International Migration and Social Transformation in the Neoliberal Era: 
A Case Study of Mixtecos as Indigenous People in Mexico and Irregular Migrants in the US

Magdalena Arias Cubas

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
The University of Sydney
June 2017
Table of Contents

Statement of Originality ........................................................................................................... vi
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................... vii
Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ viii
List of Tables ............................................................................................................................... x
List of Figures .............................................................................................................................. x
Acronyms ........................................................................................................................................ xi

1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Background ........................................................................................................................ 1
   1.2 Design and Aims ............................................................................................................... 3
   1.3 Case Study ........................................................................................................................ 5
   1.4 Structure ............................................................................................................................ 6

2 Theoretical Foundations ........................................................................................................... 11
   2.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 11
   2.2 An Overview of Migration Theory ..................................................................................... 12
   2.3 Migration and ‘Development’ in the 21st Century ............................................................... 14
   2.4 The Concept, Subject, Place and Timing of Analysis ......................................................... 16
   2.5 The Production of Migration Knowledge .......................................................................... 19
   2.6 The ‘Expert’ in Migration Studies ...................................................................................... 22
   2.7 Theoretical Propositions .................................................................................................... 27
       2.7.1 Migration as a Component of Social Transformation Processes ................................. 28
       2.7.2 Migration vis-à-vis a Broad Capabilities-Based Approach ....................................... 31
   2.8 Conclusion ........................................................................................................................ 34

3 Methodological Framework .................................................................................................... 37
   3.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 37
   3.2 Background to this Thesis ............................................................................................... 37
   3.3 Methodological Principles ............................................................................................... 39
       3.3.1 Problematising the Nation-State ................................................................................. 39
       3.3.2 Linking Biography to History ..................................................................................... 41
       3.3.3 Tracing the Histories, Experiences and Agency of Participants ................................. 42
   3.4 Fieldwork Setting .............................................................................................................. 44
   3.5 How Data Was Gathered and Used ................................................................................... 46
       3.5.1 Primary Research ....................................................................................................... 47
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>The Differentiated Impact of Economic, Political and Social Changes</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>The Analytical Salience of Distribution, Representation and Recognition</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>The Additive and Intersectional Nature of Inequalities Within and Across Borders</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Existing Expressions of Agency and Plausible Avenues of Solidarity</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Limitations and Directions for Future Research</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>Closing Remarks</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statement of Originality

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Magdalena Arias Cubas
27.06.17
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of numerous people. Foremost, I am grateful to my supervisor Stephen Castles for your patience and guidance over the last couple of years. You have been the best example of what an academic and a supervisor should be, and I feel honoured to have been able to work with you during my doctorate. I am also very grateful to my associated supervisor Tim Anderson for your ongoing encouragement and your ability to criticise me in the most constructive and generous of ways. My heartfelt thanks go also to Elsa Koleth, Chulhyo Kim, Derya Ozkul and Rebecca Williamson for the opportunity to learn from you and for the many times you looked after me and you laughed with me. I am also indebted to Elizabeth Hill and Ellie Vasta. In all honesty, I have always felt very lucky to have your support. Thank you also to Justin Peñafiel, Emma To, Chris Marcatili, Matt Withers, Sohoon Lee, Daniel Thyer and Harni Kartika for sharing some of the ups and downs of this time with me. A special mention also goes to Chris for proofreading my work.

I am also indebted to those that supported me while conducting fieldwork in Mexico and the US. I am grateful to members of the FIOB in Los Angeles, to Tacho Rivera and to Dorita Cruz for all of your help in the initial stages of my research in California and Oaxaca. I will be forever obliged to Jesus Estrada and Francisco Lozano in Santa Maria, and to Juana Chavez and Suplicia Chavez in Piñas for going out of your way in supporting my work. In particular, thank you Don Jesus for everything you did. I am also thankful to those families that opened their homes to me: the Arce family in Mexico City, the Chavez family in Piñas, the Cruz family in Huajuapan de León and to the Flores and Rodriguez families in Santa Maria. Thank you Angel, Aris, Junior, Yesenia, Leidy, Benjamin, Judith, Joel, Eli, Misael, and Cesar for making me feel so welcome at all times. Finally, I am grateful to all those people that participated in the project. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me, and thank you for sharing some of your histories and experiences with me.

Finally, my gratitude goes also to my family. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to Male Cubas, Raúl Arias, John Sweeney, Magda Cortina, Maria Manning and Henry Maas. And thank you Cailin Maas for your unconditional love, insightful contributions, endless encouragement and big-hearted support. None of this would have been possible without you by my side.
Abstract

Building on a critique of dominant readings of the migration-development nexus, this thesis investigates the relationship between migration and social transformation in the context of increasingly universal relationships of power and inequality shaping the neoliberal era. Empirically, it focuses on the case study of Mixteco participants in Piñas (Oaxaca, Mexico) and Santa Maria (California, US) and draws from their histories, experiences and agency as Indigenous people in Mexico and ‘irregular’ migrants in the US. In doing so, this thesis demonstrates that important insights into contemporary migration flows can be gained by situating migration in a more general understanding of society that engages with issues of distribution, representation and recognition. From this perspective, the focus of analysis moves away from an examination of the ‘benefits’ of migration to places of ‘origin’, and towards an investigation into the economic, political and social relationships and institutions that are conducive or detrimental to the mobility (or immobility) of an individual or group, and to their overall wellbeing within and across borders.

Theoretically, this thesis emphasises the benefits of re-embedding migration studies in broader social theory to gain a substantive understanding of social change and of key deprivations and asymmetries that affect the mobility and wellbeing of Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants. This draws primarily from the theoretical work of Polanyi (2001 [1944]) on social transformations and the work of Sen (1999) and Fraser (1998; 2005) on a broad capabilities-based approach. A mixed-methods, multi-scalar approach was used to gain insights into these complex issues, with research conducted in Mexico and the US in 2012-2013. This involved a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant and site observation and participatory photography in the local areas of Piñas and Santa Maria; semi-structured interviews with key informants across Oaxaca and California; and analysis using academic and non-academic secondary research material.

This thesis finds that the contemporary migration of Mixtecos is linked to historical and ongoing processes that have progressively transformed Indigenous communities in rural areas of Mexico and the US. Amid these changes, a conceptual focus on economic distribution, political representation and social recognition captures many of the actual challenges and opportunities faced by Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants. This is significant for two interrelated reasons: first, because this focus on existing asymmetries and deprivations uncovers that those
who migrate (and those who remain immobile) are essentially moving between societies that are stratified by factors such as ethnicity and migration status and this effectively enables or constrains the opportunities available to them; and second, because this focus on distribution, representation and recognition reveals the existence of commonalities between groups that have been confronted – to varying degrees and scales – by increasing commodification and inequality within and across borders. In the case of participants, this is evidenced by the devaluation of Indigenous land and labour in Oaxaca, in parallel with the incorporation of ‘irregular’ migrants as a source of cheap and flexible labour in the industrial agricultural fields of California and north-west Mexico. Similarly, as groups that have traditionally been left out under the liberal ideal of the nation-state, their lack of political inclusion at the national level filters down to produce qualitatively different experiences of time and space and an ongoing uncertainty about their mobility and employment. Likewise, and against an increasing emphasis on self-reliance and individual responsibility, Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants are being targeted by punitive welfare policies that reinforce their vulnerability and exclusion from social life.

Finally, this thesis finds that despite significant barriers, the agency of participants filters through multiple scales that are mediated by social relations such as gender and age. They face specific challenges that are negotiated through cultural patterns and historical experiences as exemplified by the ongoing salience of community systems of customary law or by the development of Indigenous-led organisations. Similarly, while the nation-state remains a key economic, political and social unit, specific developments at the ‘state’ and ‘local’ level provide participants with opportunities to manoeuvre beyond strict ‘national’ boundaries. Lastly, while this thesis is framed through the lenses of ethnicity and migration status, its findings demonstrate that women’s and children’s experiences of change, their incorporation into migration, and their agency in the Mexican and US contexts differ from that of adult males in significant ways that reveal important additional inequalities.

Ultimately, the experiences of participants are not entirely unique. Mixtecos are neither the only Indigenous or ethnic minority in the world, nor are they the only group to engage in ‘irregular’ migration. This case study thus elucidates the necessity for conceptual frameworks that analyse migration as part of broader processes of social transformation while unequivocally engaging with existing economic, political and social inequalities in a specific time and context. As this thesis demonstrates, this is particularly poignant for those that have migrated, or have remained immobile, under increasingly precarious conditions.
List of Tables

Table 1. Interview Participants in Piñas ................................................................. 49
Table 2. Interview Participants in Santa Maria ...................................................... 50
Table 3. Focus Group Participants ...................................................................... 51
Table 4. Participatory Photography Participants .................................................. 53
Table 5. Interviews with Key Informants ............................................................... 54

List of Figures

Figure 1. Piñas (Oaxaca) and Santa Maria (California) ........................................... 45
Figure 2. Key Multi-Dimensional Poverty Indicators .............................................. 66
Figure 3. Agricultural Fields in California ............................................................ 69
Figure 4. Population Change in Piñas between 1990-2010 .................................... 71
Figure 5. Returned Female Migrant Harvesting Coffee ......................................... 74
Figure 6. US Dollars and Mexican Pesos .............................................................. 77
Figure 7. San Quintín (Baja California), Culiacán (Sinaloa) and Hermosillo (Sonora) .............................................................................................................. 78
Figure 8. Agricultural Fields in Piñas .................................................................... 86
Figure 9. Harvest of Coffee in Piñas ...................................................................... 88
Figure 10. Strawberry Fields in Santa Maria ......................................................... 90
Figure 11. Catholic Church in Piñas ...................................................................... 95
Figure 12. A Family of Migrants in Santa Maria ................................................... 100
Figure 13. Cornfields in Piñas .............................................................................. 113
Figure 14. Bills and More Bills in Santa Maria ....................................................... 117
Figure 15. Work During the Off-Season in Santa Maria ........................................ 121
Figure 16. Access to Health Care in Santa Maria ................................................ 124
Figure 17. Mixteco Activists in Santa Maria ........................................................... 132
Figure 18. Children left Behind in Piñas ............................................................... 145
Figure 19. Employment Opportunities for 'Irregular' Migrants ............................. 147
Figure 20. Oaxaca’s Civil Registry in Santa Maria ................................................ 152
Figure 21. Impounded Cars in Santa Maria .......................................................... 155
Figure 22. The Redistribution of Work and Responsibilities in Piñas .................. 180
Figure 23. Schools and Children in Santa Maria .................................................. 184
Figure 24. Students' Ideas of Migration ............................................................... 186
Acronyms

ALRA Agricultural Labour Relations Act
CBDIO Binational Centre for the Development of Oaxacan Indigenous Communities
CDI National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples
CONASUPO National Company for Popular Subsistence
CONEVAL National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy
CRLA California Rural Legal Assistance
DACA Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
DGEI General Department of Indigenous Education
DHS Department of Homeland Security
EZLN Zapatista Army of National Liberation
FBI Federal Bureau of Investigation
FVH Fruit, vegetable and horticultural crops
FIOB Binational Front of Indigenous Organisations
FLSA Fair Labour Standards Act
FOCOICA Oaxacan Federation of Indigenous Communities and Organisations in California
GCIM Global Commission on International Migration
GED General Educational Development
GFMD Global Forum on Migration and Development
ICA International Coffee Agreement
ICE Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IIRIRA Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act
IJA Church of Jesus Christ of the Americas
ILC International Labour Organisation
IME Institute for Mexicans Abroad
IMR International Migration Review
INEGI National Institute of Statistics and Geography
INI National Indigenist Institute
INMECAFE Mexican Coffee Institute
IOAM Oaxacan Institute for Attention to Migrants
IRCA Immigration Reform and Control Act
JEMS Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NLRA</td>
<td>National Labour Relations Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>National Action Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCME</td>
<td>Program for Mexican Communities Abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>Institutional Revolutionary Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROCAMPO</td>
<td>Program for Direct Assistance in Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRWORA</td>
<td>Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAGARPA</td>
<td>Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEP</td>
<td>Secretariat of Public Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STIM</td>
<td>Social Transformation and International Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFW</td>
<td>United Farm Workers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the relationship between migration and social transformation in the context of existing economic, political and social inequalities in the neoliberal era by building on a critique of dominant readings of the migration-development nexus. Empirically, this thesis draws from the case study of Mixteco participants in San Juan Piñas (Oaxaca, Mexico) and Santa Maria (California, US). Building on an analysis of their histories, experiences and agency as Indigenous people in Mexico and ‘irregular’ migrants in the US, this thesis also emphasises that important insights can be gained by using a conceptual framework that stresses a deep understanding of the societies involved, and which highlights the links between migration and widespread relationships of power and inequality as occurring in a specific time and context. Theoretically, this thesis points out the benefits of re-embedding migration studies in broader social theory to gain a substantive understanding of social change and of key deprivations and asymmetries that affect the mobility and wellbeing of participants. This draws from the contributions of multiple migration scholars who have emphasised the need for a more inclusive, comprehensive, and human-centred research agenda. It also draws from the work of Karl Polanyi (2001 [1944]) on social transformations and the work of Amartya Sen (1999) and Nancy Fraser (1998; 2005) on a broad capabilities-based approach. In doing so it builds an analytical framework to conceptualise the relationship between migration and broader processes of neoliberal social transformation, and to evaluate the affect existing social, economic and political asymmetries and deprivations have on people’s ability to lead the kind of lives they want. This chapter introduces the background, design and aims, case study and the overall structure of this thesis.

1.1 Background

The relationship between migration and ‘development’ rose to notoriety over the last decade as ever more researchers, organisations and governments sought to once again elucidate the potential benefits brought by the migration of people across borders. This new interest constructed an assessment of ‘development’ as a unidirectional economic process intrinsically linked to migration. Not only could the movement of people aid the ‘development’ of countries and communities of ‘origin’ through the transfer of economic and social remittances, but this same process of ‘development’ could also reduce pressures to emigrate by tackling some of the root-causes of migration. Indeed, the emergence of remittances as the so-called ‘new development mantra’ (Kapur 2004) signalled an era in which research and policies targeting the link between migration and ‘development’ grew emphatically. These ‘hegemonic readings of the
migration–development nexus’ (Raghuram 2009, p. 107) appropriately highlighted the important contribution of economic remittances to the daily lives of countless people throughout the world, and the prominence of many migrants as agents of social change in their countries and communities of ‘origin’. However, this authority also obscured many other important discussions.

The original focus of this thesis was to reframe this debate beyond the contribution of economic remittances to places of ‘origin’ (namely in Indigenous communities in Oaxaca, Mexico). However, during the course of preliminary research and fieldwork it became increasingly clear that another issue required more urgent attention, namely it was necessary to re-embed the study of migration (and its so-called developmental causes and impacts) into a broader analysis of social, economic and political change that takes into account the interaction between migration and different forms of inequality occurring at multiple scales in the neoliberal era. From this perspective, the issue is not simply to look at the ‘benefits’ of migration in countries and communities of ‘origin’, but rather to look at the social, economic and political relations and institutions that are conducive or detrimental not only to the mobility (or immobility) of an individual or group, but also to their overall wellbeing in both places of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’.

The revised focus of this thesis is particularly relevant for understanding the histories, experiences and agency of those that have migrated, or have remained immobile, under increasingly precarious conditions. In the current era, entire populations – for instance ‘irregular’ migrants, asylum seekers, Muslims or Mexican migrants – have been portrayed and perceived as a problem or even as a threat; their mobility has been restricted and their wellbeing severely impacted. Yet at the same time the livelihoods of many have been damaged or undermined by the restructuring of economic and welfare systems, by the decline of systems of support based on kinship, or by ongoing conflicts and violence. For many women, for many people of colour, for many ethnic or religious minorities, for many people with disabilities, and for many ‘poor’ people from so-called ‘developing’ countries, moving across borders is as much of an opportunity as it a hardship. Very few – indeed only the lucky few – are able to migrate with their entire family to a new place that welcomes them; that extends them a degree of eligibility to education, health care and welfare; that provides them with the right to work under decent conditions; that provides them with a clear and accessible pathway to permanent residency or citizenship. Further, it is also only the lucky few who are able to have all of this where they are born. It is indeed this paradox that guides this thesis. As the case study of Mixteco participants in
Chapter 1: Introduction

Oaxaca and California illustrates, one can gain crucial knowledge of migration and broader social transformation processes by engaging with the experiences of those that are not equally and fully included in economic, political and social terms across geographical and social borders.

1.2 Design and Aims

Three fundamental and interconnected concerns influenced the design and aims of this thesis. Firstly, this thesis commenced during the peak of the migration-development debate, when numerous critics where already emphasising the shortcomings of the one-sided emphasis on remittances and the economic impacts of migration on places of ‘origin’. As explained in further detail in Chapter 2, critics noted: the confluence of policy and research at a time when the objective of ‘circularity’ and the rhetoric of a ‘triple-win’ assumed greater importance (Castles and Ozkul 2014; Faist 2008); the debate’s lack of detail to context specificity as demonstrated by the sparse attention given to the constraints and opportunities faced by ‘poor’ or marginalised (de Haan 2006; de Haan and Yaqub 2009) and by female migrants (Briones 2009a; Dannecker 2009); and the inadequate incorporation of insights from different disciplines and traditions which have long emphasised more nuanced and complex conceptualisations of ‘development’ and social change (de Haas and Rodriguéz 2010; Piper 2009; Raghuram 2009). Thus, the first aim of this thesis is to further unsettle the discussion of migration and ‘development’ by re-embedding the study of migration (and its so-called developmental causes and impacts) within broader academic and political debates and within specific historical and geographical contexts.

Furthermore, this thesis was developed as part of the Social Transformation and International Migration (STIM) Project. The central tenet of this project is that migration is not a result of social transformation, nor a cause of it, but an integral part of transformation processes that are taking place at multiple scales in the neoliberal era (Castles et al. 2015). The aim of this project has been to explore the links between global, national and local dimensions of social transformation and migration to facilitate a discussion of the ‘complexity, interconnectedness, variability, contextuality and multi-level mediations of migratory processes in the context of rapid global change’ (Castles 2010, p. 1566). As this thesis elaborates upon, key components of this social transformation – and of many forms of contemporary migration – have been the conditions of inequality of wealth and power that have reinforced the lack of inclusion of many individuals and groups (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008). This thesis argues that the most appropriate starting point for analysing contemporary migration is reflecting upon the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification which have accompanied
this transformation, without losing sight of persistent injustices within and between communities that have been perpetuated. With this in mind, the second aim of this thesis is to analyse migration in the context of broader economic, political and social relations and institutions that sustain or transform different forms of inequality at the local, national and transnational level.

Finally, this thesis is driven by interest in the histories, experiences and agency of Mixtecos in Oaxaca and California. This is related to the researcher’s own upbringing and childhood in Mexico, in particular in Huajuapan de León (hereafter Huajuapan) in la Mixteca in Oaxaca.¹ This interest is also driven by the growing academic literature that emphasises the distinctiveness and significance of Mixteco and Indigenous migrations in the current neoliberal era (Cornelius et al. 2009; Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004b; Kearney 2000; Stephen 2007; Velasco Ortiz and París Pombo 2014). Given that minorities tend to be excluded from most orthodox socioeconomic analysis (Nussbaum 2000) and that the nexus between Indigenous people and migration has been systemically overlooked in the international ‘development’ dialogue (IOM, 2008), the case study of Mixtecos provides important insights into the nature of contemporary migration flows vis-à-vis existing patterns of economic, political and social stratification shaping communities in Oaxaca and California. Against this background, the third and final aim of this thesis is to dissect the interconnections between the economic, political and social opportunities and challenges faced by Mixtecos as Indigenous people in Mexico and as (primarily ‘irregular’) migrants in the US.

Accordingly, this thesis was guided by the following set of research questions:

i. What are the characteristics of the social transformation that have taken place in Mexico and the US in recent decades? How have these transformations been experienced by Mixtecos at the local level?

ii. How has the mobility of Mixtecos developed and changed in this period? How can one best conceptualise the links between social transformation and migration in this context and time?

iii. What specific social, economic and political relations and institutions have been beneficial or averse to the mobility and the overall wellbeing of Mixtecos in both Mexico and the US? What continuities and breaks exist between patterns of stratification within and across national borders?

¹ Huajuapan is an important commercial town in la Mixteca region, where migrants and remittances became increasingly important since the 1990s.
iv. How can the insights revealed by the case study better inform theoretical and analytical approaches to the study of international migration in the neoliberal era?

1.3 Case Study

As stated, this thesis explores the histories, experiences and agency of Mixtecos, an Indigenous group from Oaxaca, many of who have migrated as ‘irregular’ migrants to work in the agricultural fields of California. This thesis particularly focuses on participants from San Juan Piñas (hereafter Piñas), a village in Oaxaca with a long history of internal and international migration, and their counterparts in Santa Maria, one of the main destinations for migrants from Piñas in the US. This focus on Mixtecos recognises that both the magnitude and the composition of migration flows between Mexico and the US have changed over the last few decades in the midst of broader processes of social transformation. Indeed, Mixtecos are just one of many Indigenous groups from Mexico’s south and south-east regions that have been increasingly migrating to the US (Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004b). As the case study of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria illustrate, this surge in international migration is neither simply the result of isolated changes in the village, the region or the country nor the sole cause of ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ changes in these spaces.

Importantly, this case study reveals that ethnicity and migration status are key to understanding not only the mobility of participants, but also the many opportunities and challenges they face as Indigenous people in Mexico and as ‘irregular’ migrant farmworkers in the US. In particular, relations and institutions that sustain forms of economic, political and social inequality to the detriment of Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants, not only impact their wellbeing in both places of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’, but also their aspirations and ability to migrate (Carling 2002). This emphasises that migration is not a unified process (Munck 2009), and that the interconnection between economic, social and political relations and institutions across borders deserves further attention. Indeed, there are important continuities between the many opportunities and challenges faced by participants in Piñas and Santa Maria that demand further scrutiny. This signals the need to analyse how people navigate a complex interweaving of economic, political and social stratification in both places of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’.

---

2 Mexico has one of the largest Indigenous populations of Latin America. To different extents, these are peoples who continue to speak their own languages (other than Spanish) and who continue to practice their own usos y costumbres (customary law) after more than 500 years of Spanish and mestizo rule. See Chapter 4 for a detailed explanation of this.
1.4 Structure

This thesis can be informally divided into 3 parts. The first (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) provides an overview of the theory and methodology guiding this research. Chapter 2 discusses the literature and theory that addresses the interplay between international migration and ‘development’. It then highlights the need to re-embed the study of migration (and its so-called developmental causes and effects) into a broader analysis of social, economic and political change that takes into account the interaction between migration and different forms of inequality occurring at multiple scales. This chapter in particular calls for a closer engagement with social theory that is more inclusive of the histories, experiences and agency of those that are not equally included in the neoliberal era, and a re-evaluation of both the production of knowledge and the standing of the ‘expert’ in migration studies to better reflect this focus. This chapter finally introduces the theoretical propositions guiding the rest of this thesis. It does so by building on the work of other migration scholars (see among others Anderson and Hughes 2015a; Castles and Delgado Wise 2008; de Haas and Rodríguez 2010; Delgado Wise et al. 2013; Hujo and Piper 2010b) and by integrating insights from broader social theory. In particular it draws from Polanyi (2001 [1944]) to emphasise that contemporary forms of migration can be understood in the context of the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification that have brought profound social, political and economic changes in almost all parts of the world. Similarly, it stresses that insights into the nature of contemporary migration flows (and contemporary societies) can be gained through a broad capabilities-based approach that builds on the work of Sen (1999) and Fraser (1998; 2005) and draws attention to existing social, economic and political asymmetries and deprivations and their impact on the wellbeing and mobility of Mixtecos.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of this thesis. Aside from providing important background information, this chapter explores three key interrelated methodological principles guiding this research. These principles emphasise the importance of (i) engaging with multiple scales, and the contradictions and synergies that exist between them; (ii) paying attention to the economic, social and political dimensions of migration and social change; and (iii) placing people – their actual histories, experiences and agency – at the centre of debates. In practice, this translates into a multi-scalar, multi-sited mixed-methods approach that is used to gather and analyse data. This includes a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant and site observation and participatory photography with participants in Piñas and Santa Maria, as well as semi-structured interviews with key informants in Oaxaca and California. This is complemented
by secondary research carried out at the national, state and community level, using qualitative and quantitative sources. This chapter finally addresses the main methodological challenges and shortcomings of this thesis and the strategies used to overcome them. These limitations include the complex relationship between the researcher – a mestizo, middle-class woman who no longer resides in Mexico – and Indigenous participants and associated barriers of trust and language; the difficulties encountered in avoiding a ‘gender’ bias in terms of the inclusion of female participants; the limited availability of reliable data to evaluate the wellbeing of participants (particularly with regards to the non-economic dimension of migration and social change); and the modest nature of the study due to time and budget constraints.

