

ARTICLE

“To Separate Myself from Them, I Think I Will Feel Great Sadness”: Transnational Fatherhood and Border Regimes in Central Mexico

Alison Elizabeth Lee¹  and Mario Alberto Macías-Ayala² 

¹Universidad de las Américas Puebla, Cholula, Puebla, Mexico, and ²University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, US

Corresponding author: Mario Alberto Macías-Ayala; Email: mariomaciasaa@arizona.edu

(Received 03 January 2023; revised 01 December 2023; accepted 19 January 2024; first published online 03 June 2024)

Abstract

Studies of fatherhood in Latin America demonstrate an uneven shift from traditional, patriarchal fatherhood to a more reflexive version that incorporates elements of active, relational fatherhood. This hybrid fatherhood emerged from the transition of Fordism to flexible accumulation, a transformation that coincided with massive migration from Central Mexico to the United States. Migration scholars have demonstrated the fluidity of masculine identities, men's strategies to father across borders, and how US immigration enforcement shapes gendered subjectivities and power relations in transnational families. Building off these insights, we examine how return migrant men in rural central Mexico navigated changing meanings and practices of fatherhood. Their hybrid strategies reflect the inherent contradictions of a border regime that limited circular migration to the United States and their interest in maintaining close emotional attachments to children. Transnational fathers' connections to reproduction reveal another way that affect articulates with capital accumulation and borders.

Keywords: return migration; transnational fatherhood; masculinities; gender; Mexico

Resumen

Los estudios sobre la paternidad en América Latina demuestran un cambio desigual de la paternidad tradicional y patriarcal a una versión más reflexiva que incorpora elementos de la paternidad activa y relacional. Esta paternidad híbrida surgió de la transición del Fordismo a la acumulación flexible, una transformación que coincide con la migración masiva del centro de México a Estados Unidos. Los estudiosos de la migración han demostrado la fluidez de las identidades masculinas, las estrategias de paternidad de los hombres a través de las fronteras y cómo la implementación de las leyes de inmigración de Estados Unidos da forma a las subjetividades de género y a las relaciones de poder en las familias transnacionales. A partir de estos acercamientos, examinamos cómo los hombres migrantes que regresan a las zonas rurales del centro de México navegan los cambiantes significados y prácticas de la paternidad. Sus estrategias híbridas reflejan las contradicciones inherentes a un régimen fronterizo que restringe la migración circular a Estados Unidos y su interés por mantener estrechos vínculos afectivos con sus hijos. Las conexiones de los padres transnacionales con la reproducción revelan otra forma en la que el afecto se articula con la acumulación de capital y las fronteras.

Palabras clave: migración de retorno; paternidad transnacional; masculinidades; género; México

Omar, a landscaper and onyx craftsman in his early fifties, discussed the difficulties of finding work in Zapotitlán, a rural town in Central Mexico, and in a nearby midsize city, Tehuacán.¹ During six interviews spaced over two years (2011–2013), we learned that he found only occasional work as a landscaper. After fourteen years in New York City and weathering two crises—9/11 and the Great Recession (2007–09)—Omar returned to Mexico in 2010. He hoped he would be able to pay for university for his two youngest children by working as a landscaper and by rededicating himself to the production of onyx crafts, an activity that had paid for family expenses before he migrated.

When he migrated for the first time in 1995, Omar's five children were school-age. He knew he would be able to pay for their education if he worked in the United States, a goal he would not achieve through income earned in the local onyx industry. Throughout the interviews, he consistently constructed himself as a father-provider: "When I went there [the United States], I told my wife that it was so that we could be a little better off, no? And give education to my children" (June 2011).

By the time he returned, three of his children—two daughters and one son—had completed university degrees, and a fourth was still studying. However, he struggled to earn enough to pay for his youngest child's university education. "Here [in Zapotitlán] one doesn't earn enough to pay for both [his two youngest daughters] to study [in the university]. My youngest daughter is not studying because there is no money. Right now, only one is in the university, because there is no money . . . we only have enough to eat" (January 2012).

Adding to his worries about not being able to provide for his family, Omar was troubled by his perception that, once he returned to Zapotitlán, his children no longer respected him. "I helped them out a lot! I don't know why they say they don't need anything from me. My wife says that I didn't earn their respect, but I have given them everything" (October 2012). Their ingratitude revealed that expectations about obligations and duty were not aligned (Leinaweaver 2013). Despite living up to the father-as-provider ideal, an idea deeply entwined with the notion of being a "good" migrant, Omar was not, from his wife and children's perspective, putting effort into having a closer emotional relationship with his children. From our perspective, he longed for such attachments. He wished that his children would talk with him at home, that his son would accompany him on trips to nearby towns to sell onyx crafts, and that his daughters would ask him to dance a few songs with him at village parties like other daughter-father couples he observed.

Without an emotional connection, routine interactions with his family turned into moments of feeling underappreciated and ignored. He was losing his "place" as the head of the family, although, he reminded us, he still covered many of their expenses. "I don't know what is going on. I gave them everything without asking for anything. I am not asking for them to give me a single cent, because I can work" (March 2013).

Although Omar's income while he lived and worked in New York paid for his family's basic household expenses in Mexico—food, clothing, health care, house repairs, and education—he assured us that, at the end of the day, one's place was with one's family in Mexico:

That's the reason one gets married, right? To have a family. For me, I would, a thousand times over, rather be with my family. A *patrón* is always a *patrón*. The day that you don't want to work or you are old and you are of no use to him, well, they will get rid of you [*te desechan*]. You are useful so long as you can work. Instead, with your family, although you are who you are [*aunque seas lo que seas*], well, you will always be with your family. (October 2012)

¹ All names of our research participants have been changed to protect their identity. Their ages are at the time of our first interview. Research was conducted in Spanish and translated by the authors.

Although the assumption that one will always be with one's family by a father-husband in rural Mexico can be interpreted as an expression of the privilege of patriarchy, given the precarious context, it also expresses the idea that the ultimate emotional and material safety net is one's family, one's closest relations. This assumption—that one will always have one's family—was not holding up for Omar. Early on in our series of interviews, family communication had broken down, and his wife and children had moved out, renting a house nearby. He wished his children would visit, but only one daughter would occasionally come to see him. He told us multiple times that he wanted to migrate again and take up his landscaping job in New York. Although he knew he would be able to handle the physical demands of landscaping for a few more years, he was reluctant to attempt a clandestine border crossing given the increase in cost and physical dangers (Lee 2018). When our interviews ended in 2013, Omar had resigned himself to being alone, although it was still not clear to him why he was not able to marshal respect from his family after his many years of sacrifice. After several years, Omar left Zapotitlán and started a new life with a woman from a neighboring state.

