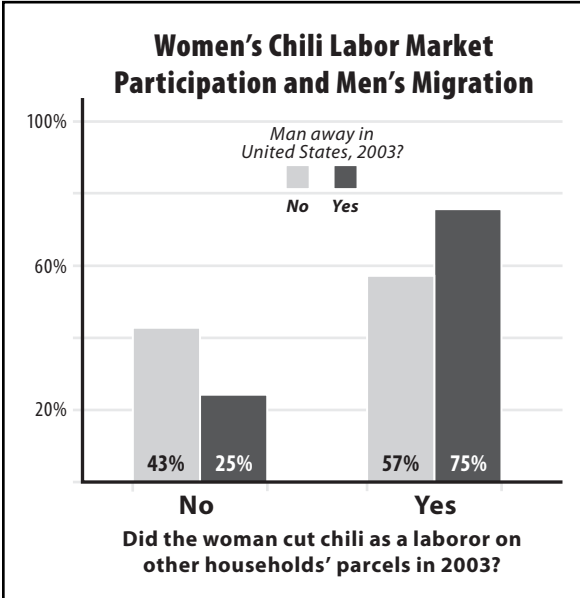


Figure 5. Women's chili labor market participation and men's migration.

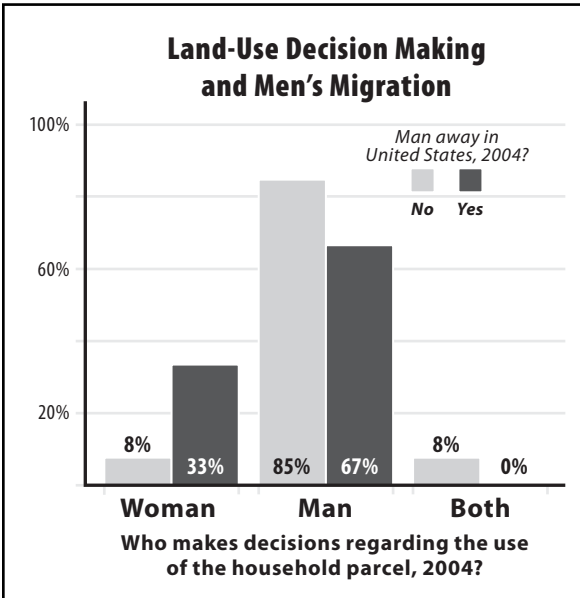


Figure 6. Land-use decision-making and men's migration.

sions over the use of the primary household land parcel(s) on his own. The decisions entail what to cultivate, if anything, and how much. These "household" parcels are most often held by the men as *ejidatarios* (Radel 2005). Although women who reported that they made the land-use decisions were more likely to be those with husbands away (33 percent versus 8 percent), these differences among the women in the sample are not statistically significant ($X^2=2.34$, $p=0.31$). Differences among women in Nueva Esperanza more broadly, based upon their husband's migration status, may be relatively small.

Men's absence from Nueva Esperanza was also associated with women's greater participation in income-generating activities in the informal sector, such

as the retailing of small consumer goods or the weaving of hammocks for sale (Figure 7). The 25 interviewed women reported on whether they had



Figure 7. Nueva Esperanza woman weaves a hammock to sell.

received any income generated through engagement in these types of activities in the previous year, and not a single woman with her husband at home in 2004 reported receiving income from these informal sector activities (Figure 8). In contrast, 50 percent of the women with husbands away reported that they had (Fisher's Exact test, $p=0.04$). The engagement of these women in income-generating activities is motivated by the economic hardships generated for her and her children by her husband's absence, particularly by his first absence when the women do not yet receive any remittances or when remittances are allocated to paying back the debt incurred to finance the husband's trip. There is, however, the potential for increased autonomy and the control of financial resources through women's independent generation of income, however meager the amounts.