The second part (Chapter 4) presents a detailed discussion of the case study of Mixtecos in Piñas and Santa Maria. Chapter 4 addresses the following sets of questions. First, what are the characteristics of the social transformation that have taken place in Mexico and the US in recent decades? And how have these transformations been experienced by Mixtecos at the local level? Second, how has the mobility of Mixtecos developed and changed in this period? And how can one best conceptualise the links between social transformation and migration in this context and time? Moving from the general to the specific, this chapter initially provides an introduction to Mexico’s Indigenous population and the emergence of Indigenous migrations to the US. This is followed by a more detailed analysis of the development of migration flows from la Mixteca region in general, and from Piñas in particular. This chapter emphasises that the quantity and quality of Mixteco migration to the US cannot be understood in isolation from the long history of internal mobility related to environmental and economic factors. Yet, the large growth of emigration flows in recent years is better understood in the context of rapid and extensive change experienced as part of the broader processes of neoliberal social transformation taking place across Oaxaca and California, and also across Mexico and the US. This does not only include economic changes (such as the growth of industrial agriculture in northern Mexico and California and the decline of subsistence agriculture in Oaxaca), but also social ones (like the

---

3 The term mestizo (which translates roughly as ‘mixed’) is commonly used in Mexico and Latin America to describe people of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry. As further explained in Chapter 4, the distinction between mestizo and Indigenous is not only defined in terms of colour or ‘race’, but also in terms of a clear hierarchy of social, economic and political power.

4 At the national level, la Mixteca represents the region where Mixteco-speaking people have traditionally lived. This covers parts of Mexico’s southern states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla. As explained by Kearney (1994, p. 52), ‘this denomination is to a large extent, a construction of the colonial administrators, anthropologist, linguists and state agencies and thus it is not surprising that as a region, la Mixteca, has not been the basis of a collective identity’. At the state level, la Mixteca also represents an administrative region of the state of Oaxaca. Piñas is located in la Mixteca region in Oaxaca, which also informally forms part of the broader national region. See Chapter 4 for more detail.
emergence of Pentecostal churches in northern Mexico, California and Oaxaca) and political ones (such as the increasing securitisation and selectivity of migration policies across borders).

The third part of this thesis (Chapter 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7) engages further with the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco participants in Piñas and Santa Maria to illustrate some of the challenges and opportunities faced by them as Indigenous people in Mexico and ‘irregular’ migrants in the US. These chapters combined address the following sets of questions. First, what specific social, economic and political relationships and institutions have been beneficial or averse to the mobility and the overall wellbeing of Mixtecos in both Mexico and the US? And what continuities and breaks exist between existing patterns of stratification across the border? Second, how can the insights revealed by the case study better inform theoretical and analytical approaches to the study of international migration in the neoliberal era? Through a focus on specific forms of economic maldistribution, political misrepresentation and social misrecognition, these chapters emphasise that the expansion of the market economy, and associated processes of commodification that have accompanied this change, along with the persistence of inequalities within and between communities that have been sustained despite this change, have impacted the wellbeing and mobility of participants – as Indigenous peoples and ‘irregular’ migrants – in varying and significant ways. Before going any further it is important to clarify that this division between the ‘economic’, the ‘political’ and the ‘social’ holds primarily for analytical purposes. In practice, each of these chapters demonstrates the interconnections between these dimensions of social transformation and associated patterns of inequality. Similarly, while these chapters focus on the experiences of participants as Indigenous peoples and as ‘irregular’ migrants, it is important to emphasise the weight of other collectivities such as gender (which is explicitly addressed in Chapter 7), or class, religion, or sexuality (which are not). Indeed, it is most useful to think of the salience of intersectionality, where many people face vulnerabilities that echo the intersections of racism, xenophobia, misogyny, class oppression, zealotry, homophobia and more, to understand contemporary forms of inequality.

Chapter 5 focuses on issues of economic distribution and maldistribution. The meaning of this is delineated through a two-step process that draws from existing academic literature on the one hand, and from the lived experiences of participants – as Indigenous people and as ‘irregular’ migrants – on the other. Against this background of existing relations and institutions that sustain forms of economic maldistribution, this chapter emphasises a number of areas of concern. In particular, this chapter analyses the existing clash that results from the expansion of
Chapter 1: Introduction

the market economy and associated processes of commodification in Piñas and Santa Maria. In Piñas, concerns over maldistribution are centred on the fact that many non-profit-driven contributions of nature and labour are not counted (and thus are undervalued and undermined). In Santa Maria, concerns over maldistribution are centred on the fact that Mixteco migrants are merely counted as sources of labour, as factors of production that are subordinated to the ‘laws of the market’. This chapter finally delineates a conceptual point that highlights the need to question the way in which people respond to, adapt to or challenge processes of neoliberal social transformation in spite of existing forms of maldistribution. This advocates a conceptualisation of agency that is rooted in a critical understanding and explanation of social transformation processes as occurring in a particular time and context. Drawing from the examples of the reconfiguration of local systems of authority and reciprocity in Piñas and the development of broad-based Indigenous organisations in Santa Maria, this chapter demonstrates some of the ways in which the agency of Mixtecos is exerted in the current neoliberal era. Importantly, these examples reveal their agency in relation to the expansion of the market economy, without losing sight of their agency in relation to other hierarchies, exclusions and forms of domination (such as sexism and patriarchy) that remain central to current processes of social transformation.

Chapter 6 conversely focuses on issues of political representation and misrepresentation. This chapter follows the same two-step process described above to delineate the significance of representation in the setting of Indigenous people in Mexico and ‘irregular’ migrants in the US in the current era. This chapter discusses a number of issues of concern. In particular, it investigates the manner in which existing relations and institutions sustain forms of misrepresentation, which result in temporary uncertainties that affect participants’ mobility and work in Piñas and Santa Maria. This uncertainty can be seen as a micro expression of the limited ability of Indigenous people in Mexico and ‘irregular’ migrants in the US to participate in political choices that govern their lives in the neoliberal era. Lastly, and in the face of existing forms of political misrepresentation, this chapter draws a conceptual point that emphasises the importance of interrogating the reach and the limits of the nation-state. This does not deny that the nation-state remains an influential economic, social and political unit but it rather accentuates the importance of exploring the links between global, national, regional and local dimensions of social transformation and migration and how people navigate within and across these borders. This conceptual point in particular emphasises the inadequacies of existing ‘national’ policies when targeting minorities such as Mixteco migrants, and the manner in which participants
Chapter 1: Introduction

engage with alternative epistemologies and practices of citizenship and political participation that reach below and beyond the ‘national’.

Chapter 7 in turn concentrates on issues of social recognition and misrecognition. Following the same two-step approach that engages with theoretical and empirical detail to elucidate the meaning of social recognition, this chapter draws from the histories, experiences and agency of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria to highlight issues of concern. This chapter primarily questions the extent to which recent social policies that seek to ‘discipline’ certain populations through a system of reward and punishment are able to transform the relations and institutions which sustain the lack of inclusion of Indigenous people (and Indigenous women in particular) from social life. This points out the role these policies play in regulating Indigenous women’s reproduction and labour, while marginalising them in other ways. Finally, this chapter builds on previous discussions on misrecognition to emphasise that processes of social transformation and migration are mediated by a variety of social relations (such as gender and age). This highlights that Indigenous women’s or youths’ experiences of change, their incorporation into migration, and their agency in these contexts significantly differ from adult males. In particular, engagement with the experiences of these populations illustrates important inequalities and deprivations that reach beyond the boundaries of ethnicity or migration status and are central to understanding current processes of social transformation.

Finally, Chapter 8 discusses the significance of the findings each of the chapters in relation to one another and their broader theoretical and empirical implications. The chapter also considers the limitations and directions for future research.
2 Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the theoretical foundations guiding this thesis. Rooted in a critique of dominant readings of the migration-development nexus, this chapter emphasises the need to re-embed the study of migration into a broader analysis of social change that takes into account the interaction between migration and different economic, political and social asymmetries and deprivations occurring at the local, national and transnational level in the neoliberal era. This emphasises that while the dominant reading of the migration-development nexus has correctly highlighted the important contribution of economic remittances and the prominence of many migrants as agents of social change, it’s predominance has also simultaneously obscured many other important aspects of contemporary forms of mobility and immobility.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 2.2 provides an overview of key migration theories to highlight how they have engaged with notions of ‘growth’, ‘modernisation’, ‘industrialisation’ and ‘development’ that capture important aspects of broader social transformation processes. Section 2.3 looks in detail at the current focus on the so-called migration-development nexus. This engages with what has been described as its hegemonic readings; in other words, that which is most visible in academic and grey materials and which has grown to be synonymous with the ‘development-migration machinery’ (Raghuram, 2009). Section 2.4 demonstrates existing divergences and gaps in terms of the concept, subject, place and timing of analysis, while Section 2.5 and 2.6 engage more deeply with the epistemological and ontological roots of current theorising. Section 2.5 begins by interrogating the production of migration knowledge, and Section 2.6 continues by questioning the ‘experts’ and institutions behind this production. Building on this appraisal, Section 2.7 moves on to introduce the theoretical propositions guiding this research. This draws primarily from the theoretical work of Polanyi (2001 [1944]) on social transformations and the work of Sen (1999) and Fraser (1998; 2005) on a broad capabilities-based approach.5 Finally, Section 2.8 concludes by laying down a set of interrelated theoretical propositions to guide the empirical analysis of the histories, experiences and agency

---

5 While the intellectual and historical origins of these three bodies of theory are different, they can be combined to provide the foundation for a sound conceptual framework to analyse the relationship between migration and social transformation in the context of increasingly universal relationships of power and inequality shaping the neoliberal era. This is related to (i) the understanding of each theorist of the interconnection between the economic, social, and political dimension of society; (ii) their independent critique of the dangers of subordinating social arrangements and the wellbeing of people to the requirements of the market economy; and (iii) their emphasis on the role of effective freedoms in enabling the development of a more just and inclusive society. For an interesting discussion on the similarities and differences between their works, see Fraser’s interview with Chhachhi (2011).
of Mixteco participants in Piñas (Oaxaca, Mexico) and Santa Maria (California, US) in the context of the neoliberal era.

2.2 An Overview of Migration Theory

The relationship between migration and social transformation has long been the subject of academic debate. Indeed, a significant amount of migration research has focused on the inception and perpetuation of migration processes (Massey et al. 1998), which is linked – directly or indirectly – to broader changes in the economic, political and social realities of individuals, households, communities, countries and regions involved. There are by now numerous articles and books that provide critical reviews of migration theory (Arango 2004; de Haas 2014; King 2012; Massey et al. 1998). Drawing from this, one can retrospectively highlight common themes arising from the migration literature to build a picture of the manner in which migration scholars have historically engaged with notions of ‘growth’, ‘modernisation’, ‘industrialisation’ and ‘development’ that capture important aspects of broader social transformation processes.

It is not surprising that the analysis of the relationship between migration and these economic, political and social processes has changed considerably over time. Indeed, theory is said to have swung like a ‘pendulum’ between optimism and scepticism (de Haas 2008): at one end praising the impact of migration as a source of ‘development’, while at the other condemning it as a root and upshot of ‘underdevelopment’. Prior to the 1970s, there was a mainly positive perception of the relationship between migration and ‘development’: migration could benefit countries of ‘origin’ through income transfers and the reduction of labour surpluses (Castles 2008). Significantly, migration could also be instrumental in the transfer of ‘modern’ values, institutions and ideologies that contribute to the modernisation of less ‘developed’ regions (Faist 2014). The aforementioned optimistic view came to an end in the 1970s when, in a significant turn, migration became increasingly considered as a contributing factor to the ‘underdevelopment’ of ‘sending’ societies (Almeida 1973; Massey et al. 1998). Here migration was blamed for the harmful impact of the ‘brain drain’ (Adams 1969) and other disruptive forces on the functioning of ‘traditional’ communities and economies, while remittances were considered a contributing factor to the growth of conspicuous consumption in developing countries (Lipton 1980).

6 The dualism and inadequacy of designations such as ‘regular’/’irregular’ and ‘origin’/’destination’ needs to be questioned (King 2002). As with the term ‘development’, this chapter will use single quotations marks in order to problematise the reification of these designations.
These different positions to some extent reflect the division between functionalist and historical-structuralist approaches that reached beyond the scope of migration studies. At the risk of oversimplifying complex debates, the former can be identified by its emphasis on individual decision-making and utility maximisation while the latter can be recognised by its focus on systemic conditions of inequality and exploitation. Functionalist approaches have become closely associated with neoclassical theory (Harris and Todaro 1970; Ranis and Fei 1961; Todaro 1976). According to this theory, an uneven distribution of labour and capital results in migration from countries or regions where labour is abundant and wages are low, to places where labour is scarce and wages are higher. Migrants as individual, rational actors, move towards places where labour is scarcer and wages are higher on the basis of a cost-benefit calculation. It then follows that migration contributes to the reallocation of factors of production and the elimination of wage differentials thus rectifying the original inequalities that gave impetus to it in the first place.

In contrast, historical-structuralist approaches have become closely associated with dependency theory, which focused on the uneven and exploitative relations between a capitalist core and an agrarian periphery. Accordingly, and contrary to equilibrium models, migration was seen as one of the mechanisms through which inequalities were perpetuated and reinforced (Castles and Kosack 1973).

There have also been attempts to advance the debate beyond the limits of these approaches. Some theoretical explanations have focused on the conditions in countries of ‘origin’ or ‘destination’ as independent variables. Most famously, the new economics of labour migration (Stark and Bloom 1985; Stark and Taylor 1989) – which draws from neoclassical theory – conceptualised emigration processes in terms of household decision-making and risk mitigation. Dual labour market theory explained immigration processes as resulting from the demand for migrant labour in segmented labour markets of industrialised countries (Piore 1979). Other theories have overcome this ‘origin’/’destination’ divide. For instance, world systems theory (Sassen 1988) – which draws from dependency theory – argues that migration results from the dislocations caused by an expanding capitalist mode of production that expels people from their traditional ways of life in the periphery, who then become cheap sources of labour in core

---

7 Both approaches have been subject to criticism. Arango (2004) for instance argues that the Achilles heel of neoclassical theory lies in its inability to explain why so few migrate in practice in spite of the large inequality in wages between countries, while he criticises dependency theory due to its inability to explain migration differentials between structurally similar countries. De Haas (2014) has also highlighted that neither theory provides a realistic account of migratory agency: the first is unable to critically conceptualise how structural factors (e.g. culture, etc.) shape migration behaviour, while the latter tends to neglect the agency of migrants in the face of these structural factors. In other words, the former portrays migrants as independent of such constrains, while the latter ties them down to them.
countries. In addition, networks theory (Mines 1981) highlights the sets of interpersonal relations that connect individuals and communities at places of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’ and which facilitate migration through the sharing of information, the provision of financial assistance and other forms of support. In this context, the value of a ‘single all-embracing’ theory of migration has also been questioned (Portes 1997a; Portes and DeWind 2004) while the focus of research has also shifted towards understanding the ‘experiences’ or ‘cultures’ of migration (Chavez 1992; Cohen 2004) and the existence of transnational communities or translocal spaces (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Portes et al. 1999). In sum, recent developments include a broader engagement with migration processes which recognise the role of households and collectives as both decision-makers and beneficiaries; the importance of factors – other than income – as determinants and consequences of migration; the general rooting of migration flows in more specific social, economic and political contexts; and the existence of a ‘third space’ that locates migrants between the ‘origin’/’destination’ divide and which recognises their ongoing bonds to places of ‘origin’.

2.3 Migration and ‘Development’ in the 21st Century

Against this background, the last two decades have seen the emergence of a strong emphasis on the explicit study of the relationship between migration and ‘development’. This new ‘mantra’ (Kapur 2004) is primarily driven by its emphasis on the benefits of individual and collective remittances – that is, monies transferred from countries of ‘destination’ to those of ‘origin’. While this may resemble a ‘striking level of amnesia’ of prior research (de Haas 2008, p. 1), studies again signal that migration – via remittances – acts as mechanism through which migrants and their families diversify and raise their incomes to the benefit of family members in the community of ‘origin’.8 While critics point out that these benefits are often restricted to those households who are able to engage in the migration process, thus perpetuating, if not increasing, inequality (Aparicio and Meseguer 2012; Fajnzylber and López 2007), advocates argue that poor non-migrant families benefit indirectly through the ‘economy-wide’ effects of remittance expenditure in migrant communities (de Haas 2008). At this broader meso-level, research also points at the stable character of remittances and their countercyclical nature, with remittances taking on a crucial insurance function in protecting migrant households against calamities such as economic crises and natural disasters (Aparicio and Meseguer 2012; de Haas 2007).

8 In the case of Mexico, research has shown that remittances can lower the share of population living in poverty by a small percentage (Fajnzylber and López 2007). Similarly, research has associated remittances with improved child health outcomes (Hildebrandt and McKenzie 2005; López-Cordova 2005) and higher educational retention (Hanson and Woodruff 2003).
Echoing past research, studies again indicate that migration – via social remittances, technology transfer and brain ‘circulation’ – can be instrumental in the transfer of values, institutions and technical knowledge that contribute to the ‘development’ of communities and countries of ‘origin’ (Lowell and Findlay 2002). In practice, this optimism has been linked to the re-implementation of temporary migration programs as providers of a win-win-win situation for countries of ‘origin’, migrants and countries of ‘destination’ (Castles and Ozkul 2014). Countries of ‘destination’ are said to benefit from the availability and flexibility of migrant workers, while migrants benefit from the economic and social opportunities of working abroad, and countries of ‘origin’ from the economic and social remittances brought by individual migrants and diasporas. This emphasis on a triple-win portrays a very unidirectional and uncomplicated link between temporary migration and ‘development’, which assumes that ‘economic development will reduce outmigration, encourage return migration, and create the conditions necessary to utilise the capital and know-how provided by diasporas’ (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008, p. 8).

The theorising of migration in general, and migration and ‘development’ in particular, has been paradoxical throughout this boom period. On the one hand, and aside from seminal work on the role of social remittances (Levitt 1998; 2001), the dominant reading of the migration-development nexus has been largely driven by empirical studies or policy-driven research. On the other hand, critics have been more committed to elaborating theoretical alternatives that highlight the less-recognised social and political dimensions of the nexus. The so-called ‘southern perspective’ (Aragonès 2013; Delgado Wise et al. 2013; Munck 2008) for instance argues for a critical evaluation of neoliberal globalisation which looks at the roots of migration and ‘development’ – as dialectical processes – recognising the contributions made by migrants to ‘destination’ countries, and the costs and impacts of migration on countries of ‘origin’, migrants and their families. In a similar vein, rights-based approaches (Castles 2011; Piper 2008c) highlight transnational issues of redistribution, social cohesion, equality, and rights as pivotal to the debate. Finally, others have incorporated notions of human ‘development’ and wellbeing to emphasise the potential of migration to enhance the real economic, political and social opportunities available to people in places of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’ (Briones 2009b; de Haas and Rodríguez 2010; Preibisch et al. 2016). It is the work of these academics that inspires and drives the theoretical framework of this thesis.
2.4 The Concept, Subject, Place and Timing of Analysis

If one thing can be said about the theory and knowledge of migration and the understanding of social transformation as ‘growth’, ‘modernisation’, ‘industrialisation’, and more recently as ‘development’ in the context of migration, it is that, after years of research, little consensus has been reached. Indeed, the evidence base for the link between migration and ‘development’ could be described as weak, unsettled and unresolved (Ellerman 2003; Newland 2007). This is partly due to conceptual and ideological differences and gaps between, and within, theories. This can be illustrated by questioning the ‘what’, ‘who’, ‘where’ and ‘when’ – that is, the concept, subject, place and timing – of analysis in distinct theoretical explanations. These four questions are in fact related to the ontological and epistemological roots of migration theories, an issue that in spite of its paramount significance has often been ignored in dominant conversations on the migration-development nexus.

First, while most – if not all – theories have been driven by notions of social change as modernisation, there are still outstanding issues regarding the concept of analysis or the ‘what’ question. At the simplest level, the attention given by specific theories to different aspects of this modernisation process not only resulted in divergent empirical analyses and theoretical conceptualisations but also in the illusory separation – and consequent neglect – of particular economic, social or political factors. This is especially evident in the neglect of social and political issues by functionalist explanations. On a deeper level though, such a focus on modernisation has left the key question of ‘what constitutes development’ mostly unanswered by migration scholars. Foremost, this reflects a gap between migration studies and the broader social sciences.

As it will be later discussed in detail, many of the key tenets of post-development and feminist critiques of ‘development’ have been poorly integrated into the core of migration studies. For example, one does well to question whether migration studies continue to treat ‘development’ as a ‘a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach that treats people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of “progress”’ (Escobar 1999, p. 384) or whether migration studies have been challenged by the critique that ‘the modes of thinking and action that pass for science and development, respectively, are not universal and humanly inclusive, [but are rather] projects of male, western origin, both historically and ideologically’ (Shiva 1989, p. xvi). Thus, migration studies lag behind more...
nuanced – and inclusive – understandings that challenge the limited western-centric, teleological and orthodox nature of conceptualising ‘development’ as ‘modernisation’.

Second, there is the issue of the subject of analysis, or the ‘who’. This is related to the unit of analysis embraced by separate theories, but also to their willingness – and ability – to recognise differences and inequalities between and within these units. While the causes and consequences of migration have been theorised at the individual or household level, this has also been done at the community, country, and even the regional level. This neglects the fact that what is ‘good’ for an individual is not always ‘good’ for the household, and what is ‘good’ for a household may not be ‘good’ for the community and so on (Sen 1999). In this context, choosing to focus on the individual rather than the community, or the region rather than the household, becomes a powerful factor dictating the manner in which migration and ‘development’ is empirically analysed and theoretically conceptualised. This is further complicated by the unwillingness – or inability – of individual theories to look beyond the aggregate and recognise differences and inequalities between and within these units. In other words, this issue is rooted in generalisation, which at best has served for elevating the status of empirical observations, and at worst has obscured severe inequalities among migrants as individuals and collectives.

While functionalist theories can be criticised for their ‘to the benefit of all’ stance (de Haas 2014), other theories likewise disappoint in their neglect of social and geographical differences. This issue is indeed closely linked to the feminist critiques of the androcentric nature of the migration literature and its failure to recognise the role of gender – and other social relations – as factors of stratification, as well as the existence of intra-household and regional inequalities (Piper 2008b). This shortcoming has also been highlighted with regards to the failure of migration research to recognise that the context in which the poor migrate (e.g. as ‘irregular’ migrants, etc.) generates particular developmental processes, constraints and opportunities (de Haan and Yaqub 2009). This has led to a debate in which only ‘particular forms of migration and certain kinds of development’ become visible (Raghuram 2009, p. 104).

A third limitation is related to the place of analysis, or the ‘where’ question. Many theoretical explanations of migration are situated along a misleading ‘origin’/’destination’ axis. In this context, the majority of studies of ‘development’ fall within the ‘origin’ side of the axis. By contextualising ‘development’ as a geographically bounded process, migration scholars have once again failed to overcome the container-space of the nation-state (Wimmer and Glick Schiller
This is problematic for three interconnected reasons. Foremost, this creates a false distinction between issues of integration, security or management in areas of ‘destination’, and issues of ‘development’ in areas of ‘origin’ (Zoomers et al. 2009). This disregards the impact that conditions in areas of ‘destination’ have on areas of ‘origin’ and vice versa. Furthermore, by locating ‘development’ on the ‘origin’ side of the axis, those at the other end of it – most significantly migrants – are left outside of the ‘development’ equation. This is a significant contradiction that bounds dominant discourses: while the subject of migration studies is the migrant, and it is her mobility that generates the entire domain of study, the conceptualisation of ‘development’ as occurring on the ‘origin’ side of the axis has buried interest in her own wellbeing in places of ‘destination’ (Raghuram 2009). Finally, this spatial separation between ‘destination’ and ‘origin’ emphasises a one-way relationship where migrants are said to contribute to the ‘development’ in places of ‘origin’ only. This fails to recognise the social, economic and political contributions that migrants make in places of ‘destination’ as well as other positive transfers (such as educational subsidies and social reproduction costs) that come from places of ‘origin’ (Delgado Wise and Gaspar Olvera 2012).