During the time we researched the process of migrant return and reintegration in Zapotitlán in the 2010s, men like Omar frequently expressed how this process shaped and was shaped by their experience as transnational fathers. In this article, we explore the fatherly frustrations and contradictions, as well as the desires expressed by return migrant men, to contribute to an understanding of return migration and transnational fatherhood. We situate their experiences during and after the Great Recession (2007–2009) and increased border and interior enforcement in the United States after the mid-2000s (Rivera Sánchez 2019). Economic crisis and ramped-up enforcement led to significant return migration flows to Mexico (Levine 2015). Although return was not necessarily permanent for many individuals and families, for undocumented migrants like Omar, it was becoming more expensive and dangerous to attempt clandestine crossings (Lee 2018). Moreover, economic conditions in rural Mexico had not improved since the 1990s and early 2000s, the peak of migration from most parts of central and southern Mexico. Rather, conditions had worsened (Fitting 2011; D'Aubeterre, Lee, and Rivermar Pérez 2020). For a country like Mexico that is highly dependent on remittances, the changing fortunes of millions of families such as Omar's were at stake. Taking as a point of departure the multiple ways in which gender structures migration, and how migration shapes and is shaped by transnational fatherhood, we shed light on the experiences of rural return migrants in central Mexico as they confronted worsening conditions of rural life with fewer options for migrating. We specifically focus on migrant men whose spouses and children remained in Mexico while they worked in the United States. With fewer possibilities of providing for one's family—a key element of being a father—how did return migrant men navigate the different demands of fatherhood? How did the changing conditions of migration affect the types of relationships they desired to cultivate with their children?

To answer these questions, we first situate our research at the nexus of the rich literature on fatherhood in Latin America and recent migration scholarship in the region examining masculinities and fatherhood in transnational contexts. Second, we discuss our fieldwork methods. Third, we describe our ethnographic fieldwork in Zapotitlán, Puebla, focused on the emergence of an accelerated flow of migrants to the United States in the 1990s and the slowing of that flow by the mid-2000s through economic recession and immigration enforcement. We compare Omar's experiences with two fathers with younger children, Pedro and Ignacio, to highlight additional affective dimensions of fatherhood and return. Finally, we discuss the implications of the emergence of hybrid fatherhood in the context of the loss of circular migration and how transnational fatherhood is articulated with capital accumulation and borders.

Fatherhood in Latin America and in transnational contexts

Fatherhood in Latin America

Fathers' narratives express the lived experience of relatedness (Carsten 2000), of how men experience fatherhood and their relationships with their children in the context of return migration. We are interested in discovering the social, material, and affective meanings of transnational fathers' connections with their children after returning to Mexico and in the context of reduced circular migration.

To build our analysis, we draw from fatherhood studies in Latin America. Since the 1990s, scholars have established fatherhood as a central aspect of masculinities (Gutmann 1996; Parrini Roses 2000; Fuller 2000a). The ideal father was understood as an authority figure who provided for children and protected, formed, and educated them. Fatherhood reproduced manliness, a site where men exercised power over women and children. Scholars carefully documented an uneven, incomplete shift from authoritative, traditional fatherhood to a more relational, active fatherhood in which fathers were expected to participate significantly in raising children and to develop close emotional bonds with them (Fuller 2000b; Bonino 2003; Rojas Martínez 2008). The new demands on fathers emerged from the liberalization of the economy, the precarity of the labor market, the lack of material base for the Fordist family structure (father and husband-breadwinner, stay-at-home mother and wife), and the massive entrance of women into the labor market (Olavarria 2001). They represented one dimension of the widespread transformation of intimacy in the last quarter of the twentieth century (Giddens 1992).

Although most men sought to distance themselves from the traditional fatherhood they experienced from their progenitors, and men and women became more reflexive about parenting practices, men adopted new fatherly discourses and some practices of active involvement in urban middle classes (Salguero Velásquez 2006) and rural areas (Rodríguez Abad 2019) in Mexico. However, it was less clear whether this was leading to significant structural changes in fatherhood, particularly with respect to the continuation of fatherly authority and the gendered division of labor in the household. This form of hybrid masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014)—or, more specifically, hybrid fatherhood (Randles 2018)—signified important changes in fathering without deeper structural change in gendered relations. Men's mix of authoritative and active fatherhood led men to perform as "benevolent patriarchs" (Fuller 2022): still superior to children and women, yet distancing themselves from stigmatized elements of the violent and emotionally distant traditional father. From another angle, some researchers asked whether the precarity of the labor market in the post-Fordist era and the subsequent increased demands on many men to work longer hours to maintain income levels allowed them to embrace more active, participative fatherly practices (Olavarria 2003; Salguero Velásquez, Córdoba Basulto, and Sapién López 2014). Still others noted that comparing the responses of fathers with young, adolescent, or adult children revealed how fathering changed over the life course as men gained more experience with their children and learned practical and emotional ways of caring for them (Wentzell 2013).

Transnational masculinities and fatherhood

Fathers like Omar are multiply positioned within gendered geographies of power (Mahler and Pessar 2001): as rural peasants and workers dispossessed of livelihood options during Mexico's neoliberal turn in the 1980s and 1990s and subject to a forced migration regime (Delgado Wise and Márquez Covarrubias 2008; Binford 2004); as racialized and criminalized migrant workers in the United States performing labor in service industries and construction (De Genova 2005); as return migrants reunited with their families yet (once again) inserted in precarious conditions resulting from decades of policies that disinvested

in rural areas (D'Aubeterre, Lee, and Rivermar Pérez 2020). Their experience of fatherhood is intimately shaped by a border regime that cheapens the cost of their productive labor through the illegalization and criminalization of their bodies in the United States (Heyman 2014). The devaluation of their labor leads many men—including the ones discussed in this paper—to migrate alone, in a military-migration pattern, allowing them to maintain their families in Mexico, where the cost of reproduction is lower than in the United States. Therefore, they can reproduce themselves at a minimum in the United States and increase the amount of the earnings they send as remittances to their families.

The separation of production and reproduction in migrant households is a defining feature of transnational families, instituted officially through the Bracero Program (1942–1964)—a guest worker program that supplied Mexican laborers for US agriculture during and after World War II—to discourage permanent settlement of Mexican migrant guest workers in the United States. This separation continued for many of the millions of undocumented workers who left their families in Mexico during the wave of massive migration from central and southern Mexico in the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s (Cohen 2006; Cordero Díaz 2007; Fitzgerald 2009).

Migration reconfigures gendered relationships and the subjectivities of adults and children in transnational families while gender simultaneously shapes the lived experience of mobility (Carling, Menjívar, and Schmalzbauer 2012). In the context of the US-Mexico border and immigration enforcement, scholars have shown how US immigration law and policies shape gendered subjectivities and power relations within transnational families, as well as the numerous hardships and painful consequences of “illegality” and deportations of family members to Mexico (Andrews 2023; Boehm 2016; Dreby 2015).

Although research has generally focused on women’s experiences and transnational motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997), transnational masculinity and fatherhood research is growing (Inhorn, Chavkin, and Navarro 2014; Souralová and Fialová 2017). In the US-Mexico context, Broughton (2008) demonstrated how men strategically adopted different masculine identities to navigate the migration experience. Migration provides opportunities for masculine performance in the workplace, for example, whereby men emphasize their capacity to work and become breadwinners (Ordóñez 2015; Gomberg-Muñoz 2010). Addressing generational change in gendered identities, Sandoval-Cervantes (2022) and Aguirre-Sulem (2015) demonstrate that what constitutes manly practice changes over time for rural, indigenous men migrating within Mexico and to the United States.