Households in Calakmul depend in varying degree upon income from informal sector activities, community-based conservation and development projects (Radel 2005), and federal government transfer programs (Klepeis and Roy Chowdhury 2004). Two transfer programs are particularly important to a large proportion of households, OPORTUNIDADES (a poverty

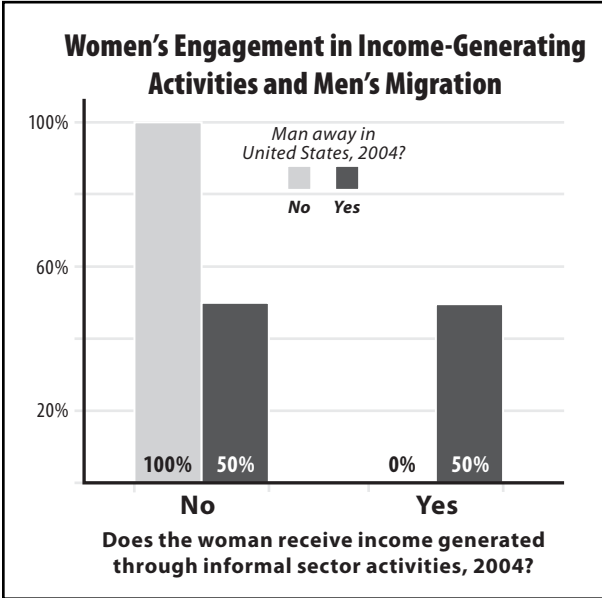


Figure 8. Women's engagement in income-generating activities and men's migration.

reduction program that provides bi-monthly payments to mothers of children attending school from their third schooling year onwards, with the intention of increasing the overall level of education) and PROCAMPO (a program of financial direct transfers to farmers in support of cultivation to ease the neoliberal end of state subsidies for agriculture; see Klepeis and Vance

2003). Receipt of PROCAMPO payments is tied to land cultivation and land tenure. As such, in the past, men have been the primary recipients of these payments, and in most cases control over the received cash remained in the hands of men. With men's migration, an increasing number of women in Nueva Esperanza are inscribed as the official PROCAMPO beneficiary (Figure 9). In households with the man at home in 2004, in 89 percent of cases PROCAMPO payments were in the man's name (11 percent were in the woman's name). In households with the husband away in 2004, only 16 percent were in the man's name (50 percent were in the woman's name and 34 percent had a payments in both the woman's and the man's name; $X^2=8.17, p=0.02$). In many cases, men are transferring the benefits to their wives so that the household will continue receiving the payments during their absence. This, in turn, implies as greater spatial mobility for these women, as collection of the PROCAMPO payments entails travel from Nueva Esperanza to the larger municipal seat of Xpujil. Although this day trip may seem a simple act, geographers have found a relationship between women's spatial mobility and their gender status or empowerment as women (e.g., Hanson and Pratt 1995).

Thus we preliminarily found that in at least two areas, informal income-generation activities and PROCAMPO payments, men’s transnational migration is associated with higher rates of women’s receipt of income. More broadly, however, is there any evidence that men’s migration is associated with women’s increased *control over* household income and participation in household decision-making around the spending of household income in general? We asked the interviewed Nueva Esperanza women, “Who decides how family income is spent?” We found that there may be a decrease in joint decision-making between husbands and wives when the husband is away, at the same time that there may be an increase in both female *and* male sole control over household spending decisions (Figure 10),

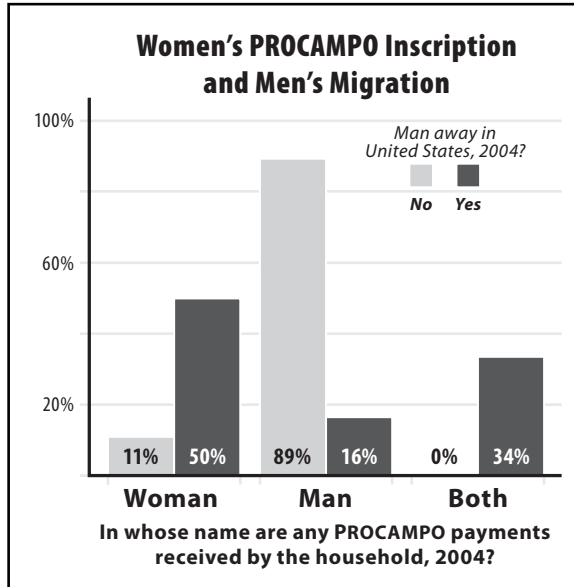


Figure 9. Women’s PROCAMPO inscription and men’s migration.