This is associated with the fourth space of disagreement that centres on the timing of analysis, or the ‘when’ question. The issue is grounded in causality: what comes first, migration or ‘development’? And under which conditions does one lead to the other? This is to say that most theorising on migration and ‘development’ presumes a causal and linear relationship between the two (although disagreement abounds in the direction of this causal relationship and on the nature of prescriptions to improve outcomes) (Raghuram 2009). Significantly, this linking of migration and ‘development’ through mechanisms of causality leads to a problem-solving logic: ‘if we can only work out and tackle the so-called “root causes” of international migration, we can drastically reduce it’ along with the ‘common sense’ message that ‘international migration (especially from South to North) is a bad thing that ought to be stopped’ (Castles 2008, p. 1).

This focus on causality is thus questionable as it assumes that certain forms of migration (in particular those that are constructed as normatively ‘bad’) can be contained or regulated, while ‘development’ is seen as teleological and normatively ‘good’. But this focus on causality is also dubious as it fails to capture the complex relationship between migration and broader processes of social transformation (Castles 2008; Raghuram 2009). One could say that the issue is not one of causality, but of context. For instance, ‘development’ may not lead to less migration in many cases, as people’s aspirations and real freedom to migrate increase as they gain more financial, educational and technological resources (de Haas 2010). This complex relationship between
migration and broader processes of social transformation is captured by Castles (2010, p. 1568) who argues that ‘the problem is not migration itself, but rather the conditions of inequality under which most South-North migration takes place … If there were less inequality (and therefore less poverty and human insecurity) there would not be less migration, but it would take place under very different circumstances’.

2.5 The Production of Migration Knowledge

Having reviewed some of the major theoretical developments on the topic, as well as some of the existing theoretical disagreements and gaps, it is pertinent to engage with the epistemological and ontological roots of such knowledge. There has been little questioning of the processes of knowledge-production about migration in general, and about migration and ‘development’ in particular. Indeed, ‘many studies on migration comment upon the lack of data and information but they rarely interrogate how this information is being analysed, circulated and used’ (Asis et al. 2010, p. 81). Knowledge on migration is created and reproduced both within broader theoretical paradigms and ideologies, and in the context of the formation of public policies (Castles 2008; Faist 2014). This implies that this knowledge is not ‘a set of disembodied practices, but also a located and historical entity … [which is] produced within, and may well be expressive of, the social hierarchies and inequalities of those who produce and circulate it’ (Raghuram 2006, p. 14). Just as history provides clear examples of the interaction between academic debates and broader institutional, ideological and political forces, it is important to emphasise that the more recent and on-going interest on the positive relationship between migration and ‘development’ in grounded in a specific political economy of knowledge-production.

The dominant knowledge on migration and ‘development’ has emerged within a highly institutionalised framework. Indeed, the ‘renewed interest in the impact of migration on development has burgeoned into a somewhat organised international debate’ (Newland 2007), particularly with regards to ‘the centrality that remittances have acquired on the agendas of the development establishment’ (Carling 2007, p. 45). As summed by Faist (2014, p. 115):

This is not to say that there were one-way streets between science and policy or public debates … What can be said with some certainty is that public policy drew

---

9 An instance of this is the ‘U-turn’ in thinking of the relationship between migration and ‘development’ in the 1970s and its association with both the disappointing long-term results of the European labour recruiting schemes and the general paradigm shift in social sciences towards structuralist views. As characterised by (Faist 2014, p. 113) this represented a “strange bedfellow” arrangement of both restrictive migration control … and a critical analysis of underdevelopment’ which resulted in portrayal of international migration as a social problem.
upon research concepts when suitable, and that academic research provided suitable models which were later (indirectly) used to justify a renewed emphasis on remittances.

The institutional interest in migration and ‘development’ is evidenced in the publication of numerous reports by the World Bank (2002; 2006), the International Organisation for Migration (2006) and the Inter-American Development Bank (Bate 2001; Inter-American Development Bank 2006; Terry and Steven 2005). The praise of migration, and remittances in particular, is also linked to changes in public policy; with host and home countries, and international organisations having increasingly encouraged the formation of policies that promote the ‘productive’ use of remittances and the use of formal channels for remittance transfers (Aparicio and Meseguer 2012; Faist 2014). This institutional focus has also coincided with the launch of the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) in 2003, the World Bank Research Group’s Research Program on International Migration and Development in 2004, the United Nations High-level Dialogue on Migration and Development in 2006 and 2013 and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) annually since 2007.

Importantly, this re-emergence of intellectual and policy interest on migration and ‘development’ arose in the context of dominant neoliberal ideology of ‘development’ and governance (Faist 2014). Indeed, the emphasis of much research and policy on the role of migrants as ‘agents’, ‘heroes’ or ‘brokers’ of ‘development’ resonates with a broader ideological emphasis on individual responsibility and a restricted role for government ‘intervention’. As exemplified by Kapur’s (2004, p. 7) argument in favour of remittances:

> People from poor countries can just migrate and send back money that not only helps their families, but their countries as well. Immigrants, rather than governments, then become the biggest provider of ‘foreign aid’. The general feeling appears to be that this ‘private’ foreign aid is much more likely to go to the people who really need it. On the sending side, it does not require a costly government bureaucracy, and on the receiving side far less is likely to be siphoned off into the pockets of corrupt government officials.

The emergence of migrants as the engines and managers of ‘development’ has led to ‘an individualisation of the moral responsibility to care for the other’ (Raghuram 2009, p. 112). In this context, the responsibility for ‘development’ has shifted away from the state and towards the migrant and her organisations. Notably, this follows a rhetoric which assumes that migrants will not only ‘enact particular attachments and perform a form of localised responsibility to specific
locations and groups’ (Raghuram 2009, p. 112), but also that they will be able to ‘make up for the failure of mainstream development policies’ (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008, p. 7). This not only raises ethical and ideological questions, but also fails to recognise the transformative scope of migration when fundamental changes to broader social, economic and political relations and structures of societies are neglected (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008).

Similarly, this focus on migration and ‘development’ has taken place in a specific political environment. Against a background in which international migration is being driven by a widening gap in ‘development, demography and democracy’ (Global Commission on International Migration 2005, p. 12), the dominant reading of the migration-development nexus has obscured essential discussions on the ‘the complex causes leading to migration in connection with the failures of conventional development policies’ (Piper 2009, p. 94) and discussions on the increasing importance of ‘migration management as a core element in the design and implementation of migration policies’ (Delgado Wise et al. 2013, p. 430). The emphasis given to migration and remittances as a bottom-up source of ‘development’ finance and ‘a part of the human face of globalisation’ (Orozco 2003) has helped disguise the fact that recent migration flows (particularly the growth of south-north movements) have occurred in the context of the expansion of neoliberal policies across the world where the livelihoods of many have been damaged or undermined by the restructuring of economic and welfare systems, by the decline of traditional systems of support, or by ongoing conflicts and violence. But this narrow focus has also failed to problematise the fact that migration policies are increasingly rendering ‘certain forms of mobility as legal and desirable, and others as illegal and unwanted’ (Castles et al. 2012, p. 118).

This specific institutional, ideological and political context of knowledge-production has normalised specific forms of knowledge by elevating them to a normative status (Raghuram 2009). It is thus crucial to emphasise that this is not only about what is included in measurements, evaluations, and policy planning, but it is also about what is excluded. Methodologically, this has led to the exaltation of quantitative income metrics – particularly that of remittance flows – over other forms of qualitative analysis. This has brought a growing availability of datasets of migration and remittance stocks and flows, and has fostered a large number of academic conferences and publications on the topic (Clemens et al. 2014). This also reproduces the dominance of quantitative income metrics (such as figures of gross domestic product, per capita income or poverty lines) to measure ‘development’. As long noted by critics,
these metrics tend to overlook non-financial information and trade-offs, while their stress on averages and aggregates tends to ignore important inequalities (Harriss 2009; Robeyns 2005a; Sen 1999).

Conceptually, this is also limited in at least three important ways. First, ‘success stories’ that drive interest in the migration-development nexus derive from a limited range of groups of migrants such as the ‘highly-skilled’ or exceptional individual stories. As a result, ‘other groups are left out in their role as “actors”, and their own visions of development are not included in the debate’ (Piper 2009, p. 94). Migration, for instance, may be less beneficial to them due to their concentration in low-paid jobs, their exclusion from banking systems, their experience of living underground in an unwelcoming society, and their concentration in employment that provides little access to training and education (Castles et al. 2012). Second, the manner in which the relationship between migration and ‘development’ is analysed separates it from broader processes of social transformation and of existing relationships of power and inequality. This obscures the importance of debating the conditions under which certain forms of migration take place in the contemporary world and the status of the rights and freedoms of all migrants (Delgado Wise et al. 2013; Rosewarne 2010). Finally, dominant readings of the migration-development nexus ‘more often than not end up only discussing economic development’ (Agunias 2006, p. 44). This ignores the social and political dimensions of social change, and it fails to engage with more nuanced discussions that emphasise the need to critically evaluate the extent of people’s real freedom to lead the lives they aspire to (Sen 1999; 2009) or the extent to which economic, political and social arrangements allow people to interact with others as peers (Fraser 1998; 2005). Arguably, these three limitations are particularly relevant when questioning the actual constraints and opportunities faced by certain groups, such as ‘irregular’ migrants or low-skilled female migrants whose mobility is often treated as a social problem rather than as a crucial feature of the ways in which states and the increasingly globalised market society now function.

2.6 The ‘Expert’ in Migration Studies

Aside from interrogating the institutional, ideological and political context of knowledge production on migration and ‘development’, there is a need to go one step further to question

---

10 Interestingly, one can draw parallels to critiques of dominant poverty analysis that emphasise that ‘the way in which poverty is conceptualised separates it from the social processes of the accumulation and distribution of wealth, which depoliticises it – and depoliticisation is of course a profoundly political intellectual act’ (Harriss 2009, p. 207).
the ‘expert’ or knowing subject behind this knowledge. This questioning is indeed a core element of post-development studies and feminist critiques of ‘development’, which have yet to truly reach migration studies (Escobar 1995[2012]; Mignolo 2009; Sandoval 2000; Smith 1999). This not only emphasises that ‘experts’ do not generate knowledge from a detached and neutral point of observation, but it also questions the distinction between ‘experts’ and those that are construed as ‘objects’ of study. This is particularly relevant in migration studies, given that migration is an issue that does not merely transcend national boundaries, but is concerned with movements on a global scale that cross various social, economic and political borders. As argued elsewhere, migration necessitates the production of ‘planetary knowledge’ that challenges dominant epistemologies and ethnocentrism (Castles et al. 2012; see also Connell 2007).\footnote{This draws from Connell’s (2007, p. vii) work on Southern theories and the global dynamics of knowledge, which emphasises that ‘only knowledge produced on a planetary scale is adequate to support the self-understanding of societies now being forcibly reshaped on a planetary scale’.} Yet, even a superficial look reveals that knowledge produced today, while presuming to theorise its subject matter on a global scale, is far from planetary in its epistemological breadth or depth (Kabbanji 2014). Instead, global material inequalities are reflected in the hegemonic position wielded by European and North American dominant epistemologies, institutions and ‘experts’ in the global economy of knowledge production that permeates other social sciences (Alatas 2003; Connell 2007; de Sousa Santos et al. 2007).

This unbalance is exemplified by a cursory overview of the editorial boards of some of the leading academic journals on migration studies. In the case of the International Migration Review (IMR), which ‘represents the single most comprehensive forum devoted exclusively to the analysis and review of international population movements’ (Centre for Migration Studies 2015), there were just seven members out of an editorial board of 44 experts associated with institutions in the whole of Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East.\footnote{These included institutions in Brazil, China, the Philippines, Ghana, South Africa, Iran and Egypt.} In contrast, there were 26 individuals affiliated with institutions in North America (25 in the US alone) and eight individuals affiliated with institutions in Europe (half of these in the UK). Things are not much different for other leading journals. In the case of the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (JEMS), which ‘publishes the results of first-class research on all forms of migration and its consequences’ (Sussex Centre for Migration Research 2015) out of an editorial board of 24 experts there were only two members affiliated to institutions in Asia (both in Singapore) but not one member affiliated with any institution in the whole of Latin America, Africa or the Middle East. In contrast, there were nine individuals affiliated with institutions in North America.
in the US alone) and 12 affiliated with institutions in Europe (two in the UK). Only International Migration, which covers the entire field of policy relevance in international migration, giving attention not only to a breadth of topics reflective of policy concerns, but also attention to coverage of all regions of the world and to comparative policy, seems to have a relatively greater representative membership on its board (Wiley 2015). Out of 13 members, five were affiliated with institutions in Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East, while four members were affiliated with institutions in North America (three in the US) and four more with institutions in Europe (three in the UK). Interestingly, one could similarly highlight that gender representation is an issue in two out three editorial boards. As of 2015, only JEMS had an equal representation of female and male board members. In the case of the IMI and International Migration, female members respectively account for approximately only 30 and 23 per cent of the boards.

This imbalance is further exemplified by the significant amount of academic research on migration and ‘development’ that has been conducted by academics affiliated with institutions in countries of ‘destination’ in North America and Europe. A search through the three major journals mentioned above reveals that out of the 121 articles recently published with the word ‘development’ or ‘remittances’ in their title, 36 (29.75 per cent) of them were published by scholars affiliated with a US institution, and an additional 29 (23.97 per cent) were published by scholars affiliated with a UK institution. In contrast, and aside from one (0.01 per cent) article published by a scholar affiliated with a Filipino institution, no articles had been published by scholars affiliated with an institution in any major country of ‘origin’ such as Mexico, India or China. Even if one broadens the search to include those articles on ‘development’ or ‘remittances’ (i.e. where the term has been used in either the title, the abstract or the keywords), the results are similar. Out of the 394 articles, 118 (29.95 per cent) were published by scholars affiliated with a US institution and 74 (18.78 per cent) were published by scholars affiliated with a UK institution. In comparison, there were just 12 (3.05 per cent) articles published by scholars affiliated with institutions based in the Philippines, Mexico, India and China in total. In either search, authors based in the US or the UK published almost 50 per cent of articles. In both searches, authors affiliated with institutions in countries of ‘destination’ in North America, Europe and Oceania – such as the Netherlands, Denmark Australia, and Canada – were also disproportionately represented.

---

13 These included institutions in Mexico, Colombia, Egypt, Nigeria and China.
14 Calculations are based on data from the Web of Science. This includes documents classified as ‘articles’ that were published in IMR, JEMS and International Migration between 2000-2015 only.
These examples emphasise the dominance of ‘experts’ and institutions in North America and Europe to the exclusion of others. As implied before, scholars based in institutions in Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East and in traditional countries of ‘origin’ are still at the margins of the debate. They produce only a small part of the scientific knowledge on migration and ‘development’ published in mainstream international journals. They are also to a large extent neither recognised nor included in the editorial boards of these journals. This is not to imply that those outside Europe or North America have been entirely muted. However, their voices have often been neglected or their message has become lost in the geopolitical fabric of academia, which is related to persistent inequalities of language and funding and to the marginalisation of certain topics and methodologies. Similarly, this is not to apply a homogenising blanket over those based in ‘North American’ or ‘European’ institutions. Not only have scholars from Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East migrated to study or work in the US and the UK for instance, but many critical voices have also risen among the ranks of North American and European institutions.

Yet, the lack of representation of ‘experts’, institutions and epistemologies from outside North America and Europe remains problematic (Lee et al. 2014). Contrary to the assumption that migration scholars generate knowledge from detached and neutral observation, one can draw from critiques of development studies and the social sciences that emphasise that one always speaks from a particular location within power structures and one’s own perspectives are formed by social and political experiences that shape and limit what one knows. This is summed up in Mignolo’s (2009) concept of the ‘geopolitics of knowing’ which highlights that the ‘expert’ is not ‘transparent [and] disincorporated from the known and untouched by the geopolitical configuration of the world’. Recognising the geopolitics of migration knowledge can aid the deconstruction of the current dominant migration-development paradigm. As highlighted by Kabbanji (2014, p. 272) ‘the setting of a hegemonic scientific agenda limits research options and subjects them to priorities dictated by the urgency felt in the European and North American countries of destination’. This makes evident that it is not coincidental that key issues have been reduced to security, migration management, integration, and remittances (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008).

---

15 To provide an example in the Latin-American context, one can emphasise the work of academics such as Teófilo Altamirano Rúa, Federico Besserer, Raúl Delgado Wise and Gioconda Herrera among others. One can also draw attention to journals such as the Mexican-based ‘Migración y Desarrollo’ or the Brazilian-based ‘Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana’.
To address this lack of representation should be a priority. ‘Not least in view of the policy dimensions of migration and the potential conflict of interests over migration issues, a fairer geographical distribution of migration expertise is desirable’ (Lee et al. 2014, p. s13). Indeed, moving beyond this North American/European/destination bias of the dominant discourse is ‘a first step towards a holistic global approach to the interlinked processes of migration and development’ (Munck 2008, p. 1228). This involves interrogating the prevailing understanding of ‘development’ (its conceptualisation, historisation and measurement) and the proposition that migration alone, via appropriate forms of ‘management’, can be made into a force for social change. As argued by the likes of Munck (2008) and Castles and Delgado Wise (2008), this is not a question of simply reversing the perspective of ‘destination’ countries or of focusing on isolated phenomena in countries of ‘origin’ and ‘transit’. This is ‘a question of developing a paradigm through which a specific process (or set of processes) can be properly contextualised and, for that matter, placed in a historical perspective’ (Munck 2008, p. 1228). In other words, it means examining migration in the broader context of ‘the overall dynamics of North–South relationships, and the interactions of the various spatial levels (local, regional, transnational, etc.) and societal areas (economy, culture, politics, etc.)’ (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008, p. 9).

Moving beyond this bias also necessitates the inclusion of migrants themselves – the female refugee, the coloured ‘irregular’ migrant, the ‘low-skilled’ temporary worker – who have so far been construed as ‘objects’ of study, their voices excluded from dominant debates. One can again draw from critiques of development studies and the social sciences to deconstruct the distinction between the ‘experts’ and the ‘objects’ of study. Escobar (1995[2012]) most famously identified the manner in which certain actors become ‘objects’ of knowledge and targets of power under the gaze of ‘experts’. While he referred mainly to peasants and women, one could argue that migrants have recently emerged as yet another ‘object’ of knowledge in general, and target of ‘development’ management in particular. One could also draw from Osamu’s (2006) critique of the division between the ‘humanitas’ and the ‘anthropos’ which recognises two asymmetric concepts of human being deployed in Western academia since the identification of the colonial other as an ‘object’ of study. As argued by Osamu (2006, p. 268) ‘this asymmetrical relation between “humanitas” and “anthropos” is being continually reproduced: the former as the owner of knowledge, the latter as the owned object of knowledge and as a manipulated

16 Escobar (1995[2012]) drew from Foucault’s conceptualisation of the panopticon to illustrate the manner in which ‘development’ experts see and articulate problems and prescribe solutions. From this supposedly distanced, detached and neutral vantage point the ‘expert’ ‘maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them’ (Mignolo 2009, p. 2).
object to be folded into the domain of knowledge’. In this context, one can also situate migrants – among other populations – as part of the modern ‘anthropos’. In the case of migration studies, the difference is that, whereas in the past the ‘humanitas’ encountered the ‘anthropos’ on his travels, expeditions or colonial companies, nowadays the anthropos is the one ‘knocking at the door’ of the humanitas’ home (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012, p. 165). The challenge to migration studies here lies in including migrants in debates as rightful knowing subjects or, in other words, to ‘unsettle the terms of the discussion by placing migrants and their experiences as knowledge producers (along with a range of other actors) at the centre of the debate’ (Piper 2009, p. 93). One way of achieving this is by ‘studying actual migrant experiences and agency, above and beyond the money they remit’ (Muniandy and Bonatti 2014, p. 1850). This recognises the heterogeneity of migrants and the fact that different knowing subjects – high-skilled migrants, refugees, female labour migrants – have different visions of ‘development’, power and influence which may lead to a re-formulation of the goals or indicators used by scholars to conceptualise the benefits and detriments associated with migration (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008; Dannecker 2009).

2.7 Theoretical Propositions

Building on this critique of dominant readings of the migration-development nexus, this thesis proposes that important insights can be gained by investigating the relationship between migration and processes of social transformation taking place in the context of increasingly universal relationships of power and inequality shaping the neoliberal era. Fundamentally, this builds on Castles’ (2010, p. 1566) call to discuss the ‘complexity, interconnectedness, variability, contextuality and multi-level mediations of migratory processes in the context of rapid global change’. This thesis thus proposes to situate migration in a more general understanding of society that engages with issues of distribution, representation and recognition. This shifts the focus of analysis away from an examination of the ‘benefits’ of migration in places of ‘origin’, and towards an inquiry into the economic, political and social relationships and institutions that are conducive not only to the mobility (or immobility) of an individual or group, but also to their overall wellbeing across borders. Notably, this proposition draws from the work of multiple migration scholars who have emphasised the need for a more inclusive, comprehensive, and human-centred research agenda (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008; de Haas and Rodríguez 2010; Delgado Wise et al. 2013; Piper 2008b). But as the following sections explain, this also draws significantly from the theoretical work of Polanyi (2001 [1944]) on social transformations and
that of Sen (1999) and Fraser (1998; 2005) on a broad capabilities-based approach that draws attention to social, economic and political asymmetries and deprivations.

### 2.7.1 Migration as a Component of Social Transformation Processes

A key step for theorising migration in the context of neoliberalism is to recognise its embeddedness in broader relationships and institutions by analysing the links between different socio-spatial dimensions of social transformation and human mobility. As argued by Castles (2010), contemporary migration is best understood as an integral part of social transformation processes taking place in the neoliberal era, rather than as simple result or a cause of them. This implies that migration cannot be separated from changes in societies and their political, economic and social relationships and institutions that are taking place at the local, national and transnational levels. This embedded understanding of migration not only emphasises the links between these different dimensions, but it ‘also creates [a] conceptual space to study [the] causes and consequences of migration simultaneously, instead of conceptually separating them’ (de Haas 2014, p. 16).

One can draw from Polanyi’s (2001 [1944]) ‘Great Transformation’ and recent developments linked to his work (Burawoy 2015; Fraser 2014; Munck 2015b) as a conceptual tool for studying processes of social transformation and human mobility in the neoliberal era. Following Polanyi’s observations on the ‘market economy’ as an entirely new institutional mechanism for western society, one can argue that the last four decades of neoliberalisation have witnessed a period of profound social, political and economic reorganisation in almost all parts of the world (Stiglitz 2001[1944]). As argued by Harvey (2005, p. 3):

> The process of neoliberalisation has … entailed much ‘creative destruction’, not only of prior institutional frameworks and power (even challenging traditional forms of state sovereignty) but also of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and the habits of the heart.

As noted by multiple authors, the impacts of this transformation have varied between and within countries, but one can still point out a number of trends that follow the expansion of markets and processes of commodification. In the case of countries in Latin America for instance, Portes (1997b) identifies: (i) the reappraisal of ‘capitalist profit-making’ as both desirable and congruent with national interest; (ii) the devaluation of organised labour and protected industry; (iii) the conviction that social inequality can be best addressed through the trickle-down effect of
markets; and (iv) the reorientation of sources of ‘national pride’ towards the insertion of the national economy into the arena of global trade as symptomatic of this neoliberal social transformation, as common trends.\textsuperscript{17}

A number of theoretical ideas developed by Polanyi can be useful for advancing a more nuanced understanding of migration in the context of the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification. First, Polanyi (2001 [1944]) emphasises that, contrary to the claim of economic liberalism, the notion of the economy as an independent and self-regulating system of integrated markets is a fiction. ‘Embeddedness’ means that the economy is never autonomous, but is rather subject to moral, religious or ethical norms and to diverse forms of political regulation (Block 2001[1944]). This foremost recognises the interconnectedness and wholeness of the social, the economic and the political (Castles et al. 2011). But it also emphasises the radical ideological and political shift that is associated with the rise of the liberal order (and later the neoliberal order); while traditionally the economy has been organically embedded in social relations, the creation of the economic process as a distinct system with its own laws actively seeks to sever these organic links and subordinate society to the laws of the market. In this context, and contrarily to understandings of social change in which the economy is conceptualised as independent or more important than society and politics, Polanyi’s emphasis on the embeddedness of the economy on social relations can provide important insights into the nature of migration in the context of the neoliberal order. This in particular emphasises ‘the essential link to massive changes in global economic and political power relationships and the resulting social transformation processes’ which is absent from a disembedded understanding of migration (Castles 2010, p. 1578).