Transnational fatherhood studies in Latin America also show the fluidity of gendered identities and men’s strategies to father across borders. For example, Schmalzbauer highlighted the emotional labor of guest worker fathers while in the United States and how gendered subjectivities shifted as they moved back and forth between their families in rural Mexico and their seasonal jobs in rural Montana (2015). Hershberg and Brinton Lykes (2019) showed how transnational indigenous Guatemalan men develop active fathering from afar and caregiving practices that challenge hegemonic conceptions of masculinity. Although fathers were highly motivated to migrate to be able to provide economically for their families, they engaged in those actions in a socioemotional manner, that is, through the love they felt for their families. Their constant communication conveyed emotional support, practical advice, and loving connection to their children. Among Mexican men in Florida, Ballesteros (2022) illustrates how her interlocutors distanced themselves from the traditional fatherhood they associated with their fathers and other men in Mexico by sharing economic provision and domestic tasks with their partners in the United States and spending time and imparting advice to children whom they lived with. Active fathering results from men’s desire to cultivate family cohesion and values so that their children avoid the discrimination and inequality that has shaped fathers’ lives.

Montes (2013) argues that Guatemalan transnational migrant men are more likely to reflect on their emotions and openly share their emotions with family members because of the harsh emotional conditions of the current migration regime. The criminalization and securitization of migration have made long-term separation (years, if not decades) a fact of life for undocumented migrants. Therefore, embracing less rigid and nonhegemonic masculine models, including more emotional fathering, allows fathers to adjust to the harsh realities associated with migration. Chávez, Edelblute, and Korver-Glenn (2016) show how, while men experience happiness and contentment upon reuniting with their families in Mexico, their previous US occupational identity, along with their economic need, exerts significant pressure that encourages future migration.

While the separation of production and reproduction was a key process underlying how men constituted themselves as breadwinners for their families in Mexico during the twentieth century, Andrews (2023) argues that detention, incarceration, and deportation in the twenty-first century attack men's masculinities by cutting them off from their social roles as fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers (see also Torre Cantalapiedra and Rodríguez Gutiérrez 2020). The men Andrews and her team interviewed expressed grief at not being able to be loving, active fathers. As one expressed about his children: "I feel bad, I feel sad . . . I'd like to have communication, hug them, kiss them, teach them like I used to teach them" (Andrews 2023, 67).

These studies show how transnational fathers reflect on and build relationships with their children across borders, bringing to the fore the emotional labor required to sustain ties in transnational contexts. This represents an important corrective to the overemphasis on—and frequent celebration of—remittances and economic provision in scholarship and public discussion about migration (Canales 2015). Rural peasant and working-class Mexicans as migrant workers in the United States have long been interpellated as "heroes" by the Mexican state—courageous individuals sacrificing themselves (involuntarily) to provide resources and opportunities for their families (Durand 2004).² For decades, remittances to Mexico from the United States have been a significant source of currency and income for the country, at times exceeding the income from oil exports and tourism (Cypher and Delgado Wise 2011). The notion of father-as-provider is deeply embedded in remittance practice and state-migrant relations in Mexico as it is elsewhere (Leinaweaver 2014; Schmalzbauer 2015). In intimate spaces within transnational communities and families, the idea of the "good migrant" shapes and disciplines men-as-fathers to provide for their families despite prolonged absences (Cordero Díaz 2007; D'Aubeterre, Lee, and Rivermar Pérez 2020, 101–102).³ For Mexican migrants and others elsewhere, father-as-provider is an exemplary masculinity and a cornerstone of traditional, hegemonic masculinity in familial, community, and transnational spaces (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

As Omar discovered, expectations of fatherhood and fathers' own desires exceeded economic provision, extending into cultivating intimacy and building attachments with children. Viewing provision as a gendered male practice of caring extends our understanding of how sending money represents more than money. As Leinaweaver (2014) shows, remittances allow men to represent themselves as good fathers and highlight how their caring benefits their children. By sending gifts and remittances, Andean migrant fathers

² Although in a generic sense the term *heroes* applies to men and women, migration is masculine coded and heavily associated with male providers. Women who migrate are often assumed to travel as dependent housewives and mothers, despite scholarship that demonstrates their insertion in US labor markets and the importance of their wages for their families on both sides of the border (D'Aubeterre, Lee, and Rivermar Pérez 2020).

³ The "good migrant" discourse also disciplines transnational mothers. In the interest of space, we do not consider mothers in this article. For a discussion of this topic, please see D'Aubeterre, Lee, and Rivermar Pérez (2020, 101–102).

attempt to cultivate affective relationships (Pribilsky 2012). For Nicaraguans, migration can be interpreted as a form of care, and by sustaining their families, they maintain a sense of belonging and connection to them (Fouratt 2017).

The literature on transnational fatherhood among Latin American men has taken migration as the implicit or explicit force behind changing fatherhood practices. And yet, as we have outlined, scholars have noted important changes in fatherhood in Latin America in nonmigratory contexts. Weighing the relative importance of the factors that lead to changes in fatherhood ideals and practices is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, we focus on what changes in fatherhood signify for return migrant men in Zapotitlán. How did they express their experiences with fatherhood? How did they articulate traditional and relational elements of fatherhood in the context of return?

Fieldwork: Migration and return in Zapotitlán Salinas, Puebla

This article is based on ethnographic research conducted from 2011 to 2014 in Zapotitlán Salinas, Puebla, a rural town in central Mexico. It builds off an earlier period of fieldwork focused on the emergence of international migration in the town conducted by Lee from 2003 to 2005 for her dissertation. Carried out in the wake of the global financial crisis (2007–2009), the three-phase research project sought to describe and explain the reasons for return and the long-term adjustments that individuals and families made as it became more difficult to migrate to the United States because of the increased risks of clandestine border crossings. First, we applied a modified version of the Mexican Migration Project's Ethnosurvey to a 25 percent sample of households. The results of the survey allowed us to identify twenty-nine people (twenty-four men and five women) who had returned during the financial crisis, with whom we conducted in-depth semistructured interviews to probe the reasons for return and experiences with economic and social reinsertion. In the last phase, we selected sixteen households to follow for eighteen months, four households in each of the following categories: with forced returnees, with voluntary returnees, with migrants still in the United States, and a control group with no migrants or returnees. We conducted five interviews at three- to four-month intervals to track reinsertion with greater detail and gain a more intimate picture of the challenges facing Zapotitecos/as.