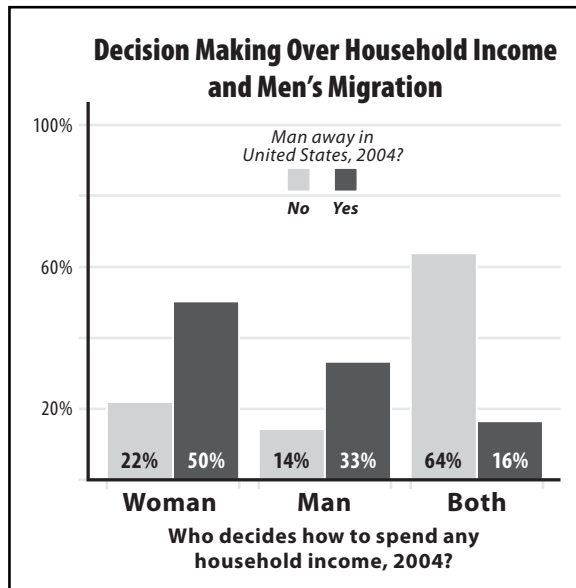


Figure 10. Decision-making over household income and men’s migration.

depending upon the household ($X^2=3.81$, $p=0.15$). In some cases, men's migration may result in women's increased autonomy in household financial decision-making, but in other cases it may in fact result in a loss of participation for women. Joint decision-making and consultation between spouses is apparently made more difficult by the physical distance between them, despite considerable communication between spouses over the telephone. It is important to note that the consideration here of who controls household income does not include the full amount of income generated by men in the United States. It only includes those funds, such as remittances, which make it back to the Mexican part of the household. Thus a significant piece of household spending occurs outside of this framework and is controlled by the man in the U.S.

We can roughly divide the Nueva Esperanza results discussed above into two categories: effects of men's transnational migration on women's labor, and effects of men's transnational migration on women's control of or participation in household decision-making. This later category is particularly important in thinking about women's changing status. Following Kabeer (1999, 435), we see women's empowerment as a process during which women acquire a greater ability to make strategic life choices. The ability to be an active part of decision-making critical to both one's daily life and one's future is an important part of these life choices. What about changes in the gendered division of household and agricultural labor? Do these potential changes have an effect on women's status as well? Women's participation in some labor tasks might lead to increased control of income, such as women's engagement in informal income-generating activities or their collection of PROCAMPO payments. Their participation in other labor tasks, such as women's supervision of male agricultural wage labor, can challenge strong gender norms. Despite these potentials, the interviewed women in Nueva Esperanza largely refer to changes in roles and responsibilities in practical and temporary terms. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the women see the expansion of their labor as more *work*, not as more freedom or personal choice. The nine qualitative in-depth interviews suggest that women would much prefer not to take on these expanded responsibilities. Gender ideology is defended by the women at the same time that the gendered division of labor bends to accommodate men's absences.

Other Qualitative Findings: Gendered Mobility, Women's Hopes for a Better Life

As mentioned earlier, women's greater mobility is associated with their gender empowerment. Men's migration can indeed lead to increasing mobility for the women who remain behind in the sending community, as a result of the necessity for women to travel outside of the community to carry out banking errands often associated with the receipt of remittances, or to collect PROCAMPO payments, for example. However, the mobility of these women's husbands who undertake migration increases to a greater degree than does the women's. In this respect, women's *relative* gender mobility actually may decrease. Another mobility issue relates to the gendered decision of who migrates. In Nueva Esperanza, the decision by these women not to migrate themselves is articulated (or defended) in primarily reproductive terms, such as motherhood and fear for the wellbeing and security of their children. This parallels what Sylvia Chant (1991) has found in her work in Costa Rica.