Second, Polanyi’s critique of the market economy is intrinsically linked to his idea of ‘fictitious’ commodities. This highlights that the extension of the market logic to the essential elements of labour, land and money is highly problematic and irrational. Against the logic that all elements of production should be subject to the laws of supply and demand, and traded in the market, Polanyi (2001 [1944], p. 75) stresses that to include labour, land and money under this logic ‘means to subordinate the substance of society itself to the laws of the market’. This points out the contradiction that while these are essential to the market economy, they are not in fact

\textsuperscript{17} In a similar vein, Cahill’s (2010) analysis of industrialised countries points out that the process of neoliberalisation translated into: (i) the general weakening of the power of organised labour in comparison to the power of capital; (ii) the freeing of capital from a number of restraints imposed on it by the post-war ‘class compromise’ and; (iii) the expansion of the sphere of commodification by means of deregulation and the privatisation of former state-monopolised services.
commodities in the sense that they are not objects produced for sale on the market and that their commodification raises ongoing conflicts and perils that threatens communities, livelihoods and habitats. For migration studies, the notion of labour as a ‘fictitious’ commodity, one that ‘cannot be shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this peculiar community’ (Polanyi 2001 [1944], p. 76), is perhaps the most salient given that migrants are often defined ‘as essentially factors of production’ (Rosewarne 2010, p. 103) in the neoliberal market economy.

Third, Polanyi argues that no society can stand the effects of this commodification. Interestingly, a key point of Polanyi’s (2001 [1944], p. 3) critique is that the self-regulating market economy ‘could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and the natural substance of society’. Polanyi (2001 [1944]) maintains that society would inevitably take measures to defend itself through a ‘double movement’. In the context of the rise of the liberal order, this can be seen as the reactive interaction between (i) the wants and needs of economic liberalism (which were supported by political forces and commercial interests that advocated deregulating markets and spreading the processes of commodification), and (ii) those of social protection (which are supported by a broad-based, cross-class front that sought to protect the human and natural substance of society, as well as its business organisation). In practice, this emphasises that while the market economy was spreading, organisations, institutions and legislation were also being created to check the action of the market. This critique remains salient given the ongoing growth of markets geographically and in real terms (as exemplified by the expansion of the market economy in rural Mexico, or increased trading in biotechnology), and the presence of diverse social struggles against this. In particular, and given that global and national neoliberal transformations are perceived and experienced locally, this allows one to conceptualise how migrants among other populations have responded to, adapted to or challenged this transformation process. Interestingly, forms of agency and resistance ‘can take the shape not only of religious or nationalist movements but also of individual or family-level livelihood strategies, including rural–urban or international migration’ (Castles 2015, p. 9).

Polanyi’s (2001 [1944]) work thus stands as a strong conceptual model for a critique of neoliberalism and contemporary forms of mobility. Yet, it is necessary to be cautious about some of its limitations. Foremost, it is important to problematise the Eurocentric and market-oriented nature of his analysis. This implies at the minimum the need to question Polanyi’s sole focus on the expansion of the market economy in Europe (as if this could have ever existed in isolation...
from other regions of the world) as well as his disregard for other forms of domination and exclusion that preceded the expansion of the market economy (such as the legacy of colonialism and slavery). However, this could additionally be extended to questioning his historisation of the development of the protective double-movement given that some states and populations have been better equipped to protect themselves from the vagaries of the market (again, this is most salient in the context of processes of decolonisation and later of neoliberalisation) (Fraser 2014). Similarly, it is important to problematise Polanyi’s neglect of the ambivalent nature of social protections, which ‘afford relief from the disintegrative effects of markets upon communities, while simultaneously entrenching domination within and among them’ (Fraser 2013, p. 129). For instance, many aspects of social protection were premised upon the division between paid ‘productive’ labour and unpaid ‘reproductive’ labour to the detriment of women, or upon majority cultural or religious norms to the impairment of minorities. These limitations emphasise the need for research to engage with multiple socio-spatial dimensions, including the linkages and contradictions between them.

2.7.2 Migration vis-à-vis a Broad Capabilities-Based Approach

Important insights into the nature of contemporary migration can be gained through embedded understanding of migration. Yet, given the progressively universal relationships of power and inequality that are shaping the neoliberal era, much can be gained from unequivocally questioning existing economic, political and social inequalities. This is significant for, as highlighted by Bauman (1998, p. 9), ‘mobility has become the most powerful and most coveted stratifying factor; the stuff of which the new, increasingly world-wide, social, political, economic and cultural hierarchies are daily built and rebuilt’. In this context, while Polanyi’s (2001 [1944]) work provides an important foundation forconceptualising key aspects of social transformation processes in the neoliberal era, one can gain a substantive understanding of key deprivations and asymmetries affecting the mobility and wellbeing of migrants and other populations by engaging with a broad capabilities-based approach that builds on the work of Sen (1999) and Fraser (1998; 2005).

Sen (1999; 2009) and Fraser (1998; 2005) have both developed important theories of justice, with Sen’s capability approach gaining an influential status in development studies and making minor inroads into migration studies (Briones 2009b; de Haas and Rodríguez 2010; Preibisch et al. 2016). The capabilities approach is best described as a normative framework that evaluates and assesses wellbeing and social arrangements in terms of people’s effective opportunities to
lead the kind of lives they want to lead and be whom they want to be (Robeyns 2005b). Fraser’s (1998, p. 30) work has received less attention outside of feminist and Marxists circles, but her framework of participatory parity – which focuses on whether all members of society can ‘interact with one another as peers’ in social life – also provides important insights into the evaluation and assessment of wellbeing and social arrangements.

Before going any further, it is important to clarify the respective foundations of Sen’s and Fraser’s work. Central to Sen’s framework are the concepts of functionings, capabilities and agency. Functionings denote ‘the various things a person may value doing or being’ (such as working, being healthy or being respected) while capabilities represent a person’s freedom to achieve one set of valuable functionings or another (Sen 1999, p. 75). This difference highlights the value of positive freedom and genuine choice, as the distinction between achieved functionings and capabilities is that ‘between achievements on the one hand, and freedoms or valuable options from which one can choose on the other’ (Robeyns 2005b, p. 95). Finally, agency ‘encompasses all the goals that a person has reasons to adopt, which can inter alia include goals other than the advancement of his or her own wellbeing’ (Sen 1999, p. 287). This last point is significant, as Sen recognises that an agent may be guided by other goals aside from the pursuit of individual wellbeing.\(^{18}\)

Aside from this lexicon, there are two epistemological issues that need to be clarified with regards to the capability approach and its applicability to the study of migration. First, contrarily to scholars such as Nussbaum (2000), Sen does not endorse a set list of capabilities. For him (Sen 2004), the selection of capabilities on which to focus is a value judgement that depends on the purpose and context of evaluation. This should be determined through democratic and public reasoning processes that engage with existing academic and political debates (Robeyns 2003b). In the case of studies of migration, this opens the parameters of the evaluation and assessment of wellbeing and social arrangements beyond narrow constraints, while it also makes it responsive to specific contexts in a potentially more inclusive manner. Second, Sen’s approach embraces ethical individualism, meaning that ‘individuals, and only individuals, are the units of

---

\(^{18}\) Sen (1982) recognises two crucial moral sentiments for human action: sympathy and commitment. The former refers to the concern for others that directly affects one’s own welfare, while the latter indicates a concern for others that is independent of one’s own welfare.
moral concern’ (Robeyns 2005b, p. 107). However, an evaluative framework whose fundamental components are the capabilities of individuals, and only individuals, is misleading and incomplete. In particular, this directs attention away from the examination of historical and structural dimension of human agency (Deneulin 2008), and its dependence to relations of power (Evans 2002). But moreover, this ignores and lags behind the ways in which collectives and movements have in practice deliberated and articulated capabilities at the community level (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). In the context of migration studies, important insights into key deprivations and asymmetries affecting the mobility and wellbeing of migrants and other populations can be gained by evaluating group capabilities, and the influence of structures and power relations on human agency.

Fraser’s framework was not developed within the capabilities approach, although she has recently recognised that her ‘theory does belong to the family of capability theory in the sense that parity of participation is also about the capability to act in society’ (Fraser in Chhachhi 2011, p. 307). Interestingly, one of the main distinctions between Sen and Fraser is that while the former focuses on the individual’s capabilities to function, the latter concentrates on social interactions (Fraser in Chhachhi 2011). This emphasises the need to investigate the economic, political and social relationships and institutions that enable or hinder the wellbeing of specific individuals and groups. Indeed, central to Fraser’s framework are the concepts of distribution, representation and recognition. As conceptualised by Fraser (2005), people can suffer from economic, political and social or cultural injustices that can prevent their participatory parity in social life. Maldistribution occurs when people are ‘impeded from full participation by economic structures that deny them the resources they need in order to interact with others as peers’ (Fraser 2005, p. 73). Misrepresentation arises when ‘political decision rules wrongly deny some of the included the chance to participate fully, as peers’ or when ‘the community’s boundaries are drawn in such a way as to wrongly exclude some people from the chance to participate at all in its authorised contests over justice’ (Fraser 2005, p. 76). Finally, misrecognition takes place when people are ‘prevented from interacting on terms of parity by institutionalised hierarchies of

---

19 As explained by Robeyns (2005b, p. 107) this imply that ‘social structures and societal properties will be evaluated in virtue of the causal importance that they have for individuals’ well-being’. This commitment is based on the belief that a focus on groups or institutions may hide forms of oppression and inequalities within them (Alkire 2008) or it may neglect the fact the individuals have multiple affiliations and identities (Sen 2002).

20 Environmental scholars and those working with Indigenous communities have argued that some forms of injustice are not simply an individual experience. These are cases where the wrongs to be addressed are essentially community wrongs (e.g. the disappearance of local and traditional cultures and practices) which are necessary for the functioning of the individual and the community (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010, p. 17). This is somewhat similar to Kymlicka’s (1996) argument in favor of supporting ‘external protections’ (while remaining skeptical of ‘internal restrictions’) with regards to group’s rights.
cultural value that deny them the requisite standing’ (Fraser 2005, p. 74). Significantly, Fraser sees these three as entwined and reciprocal, meaning that concerns over distribution, representation and recognition tend to reinforce each other in a cumulative way.

Interestingly, while the intellectual roots of Sen’s and Fraser’s work vary (as summed up by Fraser ‘it is Hegel-Marx for me rather than Kant-Rawls-Aristotle’), they both emphasise the importance of engaging with people’s real freedoms in contemporary societies and with the barriers to such freedoms (Fraser in Chhachhi 2011, p. 308; Robeyns 2003a). One can build a fruitful collaboration between the two. Notably, some capabilities (such as being able to work in an income-generating activity) are more relevant to issues of distribution, while others (such as being free of discrimination or having access to adequate education) are more relevant to issues of representation and recognition. This broad focus on capabilities and issues of distribution, representation and recognition provides important insights into many of the actual challenges and opportunities faced by people confronted by the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification.

In the context of migration, this emphasis on the economic, political and social dimensions of social change allows one to question the extent to which existing relationships and institutions are conducive or detrimental not only to the mobility (or immobility) of an individual or group, but also to their overall wellbeing across borders. But reasoning from this broad capabilities-based approach also allows one to recognise the complexities and contradictions encapsulated in contemporary forms of mobility. This implies, for instance, that the movement of people may not always be the result of an increase in the opportunities and choices available to them, but rather the result of those choices becoming more restricted in the light of increasing maldistribution, misrepresentation and misrecognition. Similarly, and given that migrants (and non-migrants) navigate a complex map of economic, political and social stratification in both places of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’, this broad capabilities-based approach allows one to conceptualise the differences and commonalities between individuals and groups that have been affected – to varying degrees and scales – by increasing commodification and inequality within and across borders.

2.8 Conclusion

Building on a critique of the dominant reading of the migration-development nexus, this chapter has set the foundations of a conceptual framework that analyses migration as part of broader
processes of neoliberal social transformation while unequivocally engaging with existing economic, political and social inequalities taking place at the local, national and transnational level. Drawing from the work of Polanyi (2001 [1944]), this emphasises that contemporary migration is best understood in the context of the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification that have brought profound social, political and economic changes in almost all parts of the world. But this chapter goes further to argue that important insights into the nature of contemporary migration flows (and contemporary societies) can be gained through a broad capabilities-based approach that builds on the work of Sen (1999) and Fraser (1998; 2005) and draws attention to existing social, economic and political asymmetries and deprivations. As highlighted by the preceding overview, these propositions draw from the work of multiple migration scholars who have emphasised the need for a more inclusive, comprehensive, and human-centred research agenda. These propositions can also be seen as contribution to the advancement of interdisciplinary ‘middle-range’ conceptual frameworks to analyse migration in a specific time and context (Castles 2007; Portes 1997a).21 As the analytical chapters that engage with the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco participants in the US and in Mexico demonstrate, this framework provides critical insights with regards those that have migrated, or those have remained immobile, under increasingly precarious conditions in the neoliberal order.

To sum up, these propositions can be clarified with regards to the questions of ‘what’, ‘who’, ‘where’ and ‘when’ that were asked from alternative theoretical explanations. This thesis aims to shift the concept of analysis away from the developmental impact of migration in places of ‘origin’, and towards an evaluation of the embeddedness of migration in the context of social change that engages with issues of distribution, representation and recognition. The subjects of analysis are migrants, but also those that have remained immobile. This recognises that contemporary forms of mobility and immobility reveal important insights into the nature of social transformation processes and existing asymmetries and deprivations. Importantly, this recognises that while individuals are the ultimate unit of moral concern, their existence cannot be understood in isolation from collectives and their agency cannot be comprehended as independent from structures and relations of power. The place of analysis is multi-scalar and selectively porous, thus highlighting the need to explore the links between global, national and local dimensions of social transformation and migration and the manner in which people navigate within and across

21 Castles (2010) in particular draws from Merton’s (1957, p. 9) concept of theories of the middle-range which refers to ‘special theories applicable to limited ranges of data’ to engage with the complexity, diversity and the importance of context when analysing migration.
stratified societies. Finally, the *timing* of analysis asserts migration should not be conceptualised ‘merely as a result of social transformation, nor as one of its causes, but as an integral and essential part of social transformation processes’ (Castles 2010, p. 1578). In other words, migration cannot be separated from changes in societies and their political, economic and social relationships and institutions that are taking place in the neoliberal era.
3 Methodological Framework

3.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the relationship between migration and broader processes of social transformation while emphasising that important insights into these phenomena can be gained by engaging with key economic, political and social asymmetries and deprivation occurring in a particular time and context. This temporal dimension centres on the neoliberal era, while the social and geographical dimension centres on the histories, experiences and agency of Mixtecos in Mexico and the US. Thus, while this thesis is informed by theories of international migration, social transformation and capabilities, it relies empirically on the case study of Mixteco participants in Piñas (Oaxaca) and Santa Maria (California).

This chapter presents a detailed account of the methodological approach adopted by this thesis. Section 3.2 provides important background information on this project. Section 3.3 explores three key interrelated methodological principles that guide this research. Section 3.4 in turn discusses the selection of the research area and introduces the localities of Piñas and Santa Maria. Section 3.5 describes the methods used to gather and analyse data, while Section 3.6 addresses the main challenges and shortcomings of this project. Finally, Section 3.7 draws a number of conclusions.

3.2 Background to this Thesis

This thesis has been conducted within the broader Social Transformation and International Migration (STIM) research project (Castles et al. 2015). As indicated by its name, this project seeks to analyse migration as a crucial component of social transformation processes occurring during the neoliberal era. Aside from the author of this thesis, four other PhD students pursued research for the STIM project while undertaking their own independent doctoral work. Research on this issue could have been done in many parts of the world, as very few places have remained unaffected by the massive transformations that have taken place since the 1970s. But given a combination of limited resources and the existence of strong relationships with local academics, case studies were carried out in Mexico, South Korea, Turkey and Australia. The independent doctoral projects all covered different aspects of the migratory phenomenon in one of the four case-study countries.
While analysing the issue of social transformation and international migration in Mexico in the neoliberal era, it would be hard to ignore the growth of Indigenous migration from the country’s poorer south and south-east. Indeed, migrants from Mexico now represent a more multiethnic and heterogeneous group than before (Fox 2006; Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004b). Among others, Zapotecs, Triquis and Mixtecs from Oaxaca; Mixtecs from Puebla and Guerrero; Hñahñus from Veracruz; and Mayas from Yucatán and Chiapas can be found all the way from California, to Texas, to Florida and New York (Rivera Salgado 2014). At the same time, the social reproduction of Indigenous communities in regions such as la Mixteca in Oaxaca has become intrinsically linked to mobility and emigration (González Chévez 2009). This growth of Indigenous migration raises important questions about the determinants, distinctiveness and significance of Mixteco and other forms of Indigenous migrations in the current neoliberal era. In particular, their histories, experiences and agency provide insights into the interaction between migration and different economic, political and social asymmetries and deprivations occurring at the local, national and transnational level. In practice, and as the empirical chapters of this thesis demonstrate, Mixtecos face particular challenges and opportunities relating to their status as Indigenous people in Mexico and as ‘irregular’ migrants in the US, which illustrates specific forms of maldistribution, misrepresentation and misrecognition that are important components of current processes of neoliberal social transformation.

This thesis has a strong empirical component that engages with the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco participants in Piñas and Santa María. This builds on the theoretical propositions laid down in Chapter 2 and follows calls by migration scholars to integrate theory and empirical research. As argued by Arango (2004, p. 34):

> While there are no simple and easy prescriptions for such a reconciliation, it could greatly benefit, *inter alia*, from case studies with a theoretical flair which focus on the specific – relying on a deep understanding of the societies involved – while making explicit the underlying assumptions on which they rest and contrasting them with reality.

The empirical part of this study took place in 2012-2013 in Mexico and the US. During this time, the researcher lived in Oaxaca City and Piñas in Oaxaca and in Los Angeles and Santa Maria in California. As demonstrated in subsequent sections, this empirical component would not have been possible without support of members of the *Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales*
(Binational Front of Indigenous Organisations or FIOB), and their friends and relatives in Oaxaca and California.\footnote{The FIOB is one of the leading Indigenous-led migrant organisations operating in California, northern Mexico and Oaxaca. For more on its history and activities see Domínguez Santos (2004).}

3.3 Methodological Principles

As explained in Chapter 2, and alongside the insights of numerous migration scholars, this thesis draws from the theoretical work of Polanyi (2001 [1944]) on social transformations and the work of Sen (1999) and Fraser (1998; 2005) on a broad capabilities-based approach to build an analytical framework for conceptualising migration in the context of neoliberal social change while taking account of significant economic, political and social asymmetries and deprivations occurring at the local, national and transnational level. Engaging critically with these theoretical propositions requires the establishment of three interrelated methodological principles to guide empirical research. This includes the undertaking of empirical research that problematises the container-space of the nation-state by tracing and analysing the strength and impact of existing social relations across multiple scales. This also incorporates the development of explanations of migration that are grounded in an understanding of the economic, political and social dimensions of change by linking the histories, experiences and agency of participants to broader processes of social transformation taking place in the neoliberal era. This finally includes the actual histories, experiences and agency of participants into explanations of migration and social transformation, and also into explanations of existing economic, political and social asymmetries and deprivations.

3.3.1 Problematising the Nation-State

The first methodological principle guiding this research is the need to problematise the container-space of the nation-state through a multi-scalar, multi-sited analysis that engages with the transnational nature of migration and social transformation processes (Glick-Schiller and Levitt 2006; Levitt 2009). This emphasises that key aspects of social transformation processes – such as the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification – are ‘reinforced, contested and made meaningful at different levels of power and in different sites’ (Williamson 2015, p. 19). This does not deny that the nation-state remains a key economic, social and political unit, but it emphasises the need to explore the links between global, national, regional and local dimensions of social transformation and migration and the manner in which
people navigate within and across these borders. In other words, this concern with multi-scalarity recognises that global forces take particular forms within particular times and contexts and that a focus on the ‘nation-state’ is insufficient to capture this complex reality.

In terms of the theoretical propositions guiding this research, this implies the need to scale ‘up’ and ‘down’ the insights of Polanyi, Sen and Fraser by situating the histories, experiences and agency of participants across multiple socio-spatial dimensions. As noted by Levitt (2009, p. 17) this ‘involves not just a recalibration of the relationship between the global and the local but also between the municipal, regional, and national’. Indeed, one cannot gain a full understanding of social transformation processes – or of issues of distribution, representation and recognition – without taking into consideration the interactive dynamism of relationships and institutions at various scales. This methodological principle thus provides a vantage point to ask: what are the characteristics of the social transformation that have taken place in Mexico and the US in recent decades? And how have these transformations been experienced by Mixtecos at the local level?

This thesis thus engages with a process of scale-jumping, beginning with an examination of the economic, political and social relationships and institutions that connect the localities of Piñas and Santa Maria and their impact on the mobility and wellbeing of participants (Boccagni 2012; Smith 2011). But this thesis recognises that it is both necessary and useful to look beyond these local-local ties. As argued by Levitt (2004, p. 3):

> It is also critical to examine how these connections are integrated into vertical and horizontal systems of connection that cross borders. Rather than privileging one level over another, a transnational perspective holds these sites equally and simultaneously in conversation with each other and tries to grapple with the tension between them.

This highlights the complexities of migration and social transformation processes, and reveals the plausible existence of contradictions and synergies that enable and constrain the mobility and wellbeing of participants within and across scales.

In the context of this thesis, this examination of wider scales includes but is not limited to sub-national regions and their ties (such as the connections between Oaxaca, Baja California and

---

23 As further explained in Chapter 4, the focus on this ‘translocality’ reflects the strength and impact of real-world links that Mixteco participants have to particular spaces in Mexico and the US (Smith 2011). In practice, this focus on the ‘local’ is particularly important given that the basis of collective identity and organising of Mixtecos has traditionally been constructed in terms of the village of ‘origin’ – in contrast to other villages – and not necessarily on a ‘pan-Mixteca’ or national basis (Kearney 1994).
California through the growth of industrial agriculture); nation-states and their policies (such as the role of migration and social policies in Mexico and the US); and the ‘differential socio-spatial, political-economic, and cultural impacts of the neoliberal regime of global governance and the opportunities and constraints it engenders for the pace and character of global mobility’ (such as the growth of punitive welfare policies targeting those who ‘fail’ to live up to neoliberal ideals of citizenship) (Smith 2011, p. 187).

3.3.2 Linking Biography to History

A second and related methodological principle is the need to develop explanations of migration, which are grounded in economic, sociological and political terms. This can be seen as an issue of linking biography to history (Castles 2012; King 2012). This thesis approaches migration – both internal and international – as occurring in the context of the broader processes of neoliberal social transformation that affect most countries today, and consequently analyses the role of human mobility within these processes. This is understood as part of complex and dynamic relationships in which the effects of global forces are mediated by particular factors (such as historical experiences, cultural values, religious beliefs, institutions etc.), which result in ‘forms of change and resistance that bring about very different outcomes in specific communities or societies’ (Castles 2012, p. 29). This involves the recognition of the interconnectedness of the social, the economic and the political in this transformation, and the awareness that this transformation is not lead by an ‘invisible hand’ but rather by the interplay of the unequal agency of multiple individuals and institutions throughout time and space (Castles et al. 2011).

As advocated by Castles (2012, p. 16), this linking of biography to history – as a means of producing explanations of migration which are grounded in economic, sociological and political terms – can be achieved by conducting ‘micro-level studies of specific migratory experiences’ which are ‘embedded in an understanding of the macro-level structural factors that shape human mobility in a specific historical situation’. This is related to King’s (2002) call to recognise the ‘double embeddedness’ of migration. That is, that the study of migration must be embedded, both in a migrant’s life-course, and in the broader societies and processes. In practice, this thesis pays particular attention to analysing the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification in Mexico and the US and the significance of this in terms of the mobility – or immobility – of people and their wellbeing. In this context, this methodological principle allows one to answer the questions of how the mobility of Mixtecos has developed and
changed in this period. And how one can best conceptualise the links between broader processes of social transformation and migration in this context and time.

The potential benefit of analysing migration as part of broader social transformation processes by means of linking biography to history is twofold. First, this leads to an evaluation of migration in terms of its ‘multi-layered links to other forms of global connectivity’ (Castles 2012, p. 30). This is in line with calls to achieve ‘a thick and empirically rich mapping of how global, macro-level processes interact with local lived experiences … that are representative of broader trends’ (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007, p. 143). This can reveal important insights into the interaction between migration and different economic, political and social asymmetries and deprivations occurring at the local, national and transnational level. Second, linking biography to history leads to an analysis that recognises that not every aspect of the lives of people can be explained by reference to their mobility or immobility alone. A migrant is never solely a migrant and proposals to see her ‘merely as a member of one social group tend to be based on an inadequate understanding of the breadth and complexity of any society in the world’ (Sen 2009, p. 247). This ‘migration bias’ can be overcome by ‘carefully weigh[ing] different factors according to their actual significance’ in a specific time and context (Van Liempt and Bilger 2012, p. 454). In the case of participants for instance, consideration of ethnicity and gender must be taken into account alongside their migration status.