Various periods of long-term participant observation in the community since 2003, multiple visits to families, and repeated interviews allowed us to develop rapport and a deeper understanding of peoples' experiences and concerns about their present and future circumstances. Our analysis emerges from return migrant men's narratives about how they navigated fatherhood in the context of reduced circulation. Therefore, we discuss parent-child relations from the fathers' perspectives. For men with children, their experience as migrants and returnees was intimately tied to their notions of fatherhood. Migration is deeply connected to ideas about improving the lives of household members in the present and future, including paying for children's education (Lee 2008). Although we identified two men who were detained for several months and deported after attempting clandestine border crossings, we present the experiences of men who returned "voluntarily" to Zapotitlán after living and working in the United States for many years. Additionally, although the feminization of migration has led to complexity in the family formation of immigrant households in the United States—so-called mixed-status families whereby some members are US citizens while others are undocumented—here we focus on the experiences of men who migrated to the United States without their spouses or children, in a military-migration pattern, thereby cheapening their labor vis-à-vis capital through long-term separation from their households.

In this article, we present details of three return migrant men-as-fathers in different stages of the household domestic cycle—Omar, with adult children; Pedro, with school-age

children; and Ignacio, who became a father during our fieldwork—to highlight generational changes in fathering practices. The three men, who returned voluntarily, were among the twenty-four male returnees we interviewed, seventeen of whom were fathers during their last migration to the United States. We interviewed Pedro once, and Omar and Ignacio were members of the voluntary returnee households we followed up with for five interviews at three- to four-month intervals. The three cases capture some of the overlap among fathers' experiences in desiring close bonds with their children and variance in how the closeness is (might be) achieved.

Emergence and contention of migratory flows: Zapotitlán to New York and back

Return migrant fathers' experiences are situated within broader processes of economic and social transformation that shape migratory flows and gender and family relations in Zapotitlán Salinas. Before the mid-twentieth century, the town's inhabitants made a living by combining rain-fed agriculture, goat raising, and salt production for local and regional markets. The extraction of travertine (known locally as "onyx") from local quarries and its processing in local workshops began in earnest in the 1960s, after a regional highway was built that linked Zapotitlán with urban centers.

The patriarchal household structure that sustained the agriculture-livestock-salt economy organized production in the onyx workshops. With production managed by male heads of household, wives and children worked in the workshops as unpaid household labor, assembling and packaging onyx products. These family and gendered relations were situated within the pronatalist, patriarchal ideologies of the Catholic Church, the dominant religion in Zapotitlán, as well as the state. However, the success of many of the workshops created space for the development of entrepreneurial masculinities, and the town, flush with cash, hosted baseball and basketball leagues, opening other avenues for masculine practices. This diversity coexisted with a violent masculinity associated with conflicts over local onyx quarries and debt payments. Sons and daughters recall the fathers of this period as mostly emotionally distant men who left caring practices up to their female relatives.

The Fordist male breadwinning model in agriculture and onyx workshops was often sustained by unmarried daughters' paid domestic work in middle-class households in urban centers and daughters' and mothers' employment in local maquiladoras. Women's employment in these low-wage sectors was met with little resistance, given the difficult economic conditions in which families lived. In this "patriarchal accommodation" (Andrews and Shahrokni 2014), women's "complementary" wages allowed them limited autonomy; however, they remained subordinate to fathers, husbands, and brothers.

The onyx industry declined during the 1980s with the country's oil crisis and the resultant dismantling of support for rural agriculture and industry. International migration became a viable solution to locals' economic hardships. Affinal relations to relatives inserted in previously established networks of US-bound migrants from the Mixteca Poblana provided the first migrants with the necessary contacts and loans to migrate without documents to the United States. For the first few years, mostly young, unmarried men from Zapotitlán left and settled in the Bronx borough of New York City, finding work principally in restaurants and markets. With the feminization of migration in the late 1980s, the migration flow diversified to include young, single and married women who were employed in the city's clothing factories and service industry. The number of migrants continued to grow, especially after the devaluation of the peso in 1994, an event that dealt another blow to the onyx industry.

Zapotitlán's migrants formed part of the enormous growth of Mexican migration to the United States in the 1990s, a trend that was sustained until the mid-2000s. Despite the

illegalization of their presence in the country—achieved through their exclusion to the possibilities of regularizing their status after the passage of the Immigration Control and Reform Act in 1986—Zapotitecos/as circulated between Mexico and the United States every few years. After the mid-2000s, however, the illegalization of Mexican undocumented labor was coupled with its criminalization, leading to a rapid increase in deportations. Internal immigration enforcement was coupled with increased surveillance at the border, long-term detentions of migrants arrested during clandestine crossing attempts, and returns to Mexico accompanied by bars to entry of three, five, and ten years (Andrews 2023).

After the mid-2000s, the Great Recession (2007–2009) and the increased border and internal immigration enforcement led to the reduction of circular migration, as the costs and risks—financial, physical, psychological—for clandestine crossers rose precipitously (Lee 2018). The reduction in circular migration on a national level, described as a “net-zero” or “below net-zero” pattern, was replicated in Zapotitlán. To avoid the violence associated with the border, many Zapotitecos/as settled in New York, bringing children born in Mexico with them and having additional children in the United States. The men who migrated without their children and spouses—men who are the subjects of this paper—struggled with years-long separations from their spouses and children. In our conversations with them, they celebrated the economic advantages of being in the United States and lamented the difficulties of negotiating and navigating relations from afar. Some migrant fathers’ emotional labor was performed through frequent phone calls. One called his children every day, “sometimes congratulating them, sometimes scolding them,” during his six trips to the United States in the 1990s and 2000s to ensure that they stayed on track with school and obeyed their mother.

The fundamental paradox deriving from transnational fatherhood is that one leaves one’s family for years at a time to provide for basic subsistence: housing, education, health care, and food. For men in Zapotitlán, this is tied to the massive migration to the United States since the 1980s. Our interlocutors wondered what it meant to be a father in these forced migration-return conditions. Norberto, age thirty, wanted to migrate to the United States with his children (four and eight years old) to keep his family together. By comparing his purchasing power of soft drinks with his earnings in Mexico and the United States, Norberto explained the advantages of migrating to his kids. However, his parents strongly discouraged their grandchildren’s migration. Instead, Norberto and his wife migrated to New York, leaving their children with their grandparents in Zapotitlán. By migrating in this way, the couple shielded their children from the dangers of clandestine border crossings and the racism that Norberto was sure they would face daily in the working-class neighborhoods where they lived and worked. This arrangement also reduced the couple’s expenses and eliminated childcare responsibilities in New York. They managed to work longer hours and save money in a shorter amount of time to be able to establish their pizzeria in Zapotitlán and return home sooner. Their plan reduced the amount of time they would have to be away from their children. “Things went well [economically],” Norberto explained, “but I came back because, like it or not, the children were not well” (June 2011). In Norberto’s opinion, grandparents were not a substitute for parents. He claimed a spot in the social reproduction of his family by desiring to be present in his children’s lives—his children would be well when he was with them (Figueroa 2017).

Traditional and relational fathering among return migrant men

Omar struggled to make sense of the affective expectations that his family had of him. As a man who became a father in the 1990s, when traditional fatherhood was still the norm in Zapotitlán, he expected that his significant efforts as a breadwinner would be enough to maintain his authoritative position in the family despite many years of separation.