Other qualitative findings from this *ejido* speak to the migration decision, the migration experience, and the associated hopes that women hold for a better life through their husbands' migration. The Nueva Esperanza case study highlights a notion of spatially dispersed but intact households. This became particularly clear through the nine in-depth qualitative interviews. Women in Nueva Esperanza do not yet fear abandonment by their husband, a fear that has been reported elsewhere in Mexico (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). The trust between husband and wife, and the sense of a common shared purpose around the man's migration, is likely an outcome of the community as a whole in 2004 being at such an early stage in its migration experience. Despite this sense of a shared purpose, husbands have a greater say than do wives in the migration decision in this community. As has been found elsewhere in Mexico (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), women are often silent in the decision, leaving it to their husband so that he cannot blame her either way, as one woman put it. These silences are accompanied by women's hopes for a better life for their families in the future. Yet for many families, the migration of the man is made possible by borrowing money to cover the cost of the trip (US\$2,000–3,000 for an illegal crossing). This results in a heavy debt load for the household, and this loan may take years to pay off. Early remittances often are earmarked for paying off this debt, and as a result, many women in Nueva Esperanza feel that they are not getting ahead at all

in these early years of migration. Some women feel great unhappiness and loneliness with their spouse away, and little tangible material result for the wellbeing of the family.

Conclusions

A number of implications stand out from these preliminary findings, for our understanding of migration as a gendered process. First, in thinking about the effects of men's transnational migration on women's gender status in the household and in the community, we need to clearly distinguish between gendered divisions of labor and decision-making, on the one hand, and gender ideology, on the other. There are critical differences between changes in labor responsibility, changes in decision-making control, and changes in gender discourse. Gender roles and responsibilities are exhibiting increasing flexibility in this age of neoliberal ascendancy. It is not clear, however, that this flexibility represents any true changes in women's status in households and communities. Women in Calakmul, who stay behind while their husbands journey to the U.S. for work, stress temporarily increased responsibility and labor—not increased autonomy or freedom.

Second, it should be no surprise that existing literature on the effects of men's migration on women's status present contradictory or mixed evidence. In Nueva Esperanza, we find contradictory processes at work—gender ideology is defended by both men and women in many households through the maintenance, on balance, of men's gender authority, at the same time that change is occurring in various aspects of gender relations, particularly around labor. However, we know that the materiality of labor can and does interact with the ideological constructions of gender. Women's changing labor roles can impact gender ideology over the longer term through changing societal understandings of what a woman can achieve and what is appropriate for a woman to do—in other words, what it means to be a “good woman.”

Lastly, but connected to the two points above, in our research we need to consider the effects of men's transnational migration on women's status *over a longer term*. This will entail following changes in a community and in specific households over the course of their experiences with migration. A critical question for research is, what happens when men return home? Due to the recentness of migration as a livelihood strategy for many Calakmul households, this case provides us with an opportunity to follow social and land-use changes from very early stages in the migration process. We also

need to consider the effects of men's transnational migration on women's status *in relation to* men's changing status, as for example the gender differential in spatial mobility increases. In looking forward towards our future research, we identify the need for a study with more women, over the course of the community's migration experience.

Notes

¹ *Ejididos* are collective land tenure units in Mexico, established by agricultural reform laws. As such, *ejidos* are both units of land and the communities located on that land.

² The SYPR Project is a joint project of Clark University, El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, Harvard University, University of Virginia and Carnegie Mellon University. See Turner et al. (2004).

³ The real name of the *ejido* has been replaced with Nueva Esperanza, a fictional name, in order to preserve the anonymity of the community.

⁴ Two of the households with "husbands away" in 2003 and 2004 are in fact households in which the adult male son was acting as a male household head in the place of a deceased husband. As this son was away temporarily to the U.S., we treated these two cases the same as we treated the other "husbands away" cases.

⁵ The traditional *milpa* contains at least three cultivars: maize, beans, and squash.

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