### 3.3.3 Tracing the Histories, Experiences and Agency of Participants

The final methodological principle guiding this thesis is that theoretical and empirical accounts of migration must be informed by the actual histories, experiences and agency of people. This implies the need to include them as producers of knowledge on migration, as well as producers of knowledge into the nature of broader social transformation processes and existing economic, political and social asymmetries and deprivations. What people think and feel about their own condition is important, albeit socially constructed and conditioned (Evans 2002). This does not advocate an uncritical engagement with the histories, experiences and agency of people, but rather the start of a conversation in which potentially important issues are debated with reference to existing economic, social and political relationships and institutions. This methodological

---

24 This recognises that it is unhelpful and extreme to refute people’s ability to make any critical judgment about their wellbeing (Copestake 2009). Indeed, this mistrust of people’s own views can lead to ‘forms of paternalism where there is an assertion of “superior” views, values and meanings which arise from higher authority, from theory or from a position of more enlightened understanding’ which was criticised in Chapter 2 (Deneulin and McGregor 2010, p. 506).
principle in particular guides responses to the questions of what specific social, economic and political relationships and institutions have been beneficial or detrimental to the mobility and overall wellbeing of Mixtecos in both Mexico and the US, and what continuities and breaks exist between these patterns of stratification.

This is in line with the foundations of a broad capabilities-based approach which advocates for an evaluation of wellbeing and social arrangement in terms of people’s real freedom to enjoy valuable things and doings, and where these beings and doings (such as being healthy, being securely employed, or being free from discrimination) are selected through explicit scrutiny and public discussion over time. Robeyns (2003b, p. 72) provides some guidance on how to structure this scrutiny and discussion. This includes ‘unconstrained brainstorming’ – a reflective engagement with ‘existing academic, political, and grassroots literature and debates’ in order to be responsive to local contexts and experiences and the act of comparing, debating, and revising potentially important issues with others. Thus, while this thesis is framed in terms of issues of distribution, representation and recognition, other issues (such as the actual capabilities on which to focus) are responsive not only to the actual histories, experiences and agency of participants, but also to the broader literature and debates (and to future potential critics).

Two issues need to be clarified. First, this focus on issues of distribution, representation and recognition involves the scrutiny of participants’ histories, experiences and agency in the context of widespread relationships of power and inequality. In this context, the emphasis is on the relationships and institutions that enable or constrain the opportunities and challenges that participants face. This recognises the interactive relationship between agency and structure in determining the extent of positive freedoms. As argued by Deneulin (2006, p. 75) ‘as human life always is within the historical reality, the contents of human choices will always be limited by this historical reality and its set of possibilities’. Second, this focus on the histories, experiences and agency of people includes migrants and ‘non-migrants’ alike. As mentioned before, there is a common blind spot regarding the phenomenon of immobility (Carling 2002; Malmberg 1997), which ‘is not only an issue of empirical characterisation, but also raises important questions about the applicability of traditional migration theories’ (Carling 2002, p. 5). Thus, the inclusion of both migrants and ‘non-migrants’ recognises the heterogeneity of their histories and experiences and the fact that different people have different degrees of agency. But this also emphasises that evaluations of wellbeing and social arrangements must engage with factors beyond the mobility – or immobility – of people. Migrants and ‘non-migrants’ are not simply and
solely migrants or ‘non-migrants’; they are members of other collectives. Thus, an analysis of the economic, social and political relationships and institutions that are conducive to their mobility (or immobility) and their overall wellbeing must engage with the reality of societies that are stratified not only by migration status (but also by other factors such as ethnicity or gender) and with the way in which people manoeuvre these stratifications.

3.4 Fieldwork Setting

This thesis was designed to focus on the histories, experiences and agency of Mixtecos. The Mixtecos, or as they refer to themselves, the Ñuu Savi – which translates to el pueblo de la lluvia in Spanish or the ‘folk of the rain’ in English – form one of Mexico’s largest Indigenous groups. They originate from a region known as La Mixteca, which covers the western portion of the state of Oaxaca and small adjacent parts of the states of Puebla and Guerrero in southern Mexico. Mixtecos from Oaxaca in particular have been very mobile for decades, having migrated primarily as agricultural labourers first to the east coast and the north of Mexico and later to the west coast of the United States. As a result, there are now significant Mixteco populations present not only in La Mixteca, but also in states such as Baja California and Sonora in Mexico (Velasco Ortiz 2002; Vogt 2006) and California and Oregon in the US (Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004a; Stephen 2007; Velasco Ortiz 2005).

Inasmuch as this thesis was intended to focus on the experiences of Mixtecos, the decision still had to be made regarding actual scope of the study. One could certainly undertake a study of social transformation and migration across La Mixteca region, but given time and financial constraints, it was decided to conduct primary research in one village in La Mixteca and one of its ‘satellite’ communities in the US. In this context, this would become a magnifying lens through which certain transformational aspects of migration and associated broader processes could be analysed. Piñas and Santa Maria (see Figure 1) were flagged as potential research sites due to the relative availability of data on this group of migrants (Mines et al. 2010). But the final decision to work there was made following contact with Indigenous migrant leaders from the FIOB in California. It was through the offices of the FIOB in Los Angeles that the researcher first made contact with potential research assistants and participants in Santa Maria. In particular, local migrant leaders in Santa Maria (who originated from Piñas) were willing to support the project, assisting with many practical and organisational matters and introducing the researcher to potential participants. It was also through the connections made in Los Angeles and Santa Maria
that the researcher was able to approach potential research assistants and the autoridad (local government) in Piñas.

Figure 1. Piñas (Oaxaca) and Santa Maria (California)

Piñas is located on the western edge of the municipio (municipality) of Santiago Juxtlahuaca in the Juxtlahuaca district of la Mixteca region. Piñas has a relatively small population of approximately 871 people, all of whom were categorised as Indigenous by the latest Mexican census (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía n.d.). The major language spoken there is Mixteco. Although many men and young people also speak Spanish, barely anyone speaks fluent English. The village is relatively remote and difficult to access due to a lack of proper infrastructure. For instance, the nearest large town of Santiago Juxtlahuaca (the cabezera-district and the nearest site with large shops, hospitals and high schools) is approximately a 1.5 hour drive along a combination of dirt and gravel roads that are not served by public transport. In this context, it is also important to note that at the time of fieldwork there was no internet, mobile reception or high school in the village.25 As further explained in Chapter 4, most people in Piñas are

25 Locals have had access to basic public education for a number of years. Participants who emigrated from the village in the late 1980’s reported that a primary school was already built by the time they left (interview with Manuel, 27/05/12), while others reported that a telesecundaria [distance education system] school opened in 1994 (interview with Jesús, 5/12/12). A high school administered by Oaxaca’s Instituto de Estudios de Bachillerato del Estado (State Institute for Baccalaureate Studies or IEBO) was opened in late 2013. See Chapter 7 for more on education.
employed in subsistence agriculture harvesting corn, beans, coffee and pineapples from family plots that form part of the local comunidad agraria (agrarian community). Many men (and some women) are also serving cargos (civic and religious offices), which form part of the local system of usos y costumbres (customary law). As explained in detail in Chapters 5 and 7, people in Piñas have very precarious incomes. Many rely on remittances sent home by relatives in northern Mexico or the US, government social assistance programs that provide cash transfers to low-income schoolchildren or elderly people, loans from local money lenders or the income from seasonal migration.

People from Piñas have emigrated for well over half a century. They travel first to other regions in Mexico and later to the US. Santa Maria is one of the main destinations for international migrants from Piñas. Santa Maria is located in the northern edge of the Santa Barbara County in California’s central coast. As further explained in Chapter 4, Santa Maria is part of the Santa Maria Valley, an important agricultural area that produces strawberries, broccoli, lettuce, grapes, celery, and other commodities that reach the US and global markets practically all year round. The city has a population of 99,553 people, 65.5 per cent of who are of ‘Mexican’ origin (US Census Bureau 2010). While there is no reliable data of the population size of Mixtecos in Santa Maria, recent estimates suggest anything between 10,000-15,000 (Cardenas 2006) and 15,000-25,000 people (Lanham 2013). As explained in detail in Chapter 5, Mixteco migrants in Santa Maria have very precarious incomes due to factors such as their employment in seasonal agriculture and their ‘irregular’ migration status. Like those in Piñas, many supplement their incomes through government social assistance programs that provide cash transfers to low-income households with US-born children, and loans from local money lenders.

3.5 How Data Was Gathered and Used

The empirical aspect of this thesis can be best described as a mixed-methods multi-sited analysis. As argued by Hedge and Hoban (2014) with regards to migration research, mixed methods integrate and draw on the strengths of different approaches to analyse the meaning and nature of a phenomenon from multiple standpoints or scales. Mixed-methods have thus been described as

---

26 A comunidad agraria (agrarian community) has been described as a ‘commune’, ‘where all land is communally held and apportioned among individual households on a more or less permanent usufruct basis’ (Nagengast & Kearney, 1990, 70). This is one of two types of communal lands established or recognised by Mexico’s federal government after the Revolution. While landless populations were granted ejido lands through endowments by agrarian resolutions, comunidades agrarias were recognised in communities that were already in possession of the land. In both cases, the right to land use was not equivalent to ownership (Améndola et al. 2006). See footnote 73 for an explanation of recent land reforms affecting communal lands in Mexico.
‘the best way to develop greater understanding of social issues and of their relevance to individual and group life’ (Castles 2012, p. 22). This combination of methods further supports the triangulation of data for the objectives of this study (Castles 2012; Hedge and Hoban 2014).

3.5.1 Primary Research

Primary research was principally conducted in Piñas and Santa Maria, although a small component of research was conducted in diverse locations across Oaxaca and California. An orientation trip to California was undertaken in April 2012, while research was conducted in Santa Maria between May-July 2012 and January-February 2013, and in Piñas between October 2012 and January 2013. Primary research included semi-structured interviews and focus groups with Indigenous participants, participant and site observation, participatory photography exercises with Indigenous participants, and semi-structured interviews with key informants.

3.5.1.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in Piñas and Santa Maria. During the first part of the interviews, participants were asked a set of close-ended questions to survey their demographic profile. Close-ended questions were chosen to provide uniformity and easier processing (Sánchez-Ayala 2012). During the second part of the interviews, participants were asked a set of open-ended questions on a number of relevant topics such as their personal histories of migration, their perceptions of change, their concerns regarding economic, political or social aspects of their lives and their opinions on the impact of migration on the community. Open-ended questions were chosen to give the opportunity to participants to fully share their experiences and opinions (Sánchez-Ayala 2012), while allowing the researcher flexibility to further enquire into particular issues of interest. Interviews were conducted in Mixteco or Spanish. In case of the former, interviews were conducted with a local research assistant who was fluent in Mixteco and Spanish. A total of four individuals contributed to the project as research assistants.

While an initial target of 80 interviews was set, this was later revised due to time and budget constraints. Ultimately 50 interviews were conducted in total (25 per location). The sample was not designed to be representative, but relatively equal participation of male and females aged over 18 years was sought during recruitment (see Table 1 and Table 2). Participants were recruited through a combination of respondent-driven and purposive sampling. Respondent-
driven sampling was appropriate as members of the target population were either difficult to locate or difficult to approach directly (Bose 2012). In this context, this network approach to recruiting participants allowed the researcher to initially overcome trust and language barriers. Purposive sampling was adopted at later stages in order to deliberately reach unrepresented members of the target population. As it explored in further detail in Section 3.6.2, this was necessary in Santa Maria as the recruitment of female participants was particularly difficult.

The recruitment process was driven by the association of participants with Piñas. This illustrated that in spite of a long history of emigration, there are many different experiences of mobility and the boundaries of community belonging are porous and changeable. For instance, there were some participants in Piñas who had never emigrated, but there were also internal and international returned migrants. Similarly, some interviewees in Santa Maria had been born outside of Piñas (particularly in the north of Mexico), or had spent most of their lives away from the village in Oaxaca. Interestingly, in almost every single case, interviewees in Piñas and Santa Maria had a close relative – a child, sibling, partner or parent – currently residing at the other side of the Mexico-US border.
Table 1. Interview Participants in Piñas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Primary Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Montserrat</td>
<td>LP01</td>
<td>16/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romina</td>
<td>LP02</td>
<td>16/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>LP03</td>
<td>16/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>LP04</td>
<td>17/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>LP05</td>
<td>17/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>Primary school *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernarda</td>
<td>LP06</td>
<td>17/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>LP07</td>
<td>18/11/12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elvira</td>
<td>LP08</td>
<td>18/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luisa</td>
<td>LP09</td>
<td>18/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>LP10</td>
<td>18/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dora</td>
<td>LP11</td>
<td>18/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Primary school *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margarita</td>
<td>LP12</td>
<td>21/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karla</td>
<td>LP13</td>
<td>21/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>LP14</td>
<td>21/11/12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabiola</td>
<td>LP15</td>
<td>22/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriela</td>
<td>LP16</td>
<td>22/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricardo</td>
<td>LP17</td>
<td>25/11/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Primary school *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pablo</td>
<td>LP18</td>
<td>25/11/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Cargo</td>
<td>Primary school *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>LP19</td>
<td>25/11/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Cargo</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>LP20</td>
<td>26/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>LP21</td>
<td>27/11/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>LP22</td>
<td>27/11/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>LP23</td>
<td>29/11/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedro</td>
<td>LP24</td>
<td>30/11/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Cargo</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerardo</td>
<td>LP25</td>
<td>01/12/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Primary school *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernando</td>
<td>LP26</td>
<td>02/12/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesús</td>
<td>LP27</td>
<td>05/12/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Cargo</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*not-completed.
### 3.5.1.2 Focus Groups

A selection of participants was asked to join focus group sessions. Focus groups are usually employed as part of a multi-method approach to engage with collective views of particular issues, to explore group contradictions and uncertainties (Lloyd-Evans 2006), or to explore taken-for-granted assumptions (Bloor et al. 2001). Focus groups followed a semi-structured schedule and provided a space to elaborate on the findings of the interviews and debate outstanding issues. This included topics such as the benefits and detriments of migration,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Primary Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manuel</td>
<td>MC01</td>
<td>27/05/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>MC02</td>
<td>27/05/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>MC03</td>
<td>28/05/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Primary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauricio</td>
<td>MC04</td>
<td>28/05/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raúl</td>
<td>MC05</td>
<td>30/05/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>MC06</td>
<td>12/06/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Primary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>MC07</td>
<td>13/06/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Primary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugenia</td>
<td>MC08</td>
<td>15/06/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Primary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>MC09</td>
<td>16/06/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Primary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mateo</td>
<td>MC10</td>
<td>19/06/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Primary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José</td>
<td>MC11</td>
<td>29/06/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Middle school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>MC12</td>
<td>30/06/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emiliano</td>
<td>MC13</td>
<td>14/07/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Primary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estela</td>
<td>MC14</td>
<td>15/07/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arturo</td>
<td>MC15</td>
<td>15/07/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>MC16</td>
<td>15/07/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Primary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>MC17</td>
<td>17/07/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paola</td>
<td>MC18</td>
<td>19/07/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Primary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrique</td>
<td>MC19</td>
<td>20/07/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucia</td>
<td>MC20</td>
<td>20/07/12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Primary school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricio</td>
<td>MC21</td>
<td>27/01/13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judas</td>
<td>MC22</td>
<td>31/01/13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrés</td>
<td>MC23</td>
<td>01/02/13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Middle school*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cristobal</td>
<td>MC24</td>
<td>04/02/13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marian</td>
<td>MC25</td>
<td>06/02/13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*not-completed.
experiences of discrimination in Mexico and the US, recent economic, political and social changes in Piñas, among others.

Two focus groups took place. One session was conducted in Piñas with five female participants, while another session was conducted in Santa Maria with seven male participants (see Table 3). Focus groups were moderated by the researcher and a local research assistant, and they were conducted simultaneously in Spanish and Mixteco. The decision to conduct sessions with only males or females was made to encourage female participation. This was decided based on participant and site observations and in consultation with local research assistants and reflects that ‘issues of power and social status must … be considered if you want to encourage participants to speak’ (Lloyd-Evans 2006).

### Table 3. Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ofelia</td>
<td>FG01</td>
<td>11/01/13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>FG02</td>
<td>11/01/13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>FG03</td>
<td>11/01/13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graciela</td>
<td>FG04</td>
<td>11/01/13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina</td>
<td>FG05</td>
<td>11/01/13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramón</td>
<td>FG06</td>
<td>18/01/13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moisés</td>
<td>FG07</td>
<td>18/01/13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>FG08</td>
<td>18/01/13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberto</td>
<td>FG09</td>
<td>18/01/13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier</td>
<td>FG10</td>
<td>18/01/13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco</td>
<td>FG11</td>
<td>18/01/13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfredo</td>
<td>FG12</td>
<td>18/01/13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35-54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.5.1.3 Participant and Site Observation

Participant and site observation was conducted at various public and private locations over a nine-month period. In Piñas, this included attending public events such as community meetings, school and sport events, religious ceremonies and parties, and more everyday activities in private settings such as sharing a meal or assisting with household duties. In Santa Maria, similar events
and activities were observed. The insights obtained by means of these observations were recorded in a research diary on a weekly basis. This included insights into the everyday lives of families; some of the challenges faced by Indigenous people in Mexico and migrants in the US; the nature of domestic and farm work; the particularities of gender and generational relationships; the functioning of the local government or the hometown association; and access to unwritten ‘local’ histories about the village of ‘origin’ and some of its early emigrants.

Wherever possible, the researcher aimed to be ‘useful’ while observing. While conducting participant and site observation in Santa Maria, the researcher volunteered on an everyday basis at the office of the FIOB assisting Indigenous migrants with immigration, health and housing matters. This was extremely time-consuming, but also rewarding. This provided a strong insight into the everyday challenges faced by Indigenous migrants in Santa Maria and it also allowed the researcher to overcome trust and language barriers. While in Piñas, the researcher was also able to contribute, although in a less systematic manner. Some of the chores included community work (such as cleaning the local primary school with other women) or providing other forms of assistance (such as assisting children with their homework).

3.5.1.4 Exercises of Participatory Photography

Participatory photography was used to document and contextualise the lives of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria. Participatory photography has been described as empowering as it provides participants with learning opportunities ‘to take up their own cameras and create photographs that can be used as autobiographic artefacts in telling one’s story and finding voice’ (Gallo 2001, p. 110). As with other methods, there are however a number of risks, ethical quandaries, and power dynamics to consider (Clover 2006; Prins 2010). Thus, it requires active discussions with participants in order to ensure that standards of consent, respect and privacy are adhered to. This was achieved via an initial training session – which covered technical matters, as well as issues of privacy and consent – and through discussions in follow-up sessions.

A selection of participants – two per location, one male and one female in each case – were given cameras for a two-month period and were asked to document daily aspects of their life and what they considered to be the determinants and impact of migration and broader change around them (see Table 4). A number of these pictures were chosen by the participants and the researcher to be used in this thesis. Participants consequently told the particular story behind each picture to the researcher, so this could be recorded and re-told in their own words by
means of their publication on online and printed media. A selection of these pictures are used throughout this thesis, while others have been published as an online photo-essay on the STIM website (Social Transformation and International Migration Project 2016).

### 3.5.1.5 Semi-structured Interviews with Key Informants

A selection of key informants were also recruited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews across Oaxaca and California. Participants were asked a set of open-ended questions on a number of relevant topics such as the nature of socioeconomic and political changes in Oaxaca and California, trends in internal and international migration, the impact of migration in Oaxaca and the particular challenges faced by Indigenous migrants in California. This provided a rich understanding of the issues relevant for this thesis and complemented the insights provided by Indigenous participants.

Interviews were conducted by the researcher in either English or Spanish. Key informants were recruited through purposive sampling (Marshall and Rossman 2006) via publicly listed contact details. They were chosen on the basis of the ability to provide insider or expert knowledge on specific topics such as policy, labour rights, health or education. In spite of efforts to recruit ten key informants, ultimately only six key informants participated in this project. This included Indigenous migrant leaders, academics, teachers and educational officers, government officials and representatives of non-profit legal and political advocacy groups (see Table 5).

### Table 4. Participatory Photography Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Piñas</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male photographer in Piñas</td>
<td>P01</td>
<td>November-December 2012</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female photographer in Piñas</td>
<td>P02</td>
<td>November-December 2012</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Santa Maria</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male photographer in Santa Maria</td>
<td>SM01</td>
<td>January-February 2013</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female photographer in Santa Maria</td>
<td>SM02</td>
<td>January-February 2013</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5.1.6 Secondary Research at the National, State and Community Level

In addition to primary research, secondary research was carried out at the national, state and community level, using qualitative and quantitative sources. The information obtained was used to contextualise the case study and complement primary research findings. This was particularly useful for drawing links between what was observed at the local level in Piñas and Santa Maria and what was observed at other scales. An initial literature review of sources written in English and Spanish was conducted between March 2011 and March 2012. This included a review of academic journals and books, government reports, newspaper articles, and materials published by migrant and other non-governmental organisations. An additional literature review was conducted between March 2013 and March 2014 following the completion of primary research as – perhaps unsurprisingly – initial research findings highlighted a number of outstanding gaps and opportunities present in the original review.

This was supplemented by the gathering of quantitative data to draw a demographic and economic profile of Piñas and Santa Maria. This thesis particularly engaged with the following sources of quantitative data: (i) the decennial censuses produced by Mexico’s National Institute of Statistic and Geography; (ii) the 2010 Indigenous Farmworker Study produced by a group of farm labour researchers in association with the Indigenous Program of California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA); and (iii) a number of data sources made available by government bodies such as Mexico’s National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL), the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA) and the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL).

Table 5. Interviews with Key Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Institutional Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migrant leader in Santa Maria</td>
<td>KI01</td>
<td>11/06/12</td>
<td>Binational Front of Indigenous Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney in California</td>
<td>KI02</td>
<td>08/07/12</td>
<td>California Rural Legal Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District official in Santa Maria</td>
<td>KI03</td>
<td>12/07/12</td>
<td>Santa Maria Bonita School District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local academic in California</td>
<td>KI04</td>
<td>21/07/12</td>
<td>UC Santa Barbara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State official in Oaxaca</td>
<td>KI05</td>
<td>12/11/12</td>
<td>Oaxacan Institute for Migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local teacher in Piñas</td>
<td>KI06</td>
<td>16/12/12</td>
<td>Secretariat of Public Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5.2 Data Analysis and Dissemination of Findings

The standardisation of data and its analysis was one of the most time-consuming aspects of the project. In particular, the majority of interview and focus group recordings and non-verbatim transcripts had to be translated into English before they could be analysed and coded. Field notes from participant observation, and the stories written during the exercises of participatory photography, were also translated into English. Data was analysed and coded with Nvivo using thematic analysis. The transcripts of semi-structured interviews, focus groups and of the research diaries were coded into nodes representative of certain topics and themes. Once these had been revised for consistency and relevance, selected pictures and annotations from the exercises of participatory photography were also coded. This revealed the emergence of dominant topics and themes that guided the empirical analysis (such as the devaluation of Indigenous people’s land and labour, their uncertainty about temporariness and permanence, and their exclusion from social life). Crucially, this also led to the reformulation of theoretical principles to better reflect the nature of migration and social transformation process in this specific time and context.

The initial findings of this thesis have so far been disseminated in several conferences (Arias Cubas 2011; 2012a; 2014b; 2016). These opportunities provided much-needed appraisals of the theoretical and methodological propositions guiding this research, as well as highlighting potential gaps in the empirical focus. In addition, a selection of pictures and annotations from the participatory photography exercises have been disseminated online. Finally, a final copy of this thesis will be provided to the FIOB and to the local government of Piñas as agreed before the fieldwork commenced in Piñas and Santa Maria.

3.6 Methodological Challenges and Limitations

Several methodological dilemmas arose during this project. This included: the complex relationship between the researcher and Indigenous participants and associated barriers of trust and language; the difficulties encountered in avoiding a ‘gender’ bias in terms of the inclusion of female participants; the limited availability of reliable data to evaluate the wellbeing of participants (particularly with regards to the non-economic dimension of migration and social change); and the modest nature of the study due to time and budget constraints. These issues will be unpacked further below.
3.6.1 Bridging the Distance between the Researcher and Participants

There is a vast amount of literature on the challenges faced by insider/outsider researchers conducting migration research (Carling et al. 2014; Sánchez-Ayala 2012). This is a recognition that a researcher’s positionality – that is, her location in the social structure and the institutions she belongs to – affects both substantive and practical aspects of the research process. To a significant extent the debate on the insider/outsider divide has focused on research conducted in ‘destination’ countries, where an ‘outsider’ is a member of the majority population while an ‘insider’ is a migrant – or the descendant of migrants – who researches his or her ‘own’ migrant group (Carling et al. 2014). In this particular case, the fact that the researcher – who is ‘Mexican’ – was investigating other ‘Mexicans’ would imply to some that she is an ‘insider’. Yet, and as highlighted by various authors (Kusow 2003; Menjívar 2000), ethno-national distinctions are but one element of the researcher’s identity that should not be privileged a priori. This reflects the intersectionality of ethno-national characteristics and other categories such as gender, class or religion. Indeed, there are an infinite number of social categories used to determine group boundaries such that ‘what constitutes “us” separated from “them” changes from one context to the other’ (Carling et al. 2014, p. 41).