Contrary to his assumptions, he felt that his children did not respect him, that is, grant him the authority that he felt he deserved after the sacrifices he made for his family. According to Omar, his wife believed that he did not earn their respect because he did not strive to develop close emotional bonds with his children.

Omar's experience contrasts with younger men's experiences with school-age children, highlighting how what was considered manly changed over time for Zapotitecos. Interviews with Pedro and Ignacio highlighted careful considerations about how to balance authority, economic provision, and loving relationships with their children.

Pedro

Thirty-seven-year-old Pedro returned to Zapotitlán in 2009 after five years of separation from his wife and children. In the United States, he worked in construction—one of the sectors hardest hit by the Great Recession (Levine 2015). Almost half of the people he worked with were laid off. He returned to Mexico with savings, planning to invest in real estate in a popular tourist destination with some family members. Pedro hoped the investment would provide enough income so that he could stay in Zapotitlán and not be forced to migrate and be separated from his family again. By the time we spoke with him, that investment plan had fallen through. However, he was appointed a job in the local government, a position that would last three years until the next municipal elections.

Pedro's undocumented status, as he explained it, took away his freedom (*libertad*), forcing him into a dreary and demanding work routine and solitary existence separated from his children and spouse:

The United States is very good economically; you have material things, but you do not have freedom. If you have a good [extended] family and friendships to pass the time with, in December and New Year's, you'll have a good time. In parentheses, no? Because you'll hang out with your friends, with [extended] family, with whomever you are with. But in reality, you are not having a good time, because you are not with those that you love and you can say "This is my family." So, you try to make the days pass quickly, because you say "In reality I am not happy here." If I say "I am fine, because I like it here," it's only because you have to be there because of economic necessity. And it is a routine, that, after time, you get tired. You want to take a vacation, you find it difficult, you want to rest, or you say "I am not going to work," you'll lose your job. So, it is better if you just decide "You know what? I am going to work, I am going to do this and then let's go [back to Mexico]!" Here [in Zapotitlán] you are free. (June 2011)

Pedro expressed the painful contradiction of forced migration for transnational fathers: one leaves one's family to improve their living conditions and educational opportunities. It is in this context that Pedro experienced a lack of freedom because he was unable to experience the well-being and comfort that comes with living with one's family. His desire for relational fathering, "being with those you love," is something that cannot be realized given the restrictive and exclusionary border regime. Pedro constructs fatherhood around economic provision, emotional attachment, and physical presence with his children.

Pedro's gendered responsibility as a father also included a desire to maintain authority over his children, even if he could not economically provide for his family to the same extent as when he was in the United States:

And thinking about the family, you also wonder: My children, how are they? They grow up, the years pass. So then, those that have experience leaving their kids [in Mexico] they say, "Well, you should go [to Zapotitlán], because later, despite all the

money you have, you will not be able to control them [referring to children]. They are not going to love you like father and son, rather like materialistically. They will say: “My father was there and he gave me everything.” And when you do not give them money, they will say to you: “Go back [to the United States] because now you don’t give me anything.” It turns into “I love you, but only if you give me something.” So, when they are still young, you can control them and say, explain to them, “Now I can’t give you anything.” (June 2011)

Pedro acknowledged that he was aware of how his economic provision was important to legitimize his position as a father with authority over his children, and yet his status was jeopardized after returning to Zapotitlán, a town with very few jobs at or above subsistence level. While in New York, other migrant fathers encouraged him to return while his children were still young, and with fewer expectations, allowing him greater leverage to exercise authority—“control”—without having to fulfill their expectations of material things that were beyond his means in Mexico. Such a strategy would allow him to maintain a position of authority even when he could not fulfill all their needs. If return migration entailed a sharp reduction in the resources available for social reproduction, cultivating a loving father-child relationship with reduced material expectations would assist in preserving Pedro’s authority as a father. For Pedro, asserting authority was accompanied by relational elements of fatherhood, constituting a hybrid masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014) that involved physical presence and nurturing love between father and children that was not based solely on material things.

Ignacio

Ignacio, age twenty-nine, migrated to the United States in the late 1990s, a few months before his fifteenth birthday, to help his single mother with household expenses. His father, a man he hardly knew, paid for the smugglers, and Ignacio lived with him and his father’s new wife and children. He soon moved out and lived with a dozen other people in a one-bedroom apartment in the Bronx. He cycled in and out of different types of service jobs, living through periods of unemployment by relying on his friends for help and tips on jobs. He returned to Zapotitlán briefly for a year in 2002–2003, during which time he met Julia, his future wife. After remigrating to New York, he maintained a long-distance relationship with her. Like Pedro, he described periods of loneliness while in New York, accompanied by bouts of drinking. He explained that he did not save money but enjoyed hanging out with friends. After seven years in New York, he returned to Zapotitlán in 2010 to marry Julia. Soon after, they had their first child.

We interviewed Ignacio over a period of two years, capturing his first years of married life and fatherhood (the couple had a second child during the second year we interviewed them). The couple lived with Ignacio’s mother, whose income from local domestic work was enough only to keep basic staple food on the table. Ignacio’s dilemma revolved around trying to live up to relational fathering expectations while experiencing the terrible precarity common in many rural Mexican towns. Although he discussed migrating to the United States again, he always weighed this against developing a close bond with his children and wife. He struggled to understand how being a good father could be related to migrating. On several occasions, when we asked him whether he would migrate to the United States, he said he would if the opportunity presented itself—that is, if a close relative would loan him the money and help him get on his feet when he arrived. However, he always qualified this answer while considering the impacts on his son (and his daughter after she was born) and wife:

If there were an opportunity to go [to the United States], I would go. But now I would go for my son's future, not for me, but for him. At the same time, here is my son. Because now he has grown fond of me. I go out, and he wants to go with me. For that reason, I think, if I go to New York, I think we will get sick with grief [*tristeza*], me and my son and my wife. Because the three of us are united ... we always go out together. To separate myself from them, I think I will feel great sadness. To make this decision [to migrate], I would think about it twice. Go there to create a good future or stay here to be with him in the future. (January 2012)

During the lapses between interviews, Ignacio found occasional work with wages far below the level of social reproduction. The family reduced their diet to a bare minimum, and his mother took out loans from different local microfinance institutions, paying one loan with others, falling deeper into debt. The occasional support from Ignacio's brother in the United States was not enough to keep the family out of debt. Being "buried" in debt, the prospect of migrating to the United States became even more attractive. However, Ignacio maintained that it would be extremely emotionally difficult to leave:

More than anything, I am worried about my children. In the future, they will say, "I have money, I have shoes, I have everything, but I don't have my father." Then I will come back [to Zapotitlán] and they will say: "And you? Why did you come back? It would be better if you left [for New York] and sent me money." For that reason, I think about their affection. In the future, when they need me [emotionally], how will I face up to them? If I make sure that they are economically stable, how will I face up to them [emotionally]? What explanations am I going to give them? Right now, they are young, and they don't understand anything. But when they are older, well, now one thinks about this. (October 2012)

Ignacio's transition to fatherhood was shaped by a growing understanding of the contradictions of adequately providing for his children and developing an emotionally interdependent relationship with them. He anticipates the grief he will experience upon separating from his children and spouse and asks himself how he will confront them in the future, after long absences. When his children grow older, old enough to acknowledge their need for their father's emotional support, he wonders how he will contend with the negative repercussions of his absence during their childhood.

The emotional experiences of Omar, Pedro, and Ignacio reveal different dimensions of the contradictions of transnational fatherhood. Omar felt that his children did not respect him, despite his living up to being a consistent provider. The privileges of being a father provider, of being able to count on your family for material and emotional support after years of separation and sacrifices—*aunque seas lo que seas*—did not hold up for Omar. His family did not "read" his remittances as the guarantor of affective relations, as he expected they would. Pedro, however, expressed how transnational fatherhood was accompanied by a lack of freedom (*libertad*) because it involved leaving one's family and engaging in a monotonous grind far from the well-being and comfort of one's family. The exclusionary border regime strips transnational fathers from the opportunity of being in the presence of (and exercising fatherly authority over) children. Finally, Ignacio described the overwhelming sense of grief (*tristeza*) that he would feel upon separating from his family. He also anticipated the sadness he would feel after returning to Mexico when his children were older only to discover weak or nonexistent emotional bonds between himself and his children.

The contrasts among these three men are related to generational changes in fatherhood ideals and their position in the domestic cycle. All three men grew up in a town where emotionally distant fathers were the norm, and it was in that context that Omar, age

fifty-two, became a father and migrated to the United States. Omar relied strongly on the idea that his consistent provision to his family would be enough to secure his place in his family when he returned to Mexico after years of separation at the end of his productive life. Upon reaching this point, he was disappointed and bewildered to discover that this was not the case. He underestimated the importance of emotional bonds with his children, although, upon his return, he desired emotional connections with his children. In contrast, Pedro (age thirty-seven) and Ignacio (age twenty-nine) became fathers at a time when fatherhood ideals were becoming more oriented toward relational fathering in Mexico. They were also aware of Omar's experience and wanted to avoid the pitfalls of prolonged separations from their school-age and young children. Pedro and Ignacio acknowledged the importance of emotional, relational fathering and strived to develop emotional connections with their children.

Transnational hybrid fatherhood, remittances, and the political ecology of emotions

In Latin America and among internal and international migrants, what is considered manly and fatherly is changing. Omar's, Pedro's, and Ignacio's experiences navigating the fatherly ideals of economic provision and emotional engagement with their children index the changing discourses and practices of fatherhood among transnational fathers. While migration scholars implicitly or explicitly focus on how migration is an important motor for these changes, scholars focusing on fathers in Latin America point to other recent economic, social, and cultural changes that shape ideas about appropriate fatherly discourse and practices. We have emphasized that these transitions are uneven, producing hybrid fatherhoods that value active, relational fathering yet retain authoritative elements (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). Rather than replace a more "traditional" fatherhood marked by patriarchal authority and economic support, elements of relational fatherhood were woven in alongside fathers' desire for respect, deference, and loyalty. The fatherhoods we have described show how these men father in the broader context of forced migration and return and a risky and costly clandestine border crossing. Although the emotional dimensions of transnational fatherhood varied somewhat among the men as a function of generation and position in the domestic cycle, as a group, they aspired to affective fatherhood as a way of staking a place in their families.

The emergence of hybrid fatherhoods that place significant emphasis on creating and maintaining emotional bonds with children coincided with the growth of international migration from central Mexico. The massive migration in the 1990s that lasted until the mid-2000s, characterized by migrants circulating between Mexico and the United States every three to five years, was reversed after the Great Recession and the criminalization of migration, resulting in a loss of that circularity. While all migrants face the fundamental paradox that one must leave one's family to maintain one's family within the context of worsening economic conditions in rural Mexico, the length of this absence increased for men still in their productive prime like Pedro and Ignacio. In this catch-22, if men leave their families for long periods of time to redress the failing Mexican rural economy, they may fail as relational fathers. On the other hand, if they stay, they may fail as economic providers.

Migrant fathers' experiences are rarely problematized as the contradictions of a specifically male-gendered practice (Souralová and Fialová 2017). Rather, popular and official understandings of migrant fathers naturalize the idea of the "male migrant breadwinner." For example, it informs the selection of participants in guest worker programs, making it more probable that the responsibilities men-as-fathers have to their families "back home" will produce disciplined participants who will work hard and return

to Mexico when their contracts expire (Binford 2013; Schmalzbauer 2015). Official discourse in Mexico of “migrants-as-heroes”—owing to the billions of dollars they send back to the country each year—arguably has a similar disciplinary effect on undocumented migrants as well. While this is a “common sense” idea in the Gramscian sense, by focusing on the ways that fathers navigate the expectations around relational fathering and economic provision, we hope to make visible these irresolvable tensions that are not acknowledged by official policies and popular ideas that shape gendered subjectivities. The feminization of reproduction, Figueroa (2017) argues, normalizes men as economic providers first and foremost and delegitimizes fatherly practices such as spending time with children. Pedro and Ignacio’s narratives showed how they constructed themselves as caring fathers *and* providers, working against the exclusion of men from reproduction.

Although border regimes contain and filter labor power, affective practices “spill over” those barriers through peoples’ attempts to maintain the ties that constitute them as a family. Maintaining loving and caring relationships is the source of motivation of the illegalized, disciplined bodies that sacrifice themselves in such a way as to fuel accumulation in the destination country. These “heroes” in migrant bodies care for their families “back home” through remittances and fathering from afar. Families “divided by borders” and existing “here and there” are emergent structures that meet the needs of capitalist production. These arrangements, however, come with considerable costs for transnational families. The painful paradoxes of return migrant fathers make visible how migrant men are profoundly connected to reproduction, thereby destabilizing the naturalized discourse of (male) migrant-as-hero and provider, individuals relegated to (trapped in?) the productive sphere. Drawing on Núñez Noriega (2007, 50), we argue that this homogenizing discourse assumes migrant fathers are unemotional providers, unaffected by the vast geographical and emotional distances that can develop between them and their children. This assumption marginalizes fathers like Pedro and Ignacio who desire to be physically and emotionally present for their children.

Acknowledging how hybrid fathering shapes the gendered subjectivities of return migrant men-as-fathers reveals another way in which affect articulates with capital accumulation and borders (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Drawing from Besserrer Alatorre’s (2014) insights into the political economy of emotions, it becomes clearer how the contradictory sentimental logic of transnational fatherhood serves as a productive force through the disciplining of laboring subjects in cross-border contexts. Hybrid fatherhood illuminates how migrants like Omar and Pedro make sense of their absence from their families because they desire to work hard to care for them through sending remittances. To the extent that men want to have relational fathering experiences, the US-Mexico border regime dispossesses them—and their families—of that experience.