To paraphrase Beoku-Betts (1994), ‘Mexican is not enough’. A more complete picture of the positionality of this researcher emerges when one considers that while she was born and raised in Mexico, she is an upper-class mestizo woman and not an Indigenous one. Mestizo is a term used throughout Latin America since colonial times to describe people of ‘mixed ancestry’ – that is, those with a European and Indigenous background. For instance, while the researcher speaks Spanish and English fluently, she struggles beyond basic Mixteco. And while she spent significant periods of her childhood in la Mixteca with the maternal family, the fact that her father was a refugee from abroad, that her maternal family migrated to Mexico City, and that she has migrated to Australia further blurred any trace of clear ethno-national belonging in terms of Mexicanidad. Indeed, many participants identified her as ‘the Australian one’.

In practice, conducting research with Indigenous people in Mexico and the US imposes a number of challenges. In particular, there are trust and language barriers that reflect the legacy of colonialism in the Americas. As explained by Mines et al. (2010, p. 4):

Chapter 3: Methodological Framework

First, they come from towns that are isolated with a long history of discrimination and exploitation by non-indigenous strangers. As a result, Indigenous peoples tend to be difficult to approach. Their experience has taught them not to trust outsiders. The largest barrier is language, because although some speak Spanish well and most speak it to some extent, most prefer to speak in their own languages. Most have a limited Spanish vocabulary that constrains their ability to express what they are feeling. This presents great obstacles to data collection that consequently can only be accomplished through an intermediary group of cultural and linguistic interpreters.

Against this background, the researcher’s designation as an ‘outsider’ was perhaps ultimately inescapable given current conditions of inequality. Indeed, issues of ethnicity, migration status, gender or class permeated her interactions with participants and her own analysis (Carling et al. 2014).

The researcher undertook a gradual process of taking away mistrust (Van Liempt and Bilger 2012). This included: (i) making contact with members of the FIOB and agreeing to a ‘Memorandum of Collaboration between the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations (FIOB) and the Researcher’ that established principles of respect and informed collaboration; (ii) consulting with migrant and community leaders on the strengths and weaknesses of the research project; (iii) obtaining the permission of local authorities before conducting fieldwork in Piñas and obtaining their support for conducting fieldwork in Santa Maria; (iii) volunteering in the office of the FIOB to become acquainted with potential participants, but also to demonstrate good-will behind the research project; and (iv) attending social and religious events on a regular basis and providing assistance whenever requested.

The process of taking away mistrust and overcoming language barriers was also supported by collaboration with a number of research assistants who lived on-site and had in-depth knowledge of the ‘local’ people, culture and life-ways (Bujra 2006; Hedge and Hoban 2014). While each of them assisted with translation during interviews and focus groups, their contribution can be more broadly defined as that of an informant and participant intermediary or an insider-companion (Bujra 2006). Working with research assistants as interpreters represented a compromise. It is ‘not an adequate substitute for learning to speak oneself’, but ‘in some kinds of research there is no alternative to employing the linguistic skills of others and this can have unexpected bonuses as the translator becomes a partner in the struggle to achieve a mediation’ (Bujra 2006, p. 178). But, working with research assistants also brings its own difficulties. For
instance, both the researcher and the research assistant need to be aware of their own social and political biases and positions otherwise information considered relevant by the researcher may be deemed 'irrelevant' by the assistant and be filtered out in the translation process (Sánchez-Ayala 2012). Furthermore, over-reliance on one individual is not recommended as this may harm the reach of the research project (Bujra 2006). These difficulties were addressed in practice by employing a collective of research assistants (two per location) and by continuously debriefing on issues such as the objective of the project, suspected and explicit biases and positions, and the meaning of nonverbal communication in particular situations.

3.6.2 Encouraging Female Participation

This study would be unquestionably incomplete if it did not include an analysis of the histories, experiences and agency of females in Piñas and Santa Maria. While males have traditionally migrated for longer and in larger numbers, the experiences of females contribute significantly to a more holistic understanding of the relationship between social transformation and migration. As argued by de Haan and Yaqub (2009, p. 3) in their analysis of migration and poverty, a focus on gender contributes significantly 'not only in understanding differentiated motivations for, and impacts of, migration, but also in the way migration processes are structured, emphasising power and exploitation'. Yet, the recruitment of female participants proved difficult at different stages of this project. In the case of Santa Maria, for instance, many potential participants would defer in favour of a close male relative citing that ‘he knows more’ or ‘he knows better’. To an extent this reflected the status of gender relations among participants. The difficulties in recruitment also reflected the fact that women simply had less time to contribute as they worked much longer hours than men (they were engaged in paid employment in the fields and unpaid employment at home), they had less access to transport and less Spanish-speaking skills. Indeed, language was a significant barrier for female participants. While all 25 of them reported speaking fluent Mixteco, only 5 reported speaking Spanish fluently and none spoke fluent English (10 of them also reported being able to speak and understand Spanish at a basic level, and 1 reported having a basic level of English understanding). In comparison, while the 25 male participants also reported speaking fluent Mixteco, 20 of them reported speaking fluent Spanish (4 more reported being able to speak and understand Spanish at a basic level) and 14 reported having a basic level of English understanding (although none reported speaking fluent English either).

Four particular strategies were implemented to avoid a significant gender-bias. First, a quota of equal female participation was set for the interviews in Piñas and Santa Maria. This was achieved
through the purposive recruitment of female participants. Second, flexible data collection strategies were developed (Hedge and Hoban 2014). Interviews with female participants were conducted often at home so participants would not depend on a male relative or a raítero (paid-driver) for transport; interviews were also conducted with children present, so participants would not have to arrange child-minding alternatives; and interviews were conducted while simultaneously undertaking household duties, in order to inconvenience interviewees as little possible. Third, and as previously explained, focus groups were conducted separately with males and females in order to encourage a freer dialogue between the researcher and female participants. A final strategy for achieving female participation was that of recruiting two female research assistants who contributed greatly to the collection of primary data in Piñas. The aim of this was to openly include the implicit biases and positions of local females as producers of knowledge.

3.6.3 Navigating the Lack of Data on Indigenous People and Migrants

One of the main external challenges faced was the limited availability of reliable data to evaluate the wellbeing of participants and the social arrangements that shape issues of distribution, representation and recognition around them. This is a common issue faced by researchers working with migrant and Indigenous populations in the US (Huizar Murillo and Cerda 2004; Kissam and Jacobs 2004) and Mexico (Rubio Badan 2014; Serrano Carreto 2006). In Piñas, it was difficult to access data on the population surveyed. Aside from the 2010 Mexican Census, many data sources made available online by secretariats and offices from the Mexican and the Oaxaca government are obfuscated. In terms of accessibility, their domain pathways are at best often unclear, the domains themselves also change often while some sources altogether disappear without notice and without replacement. In terms of specificity, some sources provide data at the community level (i.e. Piñas) while others provide data at the municipal level (i.e. Santiago Juxtlahuaca) or the regional level only (i.e. La Mixteca). Finally, in terms of transparency, it is particularly difficult to access clear data on the impact and reach of key government programs. As explained by Fox and Haight (2010, p. 7) with regards to Mexico’s agricultural programs, ‘they lack both transparency and accountability’ such that even when information is made public ‘insufficiently precise data leads to substantial confusion’.

It was even more difficult to access data on the population in Santa Maria. In terms of accessibility, it was almost impossible to get disaggregated data for the population who originated from Piñas (or even from La Mixteca or Oaxaca). To give an example, the US Census does not
Chapter 3: Methodological Framework

provide data disaggregated below ‘national’ categories of ‘Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish’ ‘origin’. Thus, while in practice one can access data for the population of ‘Mexican/Mexican-American/Chicano’ ‘origin’ in Santa Maria, there is no way of knowing with certainty if these are ‘Mexicans’ from Oaxaca or ‘Mexicans’ from another state like Zacatecas.\(^{28}\) In terms of reliability, this is further complicated by the ‘mega-undercount’ of Indigenous migrants and seasonal farmworkers (Kissam and Jacobs 2004). This can be due to: the timing of surveys (in other words, whether migrants or seasonal farmworkers are present at that moment of intake); difficulties encountered by Indigenous people due to barriers of language and illiteracy; or problems faced by researchers in reaching ‘non-traditional’ households (such as cases where multiple families reside at one address, which is common among Indigenous migrants) (Kissam and Jacobs 2004).

An associated difficulty in both the Mexican and US contexts was the limited availability of data sources that engage with the non-economic aspects of social transformation and wellbeing. While bodies like the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (see for instance Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social 2014) and the National Council to Prevent Discrimination (see for instance Escalante Betancourt 2009) have data on issues such as education, access to health services, basic household services and experiences of discrimination of Indigenous people in Mexico, there are fewer sources relating to Indigenous migrants in the US. One could argue that this is representative of the situation across the Americas. As explained by Cordero et al. (2013), the lack of information and studies on the non-economic aspect of migrants’ wellbeing is related to the dominance of an economistic approach under which migration has often been studied in the region. This approach highlights the wealth generating capacity of migrants and neglects the study of other social and political phenomena. This in turn leads to a negative cycle, as these other dimensions of wellbeing are the least studied, and are also the most difficult to study due to the lack of criteria, indicators and data sources.

Given these limitations, this thesis engages with a variety of studies to supplement available government data. In particular, it draws from the 2010 Indigenous Farmworker Study (Mines et al. 2010) to build a more accurate socioeconomic profile of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria.

--

\(^{28}\) One could identify and access data for ‘Mixtecos’ as a subgroup of the ‘race’ category ‘American Indian or Alaska Native’, although this is only available for the basic count/estimate of the census, which provides basic data on gender, age, relationship, household by type and so on. This is because in the US federal statistical system, Hispanic ‘origin’ is considered to be a separate concept from ‘race’. Thus, an individual of Hispanic ‘origin’ can also self-identify with one or more of six ‘race’ categories (Humes et al. 2011).
in particular, and of Mixtecos in Oaxaca and California in general. This report provides data on education, access to health services, basic household services, working conditions, income, assets, housing and living conditions for Indigenous farmworkers in California in general and for migrants of nine villages of ‘origin’ in particular. Piñas is one of the villages extensively surveyed by the 2010 Indigenous Farmworker Study – the availability of this data was one of the reasons for choosing to study this locality in the first place. Theoretically, this represented a compromise as the data was collected among farmworkers only, and thus excluded migrants who are employed outside agriculture. But this is less problematic in practice, as interviews with participants in Santa Maria and with returned migrants in Piñas showed that the vast majority of them were employed as farmworkers.

3.6.4 Recognising the Modest Scope of the Project

Taking into account these challenges and shortcomings, this study is undeniably modest in scope. This is further complicated by time and budget constraints. As a PhD student, the researcher had a strict timeline in which to work, while access to funding to conduct primary research was also limited. This had a number of implications. First, the research project had to restrict itself to a limited number of geographical locations. Piñas is linked by economic, political and social ties to multiple localities that span across national and international borders. Aside from the village of ‘origin’, there are considerable ‘satellite’ communities in nearby areas (Santiago Juxtlahuaca in Oaxaca), in northern Mexico (San Quintín and Zapata, Baja California), and in the west coast of the US (San Diego and Santa Maria in California). While an ideal study of social transformation and migration would involve research in all of these areas, in practice the decision had to be made to restrict the scope of the study to Piñas and Santa Maria.

This meant that a key research site – that is, San Quintín – could not be included in the primary research. As further explained in Chapter 4, San Quintín stands as a site of analytical interest for two main reasons. Firstly, due to its weight as a place of destination for internal migrants from Piñas and as a ‘launch pad’ for international migrants to nearby California and the rest of the US (Clark Alfaro 2008). Secondly, due to its significance as part of the Baja California-California agricultural production region that employs a large Indigenous workforce. In order to address this gap, special attention was given to secondary research sources that could shed light into the history and bearing of Mixteco migrations to San Quintín, as well as into the development of industrial agriculture in northern Mexico as part of the larger process of economic integration. Importantly, much valuable first-hand knowledge was also gained from interviews with older
informants in Piñas and Santa Maria as many of them had previously migrated to San Quintín and nearby areas primarily to work as farmworkers.

A second implication of these time and budget constraints was that the original research plans had to be revised in-situ. As mentioned before, fewer interviews were conducted than originally planned. One of the main reasons for this was that the recruitment of participants – particularly in Santa Maria – was extremely time- and labour-consuming. Aside from the issues of trust and language described above, a major obstacle was the extremely long hours that most participants worked. During the agricultural season, it was virtually impossible to conduct interviews between 6am and 7pm from Monday to Saturday. A similar challenge was the unreliability of key informants. For instance, many potential participants deferred requests for an interview to a subordinate or a supervisor, who in turn would do the same. Thus, finding an individual whom was in fact willing to participate proved extremely time-consuming. A separate issue was that on a number of occasions, even after potential participants agreed to have an interview, they subsequently changed the location and time at the last minute or cancelled completely. This led to the ultimate suspension of a number of interviews with potential key informants.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the methodology underlying this thesis and the methods used to gather and analyse data. These methodological principles emphasised the importance of conducting research that: (i) engages with multiple scales, and the contradictions and synergies that exist between them; (ii) pays attention to the economic, social and political dimensions of migration and social change; and (iii) places people – their actual histories, experiences and agency – at the centre of debates. In practice, this translates into a multi-scalar, multi-sited mixed-methods approach which combines the strengths of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant and site observation, participatory photography and secondary research to gain insights into the relationship between migration and social transformation in the neoliberal era, and into key economic, political and social relationships and institutions that affect the mobility and wellbeing of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria. Thus, while this methodology evolved over the course of the study in response to multiple challenges and shortcomings, it served as an important bridge between the theoretical propositions outlined in Chapter 2 and the empirical findings of to be presented in the following chapters.
Chapter 4: Histories of Indigenous Migration

4 From the Mountains of Oaxaca to the Fields of California – Histories of Indigenous Migration

4.1 Introduction

Mexican migration to the US spans over two centuries, yet the magnitude and significance of migrant flows has increased drastically since the 1980s. The composition of migration flows has also changed over recent decades, with more migrants coming from Mexico’s less prosperous south and south-east regions, which are home to a large percentage of the country’s Indigenous population. The growth of Indigenous migration has meant that the ‘Mexican migrant population in the US increasingly reflects the ethnic diversity of Mexican society’ (Fox 2006, p. 40), while the social reproduction of many Indigenous families and communities in Mexico has become intrinsically linked to internal and international mobility (González Chévez 2009). One of the most mobile groups in this new era of multi-ethnic migration is Mixteco men, women and children from the state of Oaxaca who form part of one of Mexico’s largest Indigenous groups.

As mentioned in previous chapters, this project focuses on the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco participants in Piñas (Oaxaca) and Santa Maria (California). This chapter seeks to produce an embedded understanding of migration that emphasises the links between participants’ histories, experiences and agency, and the broader processes of economic, political and social change taking place at the local, regional, national and global level. This chapter is organised in the following way. Section 4.2 provides key background information on Mexico’s Indigenous population and the emergence of Indigenous migrations to the US. Section 4.3 in turn provides key background information on La Mixteca and the growth of Mixteco migration into California. Section 4.4 looks in detail at the development of migration flows from Piñas. This section argues that the quantity and quality of Mixteco migration to the US cannot be understood in isolation from the long history of internal mobility. In fact, the large growth of emigration flows in recent years is better understood in the context of rapid and broad change experienced by the region as part of the broader neoliberal social transformation processes taking place in Mexico and the US. This not only includes economic changes (such as the growth of industrial agriculture in northern Mexico and California and the decline of subsistence agriculture in Oaxaca), but also social ones (like the emergence of Pentecostal churches in northern Mexico, California and Oaxaca) and political ones (such as the increasing securitisation and selectivity of migration across borders). Finally, Section 4.5 draws a number of conclusions.
4.2 Indigenous People in Mexico

This project does not draw a strict line between who is an Indigenous person and who is not. It agrees with the principle that it is not for outsiders, but for ‘Indigenous community members themselves to identify who belongs to each of the Indigenous groups’ (Mines et al. 2010, p. 1). For the sake of clarity some historical and sociological background is provided in this section to highlight what makes Indigenous people distinctive from other – primarily *mestizo* – Mexican migrants. While this is complex, a key factor is the dual character of Indigenous migrants: ‘*son pueblos originarios y son pueblos en transición*’ (Fox 2004, p. 7) – meaning, they are people who are Indigenous, not only in the sense of being autochthonous, but also as people who are part of a continuously living and changing culture. This duality highlights that while Indigenous migrants face unique challenges – due to their status in Mexico and the US as Indigenous people and as ‘irregular’ migrants – they are neither passive nor anonymous victims, but rather social actors that are creating new forms of commonality and reconstituting themselves as social, political and economic subjects at a translocal and transnational level.

In Mexico, constructions of Indigeneity have been largely imposed upon Indigenous people. In line with critiques of the facile use of concepts such as ‘ethnic community’ by migration scholars (Glick-Schiller et al. 2006) one can trace the manner in which Indigeneity has been constructed and naturalised in Mexico. This does not change the fact that the grouping of Indigenous people, according to colonial and government classifications, is hard to overcome when searching for quantitative and qualitative data. Yet, it is crucial to emphasise that the constructions of identity in Mexico – in terms of ‘ethnicity’ and ‘race’ – has framed the Indigenous person as an inferior ‘other’. In particular, the hierarchical duality *Indígena-mestizo*, along with class relations, is the foundation of ethnic relations (Velasco Ortiz 2014). As defined by Article 2 of the Mexican Constitution (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos 1917), Indigenous people are ‘those that descend from the populations which inhabited the present territory of the country before the [Spanish] colonisation, and who maintain their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, or part thereof.’ *Indígenas* thus stands in contrast to *mestizos*, that is, the majority of the Spanish-speaking population of mixed European and Indigenous background. This distinction between *Indígenas* and *mestizos* also informs debates on race. Significantly, and as explained by Lara Flores (2003), this distinction is not outlined strictly in terms of skin colour, but rather in terms of membership into a social group whose stigma of otherness is constructed through cultural differences.
According to the country’s latest Census, there are 15.7 million Indigenous people in Mexico (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía n.d.). This implies that in spite of a ‘legacy of centuries of poverty, discrimination, genocide, and (only apparently more benign) assimilation’ (Rivera Salgado 2014, p. 31) 9.1 million Mexicans identify as Indigenous, while an additional almost 6.9 million continue to speak an Indigenous language (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía n.d.). That the largest Indigenous population of Latin America is still found in Mexico is nothing less than remarkable considering relatively recent policies of *indigenismo* – which sought to uproot the perceived ‘backwardness’ of Indigenous people by eliminating Indigenous languages and ways of life (Stavenhagen 2015; Velasco Ortiz 2014). Whereas a counter-movement that emphasises Mexico’s pluralism and Indigenous peoples’ right to difference and autonomy has taken place since the last decades of the twentieth century – most evidently through the Zapatista movement – the subordination of Indigenous people continues. This is strongly linked to systemic discrimination from the government and sectors of the *mestizo* population. The fact that words such as *indio* (‘Indigenous’ in Mexican Spanish) are commonly used to insult or denigrate others is only one reflection of this. Indigenous people as a group have been denied access to quality employment, educational opportunities and government services (Mines et al. 2010), and the federal government has failed to implement the 1996 San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture (see Chapter 6 for more on this). Not surprisingly, the Indigenous population has higher rates of poverty than the *mestizo* population and lags behind in other major indicators of wellbeing (see Figure 2).

---

29 These homogenous classifications often do not match the actual identity of Indigenous peoples. For instance, research has shown that not all those who speak Mixteco self-identify as Mixtecos, while many who self-identify as Mixtecos do not speak the language (Mindek 2003).

30 The Accords are a key reference point in the struggle for Indigenous rights in Mexico. They are an agreement between the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation or EZLN) and the federal government that recognised Indigenous rights and granted a modest form of autonomy to Indigenous peoples (Hernández Navarro and Vera Herrena 1998).
While the Indigenous population of Mexico is predominantly concentrated in rural areas across the country’s less prosperous south and south-east regions – particularly in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Yucatán – the presence of Indigenous migrants across Mexico’s largest cities and

---

Figure 2. Key Multi-Dimensional Poverty Indicators


---

31 In this case, being able to speak an Indigenous language is used as a proxy to define Indigeneity. These indicators measure poverty in terms of key deprivations. ‘Educational gap’ measures if a person of school age is not attending school or if, according to her age, she has not finished elementary or middle school. ‘Lack of access to health services’ measures if a person is not ascribed or affiliated (directly or by kinship) to an official institution or health program. ‘Lack of access to social security’ measures if a person does not have access to a set of minimum social benefits (such as medical services, retirement funds or disability benefits). ‘Housing with inadequate quality or insufficient space’ measures if a person lives in dwelling that lacks floors, roofs and walls made of concrete, bricks, wood or any superior quality or where the number of people per room (including kitchen but excluding hallways and bathrooms) exceeds 2.5. ‘Lack of basic housing services’ measures if a person lives in a dwelling that does not have piped water, drainage, electricity and cooking fuel (such as gas or electricity, or where the kitchen does not have a chimney when the fuel used is timber or coal). Finally, ‘lack of access to food’ measures if a person, due to a shortage of money or other resources, has a diet based on a very small variety of foods, eats just once a day (or stops eating for a whole day) or feels hungry but is unable to eat (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social n.d.). See footnote 30 for more detail.
northern-border areas has also been well documented (Rubio et al. 2000). More recent flows towards the US have emerged in the context of a history of mobility that includes regional displacements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rural-urban migration in the mid-twentieth century, and rural-rural migration in more recent decades since. However, not all Indigenous migrants share the same stories or trajectories of mobility. As explained by Rivera Salgado (2014, p. 33):

Until the late 1990s, Mexico’s two largest indigenous ethno-linguistic groups, the Nahua and the Maya, did not cross the border in large numbers. In contrast to the predominance of Mixtecs and Zapotecs from Oaxaca among migrants to Baja California and the United States, 27 percent of migrants to Mexico City are of Nahua origin and 17 percent are Hñähñu (Otomi). However, as the neoliberal economic and social dynamics that encourage migration spread more deeply throughout the Mexican countryside, indigenous people who do not have a long history of migration outside of their regions are now coming to the United States. For example, Mayas from Yucatán and Chiapas are found working in California and Texas, Hñähñus and Nahua from central Mexico are coming to the American Midwest and Texas, and Mixtecs from Puebla are settling in the New York area, followed more recently by Hñähñus from neighbouring Veracruz. Mixtecs and Nahua are also coming to the United States from Guerrero, a Mexican state whose migration patterns have received little research attention so far.

4.3 *Mixtecos in Mexico and the US*

Among other Indigenous groups who have travelled to the US, the history and experiences of Mixteco migrants has been perhaps best documented (Cornelius et al. 2009; Fitzgerald et al. 2013; Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004b; Varese and Escárcega 2004; Velasco Ortiz and París Pombo 2014). Many of these migrants originate from *La Mixteca* region of Oaxaca, one of the poorest of Mexico, where almost seven out of ten people there live in poverty, while more than
three out of ten live in extreme poverty (Centro de Información Estadística y Documental para el Desarrollo 2012). This provides an image of la Mixteca in Oaxaca:

If you travel … north-west from Oaxaca de Juarez, the capital city of Oaxaca, in about ninety minutes you should be entering the Mixteca … You are likely to be struck at once by the present and the past. The present: a moonscape of rugged mountains and steep hillsides, many severely eroded, and of gutted valleys; scattered villages, seemingly uniformly poor. The past: colonial churches and monasteries, imposing and often strikingly out of proportion to their villages … What this visible, sometimes even eerie, incongruity of the past to the present speaks to is that the Mixteca, today perhaps one of the poorest regions in all of Mexico, was famous for its wealth and population when the Spaniards first entered … centuries ago (Collins 1995, p. 3).