Contextualizing transnational hybrid fatherhood within forced migration conditions and the billions of dollars remitted by migrants to Mexico each year reveals how this uneven exchange requires masculinities that celebrate economic provision and a caring fatherhood, ensuring that remittances are sent to maintain families. From the perspective of US firms, transnational fathers are disposable laborers. However, to the extent that these fathers live their labor as proud (and absent) fathers during their most productive years, the transnational family can accommodate (more or less) the toll that separation takes on family relations.

Acknowledgments. We would like to thank the Zapotitecas/os who have shared their lives with us over many years in Mexico and the United States. We are grateful for the insightful comments and suggestions from three anonymous reviewers and the editors, Dr. Carmen Martínez Novo and Dr. Juan Carlos Callirgos, who helped us clarify and strengthen the article. We also thank Jaqueline Flores Alvarez for her valuable feedback on an early draft of this article. The research for this article was supported by the Mexican National Science and Technology Council (CONACYT) project number CV-22008-01-00102222.

References

- Aguirre-Sulem, Evelyn Puga. 2015. "From Elders' Wisdom to Brave Migrants: Transformation and Conflict in the Performance of Indigenous Mexican Masculinities." *Men and Masculinities* 18 (1): 30–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14555278>.
- Andrews, Abigail. 2023. *Banished Men: How Migrants Endure the Violence of Deportation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Andrews, Abigail, and Nazanin Shahrokni. 2014. "Patriarchal Accommodations: Women's Mobility and Policies of Gender Difference from Urban Iran to Migrant Mexico." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 43 (2): 148–175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241613516628>.
- Ballesteros Gómez, Karla Gissel. 2022. "Repensando la paternidad como migrante indocumentado, encuentros y desencuentros: Caso, migrantes de El Nith Ixmiquilpan Hidalgo en Clearwater, Florida." In *De la paternidad a las paternidades en la trayectoria de vida: Contextos, significados y experiencias*, edited by María Salguero Velazquez and Angélica Rodríguez Abad, 181–202. Tlaxcala, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala.
- Besserrer Alatorre, Federico. 2014. "Regímenes de sentimientos y la subversión del orden sentimental: Hacia una economía política de los afectos." *Nueva Antropología* 27 (81): 55–76.
- Binford, Leigh. 2004. *La economía política de la migración internacional en Puebla y Veracruz: Siete estudios de caso*. Edited by Leigh Binford. Puebla, Mexico: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades.
- Binford, Leigh. 2013. *Tomorrow We're All Going to the Harvest: Temporary Foreign Worker Programs and Neoliberal Political Economy*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Boehm, Deborah A. 2016. *Returned: Going and Coming in an Age of Deportation*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Bonino, Luis. 2003. "Las nuevas paternidades." *Cuadernos de trabajo social* 16: 171–182.
- Bridges, Tristan, and C. J. Pascoe. 2014. "Hybrid Masculinities: New Directions in the Sociology of Men and Masculinities." *Sociology Compass* 8 (3): 246–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12134>.
- Broughton, Chad. 2008. "Migration as Engendered Practice: Mexican Men, Masculinity, and Northward Migration." *Gender and Society* 22 (5): 568–589. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243208321275>.
- Canales, Alejandro I. 2015. "The Debate on Migration and Development: Evidences and Contributions from Latin America." *Latin American Research Review* 50 (1): 29–53. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2015.0016>.
- Carling, Jørgen, Cecilia Menjívar, and Leah Schmalzbauer. 2012. "Central Themes in the Study of Transnational Parenthood." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38 (2): 191–217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2012.646417>.
- Carsten, Janet. 2000. "Introduction: Cultures of Relatedness." In *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*, edited by Janet Carsten, 1–36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chávez, Sergio, Heather B. Edelblute, and Elizabeth Korver-Glenn. 2016. "Life on the Edge: Balancing Gendered and Occupational Identities among Unauthorized Mexican Migrant Roofers." *Qualitative Sociology* 39 (2): 125–146. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-016-9326-7>.
- Cohen, Deborah. 2006. "From Peasant to Worker: Migration, Masculinity, and the Making of Mexican Workers in the US." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 69 (1): 81–103. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547906000056>.
- Connell, R. W., and James Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society* 19 (6): 829–859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.
- Cordero Diaz, Blanca Laura. 2007. *Ser trabajador transnacional: Clase, hegemonía y cultura en un circuito migratorio internacional*. Puebla, Mexico: ICSyH-BUAP.
- Cypher, James M., and Raúl Delgado Wise. 2011. *Mexico's Economic Dilemma: The Developmental Failure of Neoliberalism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- D'Aubeterre, María Eugenia, Alison Elizabeth Lee, and María Leticia Rivermar Pérez. 2020. *Class, Gender and Migration: Return Flows between Mexico and the United States in Times of Crisis*. London: Routledge.
- De Genova, Nicholas. 2005. *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Delgado Wise, Raúl, and Humberto Márquez Covarrubias. 2008. "Capitalist Restructuring, Development and Labour Migration: The Mexico-US Case." *Third World Quarterly* 29 (7): 1359–1374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590802386542>.
- Dreby, Joanna. 2015. *Everyday Illegal: When Policies Undermine Immigrant Families*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Durand, Jorge. 2004. "From Traitors to Heroes: 100 Years of Mexican Migration Policies." *Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute*, March 1, 1–5.
- Figueroa, Juan Guillermo. 2017. "Si 'las mujeres dan vida', ¿qué aportan los varones en los espacios reproductivos? Algunas reflexiones entre la ética, la demografía y el análisis lingüístico." In *¡A Toda madre! Una mirada multidisciplinaria a las maternidades en México*, edited by Abril Saldaña Tejeda, Lilia Venegas Aguilera, and Tine Davids, 275–305. Mexico City: Ítaca.

- Fitting, Elizabeth. 2011. *The Struggle for Maize: Campesinos, Workers and Transgenic Corn in the Mexican Countryside*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Fitzgerald, David. 2009. *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages Its Migration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fouratt, Caitlin E. 2017. "Love for the Land: Remittances and Care in a Nicaraguan Transnational Community." *Latin American Research Review* 52 (5): 792–806. <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.248>.
- Fuller, Norma. 2000a. "Introducción." In *Paternidades en América Latina*, edited by Norma Fuller, 11–32. Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.
- Fuller, Norma. 2000b. *Paternidades en América Latina*. Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.
- Fuller, Norma. 2022. "Paternidades revisadas: Las relaciones padres hijos vistas desde los milénicos." In *De la paternidad a las paternidades en la trayectoria de vida: Contextos, significados y experiencias*, edited by María Alejandra Salguero Velázquez and Angélica Rodríguez Abad, 102–113. Tlaxcala, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Gomberg-Muñoz, Ruth. 2010. *Labor and Legality: An Ethnography of a Mexican Immigrant Network*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gutmann, Matthew C. 1996. *"The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City"*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hershberg, Rachel M., and M. Brinton Lykes. 2019. "Fathering within Transnational and Mixed-Status Mayan Families: An Exploratory Study." *International Perspectives in Psychology: Research, Practice, Consultation* 8 (2): 59–77. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ipp0000104>.
- Heyman, Josiah McC. 2014. "'Illegality' and the US-Mexico Border: How It Is Produced and Resisted." In *Constructing Immigrant "Illegality": Critiques, Experiences, and Responses*, edited by Cecilia Menjivar and Daniel Kanstroom, 111–135. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette, and Ernestine Avila. 1997. "'I'm Here, but I'm There': The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood." *Gender and Society* 11 (5): 548–571.
- Inhorn, Marcia C, Wendy Chavkin, and José-Alberto Navarro. 2014. *Globalized Fatherhood*. Fertility, Reproduction and Sexuality. New York: Berghahn Books. <https://udlap.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=688221&lang=es&site=eds-live>.
- Lee, Alison Elizabeth. 2008. "'Para salir adelante': The Emergence and Acceleration of International Migration in New Sending Areas of Puebla, Mexico." *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 13 (1): 48–78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-7180.2008.00004.x>.
- Lee, Alison Elizabeth. 2018. "US-Mexico Border Militarization and Violence: Dispossession of Undocumented Laboring Classes from Puebla, Mexico." *Migraciones Internacionales* 9 (35): 213–238.
- Leinaweaver, Jessaca. 2013. "Toward an Anthropology of Ingratitude: Notes from Andean Kinship." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55 (3): 554–578. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417513000248>.
- Leinaweaver, Jessaca. 2014. "Transnational Fathers, Good Providers, and the Silences of Adoption." In *Globalized Fatherhood*, edited by Marcia C. Inhorn, Wendy Chavkin, and José-Alberto Navarro, 81–102. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Levine, Elaine. 2015. "Why Did Mexico United-States Migration Begin to Decrease in 2008?" *Problemas del Desarrollo* 46 (182): 1–15.
- Mahler, Sarah, and Patricia R Pessar. 2001. "Gendered Geographies of Power: Analyzing Gender Across Transnational Spaces." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 7 (4): 441–459.
- Mezzadra, Sandro, and Brett Neilson. 2013. *Border as Method, or, The Multiplication of Labor*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Montes, Veronica. 2013. "The Role of Emotions in the Construction of Masculinity: Guatemalan Migrant Men, Transnational Migration, and Family Relations." *Gender and Society* 27 (4): 469–490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243212470491>.
- Núñez Noriega, Guillermo. 2007. "La producción de conocimientos sobre los hombres como sujetos genéricos. reflexiones epistemológicas." In *Sucede que me canso de ser hombre... Relatos y reflexiones sobre hombres y masculinidades en México*, edited by Ana Amacháustegui and Ivonne Szasz, 39–71. Mexico City: El Colegio de México.
- Olavarria, José. 2001. *Y todos querian ser (buenos) padres: Varones de Santiago de Chile en conflicto*. Santiago, Chile: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO).
- Olavarria, José. 2003. "Los estudios sobre masculinidades en América Latina: Un punto de vista." *Anuario Social y Político en América Latina y el Caribe* 6: 91–98.
- Ordóñez, Juan Thomas. 2015. *Jornalero: Being a Day Laborer in the United States*. Oakland: University of California Press.

- Parrini Roses, Rodrigo. 2000. "Los poderes del padre: paternidad y subjetividad masculina." In *Masculinidad/es: Identidad, sexualidad y familia*, edited by José Olavarría and Rodrigo Parrini, 69–78. Santiago, Chile: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO).
- Pribilsky, Jason. 2012. "Consumption Dilemmas: Tracking Masculinity, Money and Transnational Fatherhood between the Ecuadorian Andes and New York City." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38 (2): 323–343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2012.646429>.
- Randles, Jennifer. 2018. "'Manning Up' to Be a Good Father: Hybrid Fatherhood, Masculinity, and US Responsible Fatherhood Policy." *Gender and Society* 32 (4): 516–539. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218770364>.
- Rivera Sánchez, Liliana. 2019. *¿Volver a casa? Migrantes de retorno en América Latina. Debates, tendencias y experiencias divergentes*. Mexico City: El Colegio de México.
- Rodríguez Abad, Angélica. 2019. "La construcción social de la paternidad en varones de contextos rurales de Morelos, México." *Antropología Cuadernos de Investigación* 21: 12–26.
- Rojas Martínez, Olga Lorena. 2008. *Paternidad y vida familiar en la Ciudad de México: Un estudio del desempeño masculino en los procesos reproductivos y en la vida cotidiana*. Mexico City: El Colegio de México.
- Salguero Velásquez, Alejandra. 2006. "Identidad, responsabilidad familiar y ejercicio de la paternidad en varones del Estado de México." *Papeles de Población* 12 (48): 155–179.
- Salguero Velázquez, María Alejandra, Diana Isela Córdoba Basulto, and Salvador Sapién López. 2014. "Dificultades, malestares y quejas de algunos hombres sobre su paternidad." *Revista Electrónica de Psicología Iztacala* 17 (2): 455–480.
- Sandoval-Cervantes, Iván. 2022. *Oaxaca in Motion: An Ethnography of Internal, Transnational, and Return Migration*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Schmalzbauer, Leah. 2015. "Temporary and Transnational: Gender and Emotion in the Lives of Mexican Guest Worker Fathers." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 (2): 211–226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.857033>.
- Souralová, Adéla, and Hana Fialová. 2017. "Where Have All the Fathers Gone? Remarks on Feminist Research on Transnational Fatherhood." *Norma* 12 (2): 159–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2017.1341461>.
- Torre Cantalapiedra, Eduardo, and Maritza Rodríguez Gutiérrez. 2020. "Resignificar la paternidad: Afectividad, pérdidas y malestares en padres separados de sus hijos después de la deportación." In *Nuevas aristas en el estudio de la paternidad*, edited by Juan Guillermo Figueroa and Alejandra Salguero, 187–222. Mexico City: El Colegio de México.
- Wentzell, Emily. 2013. "'I Don't Want to Be Like My Father.' Masculinity, Modernity, and Intergenerational Relationships in Mexico." In *Transitions and Transformations: Cultural Perspectives on Aging and the Life Course*, edited by Caitrin Lynch and Jason Danely, 64–75. New York: Berghahn Books.

Alison Elizabeth Lee is an associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at the Universidad de las Américas Puebla. Her research focuses on Mexican migration to the United States, return migration, transit migration in Mexico, gender, and borders.

Mario Alberto Macías-Ayala is a PhD candidate in anthropology at the University of Arizona in Tucson, United States. His research focuses on the acceleration of migration between Mexico and the United States, return migration, and the reintegration of returnees into their communities.

Cite this article: Lee, Alison Elizabeth, and Mario Alberto Macías-Ayala (2025). "To Separate Myself from Them, I Think I Will Feel Great Sadness": Transnational Fatherhood and Border Regimes in Central Mexico. *Latin American Research Review* 60, 98–114. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2024.37>