Given this precarious socioeconomic environment, it is not surprising to find that la Mixteca in general, and certain geographical spaces within it in particular, are key sources of national and international emigrants. According to the Instituto Oaxaqueño de Atención al Migrante, (Oaxacan Institute for Migrants or IOAM, 2009) more than 26 per cent of all Oaxacan migrants originate from the la Mixteca region. Similarly, 76 per cent of migrants from la Mixteca originate from four out of its seven districts: 23 per cent from Tlaxiaco, 20 per cent from Siloayapan, 19 per cent from Huajuapan and 14 per cent from Juxtlahuaca (where Piñas is located). As estimated by a state government official, up to 300,000 Mixtecos reside in the US, with thousands more in north-west Mexico (interview, 12/11/12). As further discussed below, Mixteco migrants have been largely incorporated into an agro-export processing zone that extends from north-west Mexico into California. While not all Mixtecos migrate for work, or to work on agricultural fields per se, it is significant that a critical mass of them is concentrated in agricultural work, one of the most labour-demanding and lowest-paid jobs in Mexico and the US (see Figure 3).

---

32 According to CONEVAL’s official definition, someone is ‘poor’ if she has an income that is below the ‘wellbeing line’ and endures at least one social deprivation. Someone is ‘extremely poor’ if she has an income that is below the ‘minimum wellbeing line’ and endures three or more social deprivations. The deprivations are educational gap, lack of access to health services, lack of access to social security, housing with inadequate quality and insufficient space, lack of basic housing services, and lack of access to food. The ‘wellbeing line’ represents the monetary value of a food, goods, and basic services basket, while the ‘minimum wellbeing line’ represents the monetary value of the food basket alone (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social n.d.). See footnote 29 for more on this.

33 The state of Oaxaca is divided in eight regions, 30 districts and 570 municipalities. Each municipality in turn contains one cabecera municipal (seat of the municipal government), agencias municipales (villages) and agencias de policía (hamlets). La Mixteca region for instance is sub-divided into seven districts, which in turn are sub-divided into 155 municipalities (Collins 1995; Rivera Salgado 2014). Piñas is one agencia municipal in the municipality of Santiago Juxtlahuaca, which is part of the district of Juxtlahuaca.
Most of these workers are Mixtecos. I always wonder what the farmers would do to reap the harvest if not for these men and women here. [White Americans] do not work well in the fields (female photographer in Santa Maria, 2013).

Research on Mixteco migrants emphasises four trends. First, Mixteco migrants have an intense and continual relationship with their villages of ‘origin’ due to the system of usos y costumbres (customary law) that governs many communities (Velasco Ortiz 2014). This system ‘situates its migrants in a complex array of familial and community obligations that [are required] in order to maintain one’s citizenship and residence’ (Ventura Luna 2010, p. 43).34 As further discussed below, this system has influenced – and has been influenced by – emigration from villages like Piñas (Kearney and Besserer 2004; Ventura Luna 2010). Second, Mixtecos have reconstituted their identity as ‘Indigenous’ people and have engaged in new forms of ‘transnational community’ and ‘transnational ethnic consciousness’ (Kearney and Nagengast 1989). While social identity in la Mixteca was historically defined in terms of the village of origin, a ‘pan-Mixteca’ or ‘pan-Indigenous’ identity has emerged among migrants in the north-west of Mexico and the US (Kearney 1994). In this context, aside from the comitiva del pueblo (hometown association) that attend to issues related to the village of origin while promoting its cultural

34 As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 and 6, Indigenous epistemologies of citizenship are constituted in terms of collective and individual responsibilities and rights. Responsibilities include participation in cargos and mayordomias (civic and religious offices), tequio (communal work) and specific payments towards projects or celebrations. Rights include access to communal land for farming or to build a family home, access to communal resources (wood, water, wild game, etc.), burial in the community cemetery, and participation and voting in community assemblies (Stephen 2014).
reproduction; there are pan-ethnic and multi-regional ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Oaxacan’ coalitions that bring migrants together for broader cultural and political reasons (Rivera Salgado 2014). Third, Mixteco migrants in the US are concentrated in rural California and in specific job markets, particularly agriculture (López and Runsten 2004). While there are no accurate counts, it has been estimated that half of the more than 165,000 Indigenous migrants working in California’s agricultural fields were Mixteco speakers (Mines et al. 2010). Fourth, Mixteco migrants have higher rates of disadvantage compared to mestizo migrants. Study after study has found that Mixteco migrants – many of whom are ‘irregular’ – are poorer and less educated and they often live and work in worse conditions than mestizo migrants, and they are subject to discrimination by both mestizo Mexicans and white-Americans (Farquhar et al. 2008; Mines et al. 2010; Runsten and Kearney 1994; Zabin 1994).

4.4 Migration and Social Transformation in Piñas and Santa Maria

In line with broader trends of Indigenous migration, migrants from Piñas have travelled to the US in great numbers over the last decades, with Santa Maria being one of their primary destinations. As argued in the following sections, Piñas and Santa Maria are now linked by a relatively long history of translocal and transnational social relations. It has been reported that the earliest migrants from Piñas arrived in the US in 1977 (Runsten and Kearney 1994), while participants reported that migrants arrived to Santa Maria in the mid-1980s. In their survey of Indigenous migrant farmworkers, Mines et al. (2010, p. 115) describe Piñas as an ‘early-arriving community’ with a relatively ‘low degree of settlement’ because the median year of arrival of migrants to the US was 1995, and because the majority of migrants had not taken their families with them to the US and many still travelled back and forth between Mexico and the US. As of 2010, Mines et al. (2010, p. 23) also calculated that ‘the median age of the population of the settlers is relatively high (33 years)’. Interestingly, this description did not fully match the experiences of participants in this project, as the majority of those in Santa Maria (two-thirds) had their partners and families with them and very few (less than one-fifth) had travelled to Mexico since 2010.

In terms of population size, there are no reliable estimates for the number of migrants from Piñas in Santa Maria. Given the relatively small sample size of this project is it not possible to

---

35 Some of the best-known coalitions include the Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (Oaxacan Indigenous Binational Front or FIOB) and the Federación Oaxaqueña de Comunidades Indígenas en California (Federation of Organisations and Communities of Oaxacan Indigenous Peoples or FOCOICA). For more on these and other Indigenous organisations see (Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004b).
produce an accurate estimate of this population. It is nonetheless significant that on top of the 25 participants that were interviewed in Santa Maria, one can directly trace another 106 individuals (participants’ spouses and children) in Santa Maria and 25 more across the US (particularly in San Diego). While this certainly under-represents the population of migrants with links to Piñas in San Maria – and even more in other parts of the US – it is telling that these 156 individuals (migrants and their relatives) add up to almost 20 per cent of the current population of the village in Oaxaca. It is also illustrative that locals in Piñas estimate that ‘nowadays there is around 80 families [from Piñas] living in the US. Here in the village there are another 200’ (interview with Jesús, 5/12/12). In this context, and amid broader processes of social transformation, it is not surprising that Piñas has experienced significant population change. In particular, the population of the village declined between 1990 and 2000 (with the number of men almost halving), before reaching a relative plateau since then (see Figure 4).³⁶

Figure 4. Population Change in Piñas between 1990-2010

Emigration from Piñas to Santa Maria has occurred amid significant social, economic and political change. Emigration did not emerge in a vacuum; it has rather developed in tandem with other phenomena. Among others, flows between Piñas and Santa Maria are best understood in the context of a long history of internal migration resulting from environmental and economic factors. More recently, significant changes have taken place amid broader processes of neoliberal

³⁶ It is not possible to gather data from before 1990, since 1990 is the earliest census in which data was made available at the community/localidad level. This is unfortunate as emigration from the village started prior to this decade.
social transformation that have led to increasing inequality within and between borders. While this transformation has driven the incorporation of Mixteco migrants into agribusinesses in north-west Mexico and California, it would be wrong to suggest that this has been solely an economic process. For instance, one cannot truly account for the history, experiences and agency of participants without taking into consideration processes of social change – as seen most clearly through the growth of non-Catholic churches among primarily Catholic communities. This demonstrates that emigration is not simply the result of isolated changes in the village, the region or the country. Nor is emigration the sole cause of changes in these spaces. Rather, migration has occurred alongside broader economic, political and social processes that have affected people, villages, and industries in different ways.

4.4.1 Early Migration Flows within Mexico

One of the first factors to consider when analysing international migration from villages such as Piñas is the long history of internal mobility from the region. While Mixtecos where not involved in large-scale migration to the US until relatively recently, many have been mobile for generations. Early emigration flows from la Mixteca began in the late nineteenth century (Sarmiento 1989) or in the years immediately after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) (de la Peña 1950). Earlier migrants came largely from villages near the major roads (Mines et al. 2010) and where Spanish and Mixteco were both spoken (López and Runsten 2004). Migrants from more remote and monolingual villages joined the migrant stream later (Mindek 2003). During the first two decades of the twentieth century, and with variations among different villages, Mixteco migrants travelled to work in the coffee and cotton plantations along the coast of Oaxaca and the south-west of Chiapas and later in the sugar cane plantations in Veracruz. Around the 1920s-1940s, Mixtecos began to migrate to Mexico City and other urban areas to work in construction, gardening and domestic work (Mindek 2003). By the middle of the century, migration to north-west Mexico had begun and men were participating in the Bracero Program in the US. Indeed, estimates suggest that between 7,000 (Hernández and O’Connor 2013) and 8,000 (Sánchez cited in Flores 2000) Mixtecos migrated as braceros. In general, and aside from permanent migration to urban centres such as Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl on the periphery of Mexico City, Mixtecos travelled seasonally to work as farmhands in agriculture before returning to their villages to visit families, tend their family plots or to serve as cargo (civic and ceremonial offices) in accordance to the system of usos y costumbres (customary law) (Kearney and Besserer 2004; Zabin 1994). Their migration was described as that of golondrinas (swallows): one that trails from place to place
following crop cycles in different regions (de la Peña 1950). This pattern persists among some migrants who continue to work in industrial agriculture in Mexico and the US.

In line with regional trends, participants described a long history of emigration from Piñas: ‘in the 1960s locals were going to work to Veracruz, then to Culiacan [Sinaloa], Hermosillo [Sonora] and Ensenada [Baja California]’ (interview with Jesús, 5/12/12). A number of elderly participants also described having migrated to Veracruz and north-west Mexico when young:

*It was such a long time ago … I went on my own to Veracruz to work. I had nothing in Piñas … There was not enough work. My father was a very humble man; we had very little, not even a [proper] house … My father was not interested in going out … But someone from the town had told me that there was work there. I spent three years working on the sugarcane fields. From Veracruz, I went to Sinaloa for six or seven years, and then to Hermosillo [Sonora] for another six or eight. I was always in the field. In Veracruz, cutting sugarcane. In Sinaloa, picking tomatoes. In Hermosillo, picking grapes, but also chickpeas, sesame seeds and so on … I used to return to Piñas every year … to serve as a cargo for a year, and I then would go away again after I had finished it* (interview with Enrique, 20/07/12).

Two critical insights emerged from the analysis of interviews and focus groups. First, it was important to find that women, although in lower numbers, had also emigrated from Piñas for a long time and that historically they were working on the agricultural fields alongside male migrants (see Figure 5). Among others, Eugenia recalled that:

*I left Piñas for the first time when I was 18-19 years old. I travelled to Culiacan [Sinaloa] with my husband in search of money to buy clothes. We stayed there for about two or three months before going back to Piñas. After that we travelled to Hermosillo [Sonora] for six-seven months. I worked picking grapes, melons and chilli. We only used to go for the money, because everything else [food] grows in Piñas. We travelled like that for many years* (interview, 15/06/12).

There were important differences between male and female migrants. While male migrants often travelled alone or with other males from the village, women tended to only travel with their fathers or husbands. Furthermore, female migrants often worked in and outside of the fields. Aside from agricultural work, they often looked after children and undertook unpaid domestic work such as cooking and cleaning. These differences persist today (see Chapter 7 for more detail). Second, it was interesting to find the relatively low levels of emigration from the village vis-à-vis others in the region and the selectivity of their destinations. Compared to the other villages with a longer history of emigration, relatively few people ventured out of Piñas before
the 1970s. This is perhaps due to the low levels of Spanish fluency in Piñas and its remoteness from main roads leading out of Oaxaca. Significantly, the Bracero Program was not mentioned by any of the participants. However, it is likely that some men indeed travelled to the US in the 1942-1964 period given that a previous survey found that a few men from the village took part in the Bracero Program (Mines et al. 2010). Furthermore, while many travelled to the east coast and the north-west of Mexico, no one described migrations to Mexico City or its periphery.

**Figure 5. Returned Female Migrant Harvesting Coffee**

![Returned Female Migrant Harvesting Coffee](image)

*There are women who have emigrated in the past. Their children have also migrated, but their situation has not improved. Like her, many continue to depend on the coffee harvest [as a source of income] (female photographer in Piñas, 2012).*

The phenomenon of Indigenous migration to the US, and the experience of migrants from villages like Piñas, is best understood if one takes into consideration this long history of mobility. Skeldon (2006, p. 23) argues that ‘those looking at internal migration and those looking at international migration are separately looking at what are likely to be different responses to similar forces.’ It is thus important to recognise the temporal and spatial continuum of these flows, or in other words, to note ‘how internal migration is often sequenced or interleaved with international migration’ (King 2002, p. 92). Early internal flows occurred at a time when la Mixteca was facing environmental challenges, as well as social and economic changes. Many of
these continue to influence emigration flows today; the primary differences being the larger scale of the flows, the transition from internal to international destinations, and the evolution from temporary to permanent stays.

Environmental factors – related to the limited vitality of agriculture – continue to impact the livelihoods of people and drive emigration from the region. This is rooted in the ambiguity that while la Mixteca is characterised by its rugged terrain, poor soils and a high degree of erosion, the inhabitants have historically depended on subsistence agriculture. More than half a century ago, de la Peña (1950) highlighted that early emigration flows were related to poor agricultural conditions and the destruction of livestock following the Mexican revolution. More recently, scholars have continued to highlight the marginality of agriculture, which is practiced in small units of eroded and rain-fed soil, as driving emigration (Collins 1995; Mindek 2003). Collins (1995, p. 12) argues that ‘most households … do not produce enough maize, not to mention other foods, for their own annual consumption needs’. Livestock, another of the pillars of the regional economy since colonisation, is equally poor (Collins 1995; Mindek 2003). Paradoxically, while livestock has supplemented the diets and the incomes of locals, the fact that animals graze freely has further deteriorated the flora and soils upon which agriculture depends. Finally, while the cultivation of coffee emerged as an alternative source of income since the 1940s, this was limited as coffee growers were small in scale and geographically remote. As further discussed below, the situation of Indigenous coffee growers – and subsistence farmers in general – has become more precarious since the 1980s (Lewis and Runsten 2008; Marroquín and Hernández 2009). In this environmental context, emigration can thus be seen as emerging as a means of household maintenance and a complement to subsistence agriculture.

But there are also social and economic factors – related to the expansion of the market economy – that drive people to search of paid employment outside of the region. Until the middle of the twentieth century, Mixtecos in rural villages had ‘carved out for themselves a self-sufficient existence’ although ‘life was desperately poor for the vast majority’ (Mines et al. 2010, p. 12). They either made, grew, gathered or raised almost all the products needed for their survival (food, clothing, construction materials, etc.); or they engaged in barter trading with other villages in the region. The beginning of the monetisation of the local economy is related to three factors. First, as mentioned previously, the cultivation of coffee – a cash crop – grew since the 1940s. The resulting circulation of money allowed growers access to food produced outside the village

37 Estimates suggest that family harvest ensure food supplies for as little as two months (Collins 1995) to six or eight months per year (Mindek 2003).
and to compensate for periods of scarcity, although it also led to inequalities within and between villages (Katz 2009). Second, the region became decreasingly isolated from the 1950s onwards due to the construction of roads and the gradual arrival of services such as electricity, running water, telephone, and television (Katz 2009). It is unclear precisely when roads reached Piñas, ‘the community got drinking water and electricity in the early 1980s’ (interview with Jesús, 5/12/12). Nevertheless, the introduction and gradual expansion of roads within the entire Mixteca region facilitated the departure of migrants to more distant places (Velasco Ortiz 2005). Finally, the monetisation of the local economy was further driven by the arrival of ‘industrial’ goods from outside the region (Katz 2009). As explained by Mines et al. (2010, p. 12):

The time-consuming and difficult ways of producing the needed goods locally were gradually cast aside by a hunger for cheaper and less work-intensive imported items … Imported cloth, hats and shoes soon replaced ‘manta’ cloth, palm sombreros and huaraches. Imports of Coca Cola and Tequila replaced locally made ‘tapache’ and mezcal

This expansion of the market economy set in motion what can be described as a process of cumulative causation as local people sought paid employment outside of their villages not only to complement shortfalls in food, but also to pay for goods and services that in turn become increasingly popular (see Figure 6). This process has only intensified over the last few decades amid processes of neoliberal social transformation.  

38 Ironically, processed food items such as instant coffee and wheat flour (for tortillas) have become popular across the region (Katz 2009). This paradox is evident in Piñas. While most locals have small coffee plantations, and some continue to harvest and sell their produce, Nescafé – a brand belonging to Swiss transnational Nestlé – is purchased and consumed by locals on a regular basis despite its significantly higher cost (research diary, log 13, 2012).
There is a very visible difference between payments for work performed in the village or within the [Mexican] republic and those paid abroad. This is one of the realities that push each Indigenous person to migrate to the US (male photographer in Piñas, 2012).

4.4.2 More Migrants, to More Distant Places, for Longer Periods

While this history of internal mobility demonstrates that villages like Piñas are no strangers to migration, the growth of flows since the 1970s – when Mixtecos migrated in larger numbers to north-west Mexico and later travelled further north into the US – is noteworthy. By the late 1980s it was estimated that out of every ten people born in la Mixteca, three had emigrated permanently, four had emigrated temporarily and only three remained in the region (Ortiz Gabriel 1989). Through this period, a critical mass of Mixteco migrants established ‘satellite’ communities in the north-west of Mexico and in California in what now forms part of la ruta Mixteca (the route of Mixteco migration) (Varese and Escárcega 2004).

Emigration from la Mixteca to north-west Mexico grew in parallel with the development of agribusinesses in Sinaloa, Sonora and Baja California. Among others, Mixtecos were brought to the developing agricultural fields by enganchadores (labour contractors) who recruited workers across la Mixteca with promises of well-paying jobs and housing (Garduño et al. 1989). Mixteco workers however, have endured less than living wages and appalling living and working conditions (Clark Alfaro 2008; Zabin 1994). This was, and continues to be, a source of conflict (Bacon 2015). In the case of Piñas, emigration flows to the north-west intensified during the
Chapter 4: Histories of Indigenous Migration

1980s. At the time migrants travelled primarily to the valley of San Quintín (Baja California), although some also travelled to Culiacan (Sinaloa) and Hermosillo (Sonora) (see Figure 7). Migration to the agricultural fields was at first mostly seasonal. By the late 1980s it was estimated that 40,000 Mixtecos were migrating to work seasonally in the tomato fields of the San Quintín Valley alone (Kearney 1998). This pattern of circularity was common among migrants from Piñas. As told by Elvira:

*The first time I went to Baja California I was 20 years old [in 1992]. I went there with my husband. I worked on the fields for two months even though I had my baby boy with me … We continued going to Baja California. The second time we worked picking tomatoes, so did we the third time. We used to go for four-five months and then we would return to Piñas to clean our pineapple plantation* (interview, 18/11/12).

**Figure 7. San Quintín (Baja California), Culiacán (Sinaloa) and Hermosillo (Sonora)**

A significant feature of Mixteco migration to north-west Mexico is that while men often travelled alone, many travelled with their families. The mobility of women and children is significant for two reasons. First, this ‘gendered pattern of migration’ represented a new development for farmworkers in Mexico and the US. Traditionally, when *mestizo* men migrated
to work in agriculture, their female relatives stayed in rural communities of origin. Thus, the migration of Mixteco male and female migrants had ‘more in common with migration patterns generated by growth in maquiladora production in cities along the border than historical US-Mexico rural labour links’ (Zabin 1994, p. 187). For women, the growth of agribusinesses had a similar impact as that of the maquiladoras: more of them were brought into wage labour – which was unavailable in communities of origin – but often with ‘very low wages, no room for advancement, and poor working conditions’ (Zabin 1994, p. 193). Second, since entire families travelled together, child labour in the agricultural fields was widespread. For instance, it was a common among migrants in Santa Maria to have spent their childhood or teenage years working in the fields in north-west Mexico (see Chapter 7 for more on this). By the mid-1990s it was estimated that one in five farmworkers employed in the San Quintín Valley was a child aged between 8-14 years old (Clark Alfaro 2008). Children risked exploitation, their education was abandoned and their health was compromised through arduous labour and exposure to pesticides. Agriculture is after all one of the three most hazardous industries for workers (along with construction and mining) (International Labour Organisation 2016). Unfortunately, child labour remains a persistent issue in Mexican agriculture (Marosi and Bartletti 2014).

Over the years there was a transition from temporary to permanent, and from internal to international, migration. First, Mixtecos began to settle in the north-west. By the 1990s it was estimated that more than 8,000 Mixtecos were residing in Baja California alone (Velasco Ortiz 1995). Migrants from Piñas settled primarily in San Quintín, Lázaro Cárdenas and Vicente Guerrero (Baja California), although some also settled in Hermosillo (Sonora). Participants spoke of having relatives still living in the north-west. Indeed, a common story was to hear of migrants who in principle left Piñas temporarily, but in practice had relocated permanently. As told by Andrés: ‘we left in 1982, when I was five years old. My parents had a lot of debt, so we went to Baja California. The plan was to eventually return [to Piñas], but they are still there’ (interview, 1/02/13). Others in turn recalled having family homes in north-west Mexico or the wish to return to live there again: ‘my children would like to return to Hermosillo (Sonora), our family has a little house there … Hermosillo is a beautiful place … and we also have our house in the city’ (interview with Eugenia, 15/06/12). In the case of Piñas, many of those that settled permanently in the north-west were Pentecostal converts that were expelled from the village. This is explored in detail below.

Second, Mixtecos started to travel to California in search for better paying jobs. A history of these early flows can be assembled from the recollections of a number of participants: ‘the first
ones to emigrate to the north went in 1982 … Then in 1990-1991 lots of people began to emigrate’ (interview with Gerardo, 01/12/12). Migrants first travelled to San Diego and consequently to Santa Maria, where the majority of them are now settled. Some, however, went as far north as Washington and as far east as Florida. As explained by Javier, ‘I know that my uncle … and others … came [to Santa Maria] in 1985 for the first time … But in the 1990s you could see large families arriving. Some stayed here, but others went all the way to Washington’ (focus group, 18/01/13). As noted earlier, female migrants were present from relatively early on. As discussed by participants in the same focus group: ‘the first woman that came here, to Santa Maria … in 1987 … She came here with me’ (Alfredo in focus group, 18/01/13). By 1989, Runsten and Kearney (1994) were aware of least 100 men from the village living in San Diego. By 1994, the same survey found a total of 16 migrants in the village (nine men and seven women) in Santa Maria (out of a total of 365 Indigenous migrants).

A number of interesting facts emerge from the memories of migrants’ trips to the US in the 1980s. First, many – but not all – had migrated to Mexico’s north-west to work in agriculture before travelling into the US:

> Around 45 years ago, I travelled to Culiacan (Sinaloa) with my father to work on the tomato fields for some months. Someone else from my town had already gone there to work. That time we travelled by bus. While in Culiacan, I met my husband and we stayed there together … My family and I also lived in San Quintín (Baja California) for about ten years while we were working in the fields … We migrated to California 20 or so years ago. We came straight to Santa Maria (interview with Estela, 15/07/12).

Second, it was relatively easy for migrants to travel to the US and it was common to do so in the company of experienced friends or relatives without papers:

> I then travelled to the US in 1982. I came because many men from my town were coming here. One of my nephews, who had been here, came to the ranch where I was in Hermosillo. He arrived at three or four in the afternoon and he started to convince me: ‘Come on uncle! Let’s go to the north! I’ll go to the town and I’ll pick you up on the way back,’ he said. ‘Come with me.’ ‘No,’ I said, ‘I am afraid. I am afraid of la migra.’ ‘No,’ he said, ‘they do not do anything!’ So he convinced me and I came up with him. But that time it was not hard. You just had to walk across a small hill, in two or three hours you would be at the other side. It was easy! (interview with Enrique, 20/07/12).

Third, migration was primarily temporary (aside from those that relocated due to religious conflicts) and migrants worked in agriculture or to a lesser extent in construction. In particular,
migrants would return periodically to Piñas to tend to their fields or serve a *cargo* (civic and ceremonial offices):

*But the first, first, time I came [to the US] was in 1983. I went to San Diego to work in the tomato fields with my brother … I left Piñas out of necessity. I had debts … I stayed there for six months, and then I went back to Piñas … In 1985 I went back to San Diego for six months. I stayed only for a short time because I was afraid I would not be able to go back to Piñas. I stayed there for five years, until 1990 when I went back to San Diego for another year. That time I worked in construction* (interview with Emiliano, 14/07/12).

### 4.4.3 Neoliberalism Across Borders and its Local Impact

Though migration flows over these last decades continue to be driven by factors the limited vitality of agriculture and the expansion of the market economy described previously, this also coincides with a period of profound social, economic and political transformation in Mexico and the US following the implementation of important neoliberal reforms. This has influenced the magnitude and shape of migration flows between both countries. This social transformation has led to a process of segregated integration. As argued by Fernández-Kelly & Massey (2007, p. 98) this centres in ‘the paradox of increasing capital mobility and attempts at controlling more tightly the movement of immigrant workers’. This has resulted in a situation in which ‘borders stand mainly to contain the most vulnerable sectors of society while they become more and more permeable for those in positions of power’ (Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007, p. 116). As it will be argued in the rest of this chapter, these ‘borders’ are not only geographical, but they also represent different social scales within Mexico and the US.

This process of segregated integration is rooted in neoliberal reforms implemented since the 1980s (Arias Cubas 2014a). In the case of Mexico, and ever since the debt crisis of 1982, governments have implemented a radical reorientation of its development strategy away from state-led industrialisation and trade protection, and towards a neoliberal agenda of export-led industrialisation and trade liberalisation.39 This has also drastically affected the orientation of social policies (Pastor and Wise 2005). In general, this major reform process was conducted with the aim of giving a larger economic role to the private sector while accelerating the integration of Mexico into the US and the world economy (Moreno-Brid and Ros 2004; Otero 2006). In this

---

39 Prominent reforms implemented in Mexico include: privatisation of state-owned enterprises, deregulation of industry and elimination of most subsidies, import liberalisation and tariff reductions, reforms to land tenure and use, deregulation of the financial system, and the promotion of foreign direct investment (Solomon 1999). For more on Mexico’s recent economic history see Moreno-Brid and Ros (2004; 2009).
context, the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 is seen as a ‘culmination of the reform process … and as providing an “external lock” on the reform process’ (Griffith-Jones 1996, p. 159). The US has also been subject to considerable reforms throughout these years. The crisis that resulted from the end of the post-war boom and the emergence of stagflation signalled the start of a neoliberal revolution through strategies of privatisation, deregulation and marketisation (George 1999), while firms and corporations sought to regain their competitiveness by increasing their internal and external flexibility (Canales 2000). 40

Reforms in Mexico and the US have had broad effects. In terms of employment, for instance, Canales (Canales 2000, p. 412) has argued that:

In Mexico, a labour market deregulation strategy tends to predominate, causing greater job insecurity, a reduction in occupational posts, low wages and other adverse effects. In the United States on the other hand, a polarisation strategy seems to prevail, in which the combination of various flexibility strategies has led to growing differentiation and segmentation in the structure of labour markets.

Mexico’s strategy of deregulation has resulted in the growth of the informal sector, which is characterised by insecure and unsafe working conditions and the absence of social benefits (Centeno and Portes 2006). In turn, a changing labour market in the US has resulted in the coexistence of stable and high-income jobs alongside low paid and casual ones. Both the deregulation and the polarisation strategy have resulted in increasingly unequal societies. In Mexico, income inequality increased significantly between 1982 and 1994, when the bulk of reforms were implemented amid two of the country’s worst economic crises. While there was a reduction in inequality in the first decade of the twenty-first century, inequality has grown since the recent global financial crisis. According to the latest data from the OECD, the average income of the top ten per cent was 30.5 times higher than that of the bottom ten per cent (up from a ratio of 22 to 1 in the mid-1980s) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2015a). Income equality has also grown in the US: the average income of the top ten per cent was 19 times higher than that of the bottom ten per cent (again up from a ratio of 11 to 1 in the mid-1980s) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2015b).

Importantly, certain populations such as Indigenous people continue to be the some of the

40 In the US, reforms focused on reducing inflation and speeding economic growth by ‘reducing government spending while strengthening national defence, cutting taxes, lightening the “burden” of Federal regulation, and encouraging “a monetary policy on the part of the independent Federal Reserve System which is consistent with these policies”’ (Solomon 1999, p. 159).
poorest in Mexico, while in the US it is mostly Mexican immigrants (and African-Americans) who occupy the lowest ranks.

Theses economic, political and social changes have impacted Mixtecos, and other Indigenous peoples, in important ways. As argued strongly by Rivera Salgado (2014, pp. 31-32):

[The neoliberal] model does not give pride of place to Indigenous rights. Political elites sometimes bow to popular and domestic political pressure by placing Indigenous rights on national agendas, but thus far few such agendas have been even partially realised anywhere. Because the majority of … Indigenous people still live in small villages and depend on agriculture, their livelihoods are highly sensitive to governmental policies with regard to that sector. Since the 1980s … states have abandoned what had already been on-again/off-again commitments to making family farming economically viable … Since then ‘peasant’ agriculture has been a target of state welfare policy rather than production support, a shift that has weakened the economic base of Indigenous (as well as other peasant) communities … This has meant, among other things, that more and more Indigenous people and peoples are either domestic or international migrant workers. Whatever the intentions of elites, neoliberal theory and practice do not include an independent role for Indigenous migrants other than that they join the urban and agro-export workforce at whatever level their skill set and Indigenous identity permit. In other words, they are subject to the labour market with all that that market entails in terms of opportunity but also in terms of racist and exploitative labour practices.

4.4.4 Agribusinesses and the Abandonment of Subsistence Agriculture

Processes of neoliberal social transformation are evident in the now entrenched nexus between industrial agriculture and the mobility of Mixtecos. The growth of Mixteco emigration from villages such as Piñas has occurred at a time when agribusinesses in the Californias (Mexico’s Baja California and the US’ California) developed and became increasingly incorporated (Mines et al. 2010; Runsten and Kearney 1994; Zabin 1994). Indeed, ‘this is one of the few sectors where production on both sides of the border uses the same technologies, is financed by the same capital, and sells in the same markets’ (Zabin 1994, p. 186). Arguably, this sector also uses the same labour. By the 1990s one could find Mixtecos working ‘in the same crops on both sides of the border in a yearly migration circuit’, while others ‘first work in Baja and then go on to
work in the United States; and some work only on one side of the border, but have relatives or fellow villagers doing farm work on the opposite side’ (Zabin 1994, p. 187). While the mobility of Mixtecos has become increasingly restricted in the face of increasing border ‘securitisation’, their presence in the agricultural fields of north-west Mexico and California remains significant. Indeed, the critical mass of Mixtecos in the Californias has lead researchers to coin the term *Oaxacalifornia* to refer to the socio-cultural and political space that these migrants inhabit across borders (Kearney 1995).

Neoliberal processes have impacted industries in differentiating ways. This is the case in the agricultural sector, where industrial and subsistence or small-scale farming have grown increasingly apart. While many migrants did not cross a geographical border to work in the industrial agricultural fields of north-west Mexico, the differences between that agriculture and the agriculture of regions such as la Mixteca could not be starker. Indeed, one consists of ‘large-scale commercial production which is essentially an extension of North American agribusiness south of the border’, whereas the other is comprised of ‘small subsistence peasant holding which for the most part are in marginal lands that are not under capitalist production’ (Stuart and Kearney 1981, p. 2). The growing differences between the ‘northern’ and the ‘southern’ agriculture of Mexico are related to the long-term effect of economic policies. These policies have favoured the production of labour-intensive high-value exportable commercial crops (fruits and vegetables) in large privately owned or leased lands over the production of subsistence crops (corn and beans) in communal lands such as *comunidades agrarias* (agrarian community) which are a dominant form of land tenure and production throughout *la Mixteca* (including Piñas).

Official information on the size of landholdings or the availability of agricultural machinery and irrigation in the local context of Piñas is unavailable. However, one can gain some insights into the broader situation of agriculture in the *comunidades agrarias* (agrarian communities) and *ejidos* in Santiago Juxtlahuaca (which include Piñas) through existing data at the municipal level. For instance, the municipal government estimates that each farmer in these *comunidades agrarias* (agrarian communities) and *ejidos* owns 3 to 4 *parcelas* (plots) intended for growing maize (Honorable Ayuntamiento Municipal 2008). There is contradictory data on the average size of the *parcelas* (plots) with the reported average of arable land per *comunero* (member) ranging from

---

41 This is the case with other industries as well. Mexico’s manufacturing for instance has witnessed the rise of a ‘dual structure’ in which a small number of very large firms with ‘oligopolistic power in the domestic market and links with transnational corporations and access to foreign capital … coexist with a vast number of medium and small firms without access to bank credit and technology that struggle to survive the intensified pressure from their external competitors’ (Moreno-Brid and Ros 2009, p. 187).
Chapter 4: Histories of Indigenous Migration

1.2 to 3 hectares (INEGI 2007; Honorable Ayuntamiento Municipal 2008). In terms of access to machinery, data from the latest Censo Ejidal (INEGI, 2007) reveals that only 1 out 10 comunidades agrarias (agrarian communities) and ejidos in Santiago Juxtlahuaca had a tractor, while only 2 out of 10 had other types of machinery for agriculture or forestry. Finally, while 8 out of 10 comunidades agrarias (agrarian communities) and ejidos employed some form of irrigation, less than a quarter of the lands farmed as individual parcelas (plots) were irrigated. In this context, it is important to note that while large amounts of private and public research and finance have contributed to the development of agribusinesses since the 1960s, complementary resources were never made available on an equal basis to small subsistence farmers in this type of communal lands in la Mixteca (Hicks 1967; Rochin 1985). For instance, irrigation is more prevalent and farming units are therefore less dependent on rain in north-west Mexico – ironically a traditionally dry area. Similarly, agriculture in the north-west has made more use of new agricultural technologies (mechanisation, fertilisers, hybrid seeds, etc.) and associated managerial skills (Hicks 1967; Rochin 1985).

The gap between these two agricultures has grown over recent decades as unilateral industrial deregulation led to comparative growth of the production of high-value exportable commercial crops. As explained by Pechlaner and Otero (2010, p. 201):

We might expect that Mexican producers to [sic] benefit massively from the increased agricultural exports. Only 20,000 of 7 million agricultural producers are the most dynamic, however. While there are 32,000 firms in the food industry, only 1,692 engage in exports, and only 300 firms account for 80 per cent of all exports.

Instead, agricultural reforms have led to a situation in which ‘Mexican farmers receive little government support and are being increasingly exposed to competition by highly protected (subsidised) agricultural systems of developed countries’ (Améndola et al. 2006, p. 8). Thus, while reforms have benefited large producers of exportable crops, this has also led to the exponential growth of imports – particularly grains – and the collapse of subsistence or small-scale agriculture (Améndola et al. 2006). Reforms resulted in the commodification of agriculture to the detriment of small farmers who have no access to alternative forms of employment or

---

42 On the one hand, the Honorable Ayuntamiento Municipal (2008) report that these parcelas (plots) on average add up to 2 to 3 hectares of arable land. On the other hand, the latest Censo Ejidal (INEGI, 2007) reports that the average number of comuneros and ejidatarios (members) per comunidad agraria (agrarian communities) and ejido in Santiago Juxtlahuaca is 1,130 people, while the average area dedicated to agriculture is 1,356 hectares which only amounts to 1.2 hectares per member. It is also important to note that not all of the hectares tend to be farmed on a yearly basis as lands need to intermittently lay fallow.
income. This is one of the most localised expressions of neoliberal social transformation in rural Mexico (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Agricultural Fields in Piñas**

For decades agriculture has continued to be an important source of production and profit, which suffices to barely provide for the nutritional needs of each family. It does not fully meet all the needs of every person, so many are forced to migrate (male photographer in Piñas, 2012).

The local impact of agricultural liberalisation on villages like Piñas can be analysed using the experiences of small coffee producers. The price of coffee – an alternative income source to migration – has plummeted since the international and national coffee market was liberalised in the late 1980s. Producers of coffee have become increasingly vulnerable to price fluctuations following the elimination of quotas from the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) in 1989. In Mexico, the situation was further worsened by the dismantling of the Instituto Mexicano del Café (Mexican Coffee Institute or INMECAFE) in 1989 after the government relinquished its control of the ‘market’ in accordance with structural adjustment policies of international financial organisations (Renard 2010). This ‘deprived smallholders of financial, technical, and marketing services and left them particularly vulnerable to the price fluctuations’ (Lewis and Runsten 2008, p. 277).
This is significant as coffee-producing areas in Mexico ‘coincide exactly with a map of extreme poverty’ (Lewis and Runsten 2008, p. 276). Coffee-growers are small-scale, geographically remote, and largely Indigenous (see Figure 9). Indeed, some of the states that have witnessed growth in Indigenous emigration (Oaxaca, Chiapas and Veracruz) are the ones where the majority of coffee producers reside. In this context, reforms to the coffee market – and the subsequent collapse of its price – have lessened the contribution of this crop as an income alternative (Lewis and Runsten 2008; Mines et al. 2010). In the case of Piñas, for instance, a local migrant leader in Santa Maria explained that ‘more people migrated after the crisis of 1994, when the price of coffee and corn collapsed’ (interview, 11/06/12). In recent years, the price of coffee has grown slightly:

Before, they paid us US$3-4 for maquila [approx. 5-7kg], but now they pay more than US$5. People have their own plantations, and the family itself looks after them and weeds them … It is only during the harvest time that three or four other people are hired to pick the coffee for a maximum of five days or so. People are paid US$7 a day. We harvest around ten sacks of coffee a year. Each sack has five-to-six maquilas (male photographer in Piñas, 2012).

Yet, the price paid to producers remains extremely low considering the labour inputs required (and the price paid by consumers for a cup of coffee). Furthermore, producers remain vulnerable to future price drops.
'It is so good that in these difficult times we are starting to get pay well to our coffees’ – Every family asserts now regarding the priority of producing and selling coffee. Thanks to this activity, the inhabitants of the village support themselves while their migrant relatives work in foreign fields to earn money to pay their debts (male photographer in Piñas, 2012).

*La Mixteca* and its inhabitants can be seen as occupying a ‘paradoxical’ space within an increasingly internationalised Mexican and world economy. As argued by Kearney (1998, p. 137) almost two decades ago:

Unlike central and northern Mexico … there is at present very little direct penetration of either national or international capital into [la] Mixteca. In this regard, its insularity is assured by its rugged mountainous terrain. Having no extensive commercially exploitable natural resources, the region has been abandoned to the ‘Indians’, who themselves are unable to scratch out even a minimal livelihood from the increasingly deteriorating landscape and who are therefore forced in massive numbers to migrate and emigrate from their homeland in search of supplemental income. [La] Mixteca thus has become indirectly internationalised with respect to labour, given that large and growing numbers of Mixtec[o] migrants work in Mexican commercial, agricultural and other enterprises that themselves are highly
internationalised. Furthermore, large and increasing numbers of migrants from [la] Mixteca are directly internationalised as they stream into the United States in the search of work.

Hence, the fact that farm workers from the south of Mexico power agribusinesses in the north of the country is a reflection of the fact that the two agricultures are increasingly unequal, but not independent of each other. As further argued by Kearney (1998, p. 139), farm workers ‘are born and reproduce in the subsistence sector but ... are employed in the commercial’ one (see Chapter 5 for more detail). Mixtecos have been previously described as living ‘fragmented lives’ – as part peasant and part worker – (Stuart and Kearney 1981) or as ‘semi-rural proletarians’ who spend months or years at a time employed as waged labourers in industrial farms to supplement their livelihoods as subsistence farmers (Foladori quoted in Collins 1995, p. 19). Pointedly, Mixtecos have provided agribusinesses in the north-west of Mexico not only with a large source of cheap labour, but also a flexible one.

The growth of international migration among Mixtecos is also linked to the development of agribusinesses in California – their primary destination in the US. California has been the ‘leading farm state since 1950’ due to its production of fruit, vegetable and horticultural (FVH) crops (Martin 2009, p. 45). Like agriculture in north-west Mexico, the industry in California has experienced significant changes over the last decades (Martin 2009; Palerm 1994; 1999). For instance, the use of new agricultural technologies and associated managerial skills has grown since the 1980s. There has also been a shift towards the production of labour-intensive high-value exportable commercial crops – such as strawberries – in the decades since (Palerm 1994). Thus, in spite of technological and managerial advances, on balance many of the crops produced in California continue to be labour intensive as ‘the expansion of FVH production stabilised the employment of hired workers despite significant labour-saving mechanisation’ (Martin 2009, p. 46) (see Figure 10).
This picture has many stories to tell. You see the strawberry plants, but people have been for three or four months awaiting the arrival of the season to return to work. Farm work is hard and seasonal. People sometimes work ten to twelve hours a day in the sun. You always have to work squatting while picking [the berries] and pushing the trolley [that holds the empty boxes]. Afterwards, you have to take the boxes of strawberries to the table or truck, the marqueta box weights between 3.5 and 4.5kg, but the caneria one weighs over 9kg. When it rains everything gets covered in mud, but you have to continue to work. There are also times that you get sick and you don’t even know if it is a dust allergy or something to do with pesticides (male photographer in Santa Maria, 2013).41

A constant through these changes has been the role of Mexican migrants in providing cheap and flexible labour. According to recent estimates, 98 per cent of farm workers in California are born abroad (almost all in Mexico), and 68 per cent are ‘irregular’ migrants (Martin 2013). The importance of Mexican migrants is not new. Mexican workers were described as ‘the principle work force in many south-western farming areas’ of the US in the 1920s (Scruggs 1960, p. 319). This continued through the Bracero Program.44 Yet, the ‘flexibility’ of the Bracero Program – which required migrants to work for the agricultural season and then return back to Mexico

41 *Marqueta* are the strawberries that will be sold whole in supermarkets. *Caneria* are the strawberries that will be used in the preparation of processed foods (usually the ripest or the less aesthetic ones).

44 California occupied the largest share of Bracero workers (Cohen 2011), where the ‘availability of braceros held down farm wages … allowing labour-intensive agriculture to expand’ (Martin 2009, p. 29).
before participating again in the forthcoming season – was denounced by critics, who compared the treatment of Braceros to that of ‘sprinkling systems of mechanised irrigation’ which ‘could be turned on and off’ (Galarza 1977, p. 265). This was strikingly similar to the situation of Mixtecos in the north-west of Mexico who could be ‘sporadically thrown back onto their village’ (Kearney 1998, p. 140).

In line with the historical pattern of ethnic replacement, Mixtecos and Indigenous migrants began to substitute mestizo farm workers in some of the most labour-intensive crops since the 1980s (Zabin et al. 1993). Palerm (1994, pp. 29-30) for instance documented the fast-increasing flow of ‘new’ Mixteco migrants ‘who lack both experience and a migration infrastructure’ to satisfy longer seasonal labour demands in the expanding strawberry fields of the Santa Maria Valley. As predicted by him, ‘as long as this highly seasonal crop continues to grow it will enlarge the size of the migrant worker group’.45 As emphasised by Runsten and Kearney (1994, p. 19), Mixtecos work in crops that were ‘the principal users of the Bracero Program in California in its latter years’ and that ‘continue to be the main arena of conflict over farm labour conditions and wages’. In other words, Mixtecos provided expanding agribusinesses in areas like Santa Maria with a source of cheap and flexible wages: ‘because they suffer unstable employment and receive the poorest wages, they lead the least-conventional and most-precarious lifestyles’ and ‘because they are the last-hired and first-fired, their presence in Santa Maria is shorter than that of the traditional, experienced migrant’ (Palerm 1994, p. 30). In the early 1990s it was estimated that the peak-season population of Mixtecos in California’s agricultural fields approached 50,000 (Runsten and Kearney 1994). More generally, it was estimated that Indigenous farm workers from southern Mexico accounted for around six per cent of California’s farm labour in 1993-1996. This has since more than tripled, with Indigenous farm workers accounting for 20 per cent of farm labour in 2005-2010 (Rivera Salgado 2014).

4.4.5 The Growth of Religious Conversions amid Broader Change

While emigration is closely related to economic and political factors such as a changing agricultural industry, one very important aspect of the process of social transformation across Oaxaca and California has been the growth of religious conversions and the emergence of evangelical churches. It is among the Indigenous population that one witnesses the growth of

45 The strawberry industry has expanded significantly in the valley. In 1960, there were approximately 323 hectares of strawberries. This soared to approximately 1833 hectares in 1990 before reaching 2618 hectares in 2011 (Sanchez 2013).
This religious pluralism is present among Mixtecos too, and its growth has had wide repercussions in villages such as Piñas since the 1980s when conversions became widespread (Garma and Hernández 2007; Hernández and O'Connor 2013; Marroquín and Hernández 2009).

The growth of religious pluralism in la Mixteca is generally traceable to the movement of Mixtecos who work in agriculture to Mexico’s north-west. It was there that Mixteco migrants came in contact with US evangelical missionaries from the Pentecostal tradition and who are now known as hermanos cristianos (Pentecostal brothers) across la Mixteca. As explained by a local academic in California, the initial interactions between missionaries and Mixteco migrants took place in agricultural areas like San Quintín (Baja California):

The bosses in San Quintín and Culiacan had sent buses to the little towns of la Mixteca to hire Indigenous workers. And they brought them to San Quintín. And when they arrived they found this horrible desert. And every weekend the missionaries would come. And every summer, groups of students would come as well. And they all wanted the same thing: they wanted to convert them, but they also wanted to help them. If you ask people in San Quintín why so many are converting, they will tell you that it is because [the missionaries] give out food, money and so on. And some of the missionaries are dentists, or people with experience in construction, or with medical qualifications, so they have a lot of skills and willingness to help people. They are Christians. They also take second-hand clothing, Bibles in Spanish and so on. And as you know in San Quintín there is nothing, there is no entertainment at all, there are no cinemas. It is as much of a cultural desert as it is a geographical one. And missionaries brought movies about God. And many say ‘I liked the way they sang, they are fun’. So the two things are intrinsically linked: missionaries want to convert [migrants], but they also want to help them. And this help is what fuels conversions, because migrants say ‘these people are really good’ (interview, 21/07/12).

Many of those who converted in the north-west returned to their villages and began spreading their new faith among their families and friends. Since then, the presence of Pentecostalism among Mixtecos has become widespread. Among other churches, the growth of la Iglesia de Jesucristo de las Americas (Church of Jesus Christ of the Americas, or IJA) – a splinter from the Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Christ Jesus – has been well documented (Garma and Hernández 2007; Hernández and O’Connor 2013). With an estimated membership of 15,000 to

46 By 2010, 15 per cent of Indigenous Mexicans were non-Catholic compared to nine per cent of the general population (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas n.d.). Similarly, 49 out of the 50 municipalities where Catholicism is practiced by less than half of the population are localities with an Indigenous majority (Garma and Hernández 2007).
20,000 followers, its three biggest congregations are in Santiago Juxtlahuaca (Oaxaca), San Quintín (Baja California) and Santa Maria (California) (Hernández and O’Connor 2013). This directly follows *la ruta Mixteca* of migration and settlement.

The growth of evangelical churches can be attributed to a number of factors. At an institutional level, Pentecostalism has filled a void left by the Catholic Church. Prima facie, evangelical missionaries provided pastoral and social care to migrants that were neglected by the Catholic Church in the north-west of Mexico. This neglect by the Catholic Church is part of a long historical process. For instance, while most villages in the region have a church, the presence of priests is rare. Catholic rituals have thus been under the administration of the village, while contact with the structure of the Catholic Church has been weak and sporadic (Marroquín and Hernández 2009). Recent efforts to address this have been limited by a lack of priests, financial resources and adequate transportation. Also problematic is that the Catholic Church remains predominantly *mestizo*. In contrast, Pentecostal churches have successfully formed their own Indigenous clergy and conduct services in Mixteco, as well as Spanish and English (Garma and Hernández 2007). But Pentecostalism is also attractive to prospective converts for other reasons. For instance, it offers hope of upward social mobility through rigorous ethics that promote financial savings, while it is critical of large expenditures made through religious parties and of alcohol consumption (which is often related to domestic violence) (Garma and Hernández 2007).

Religious conversions coincide with larger processes of neoliberal social transformation and the search of some Indigenous migrants for social protection from the vagaries of the expansion of the market economy. For instance, Marroquín and Hernández (2009) highlight the relationship between the decline of peasant agriculture in the 1980s and the weakening of the traditional system of customary law and catholic religiosity. Hernández and O’Connor (2013) further argue that religious conversions to the Pentecostal faith followed the realisation that the traditional community system of authority and reciprocity had failed to protect the economic, political, and social lives of its members in the face of increasing economic challenges. These critiques are in line with those of other scholars who have emphasised the ‘complex symbiosis’ between Pentecostalism and the expansion of the neoliberal economy (Martin 1995, p. 101). In this context, Pentecostalism has provided individuals and groups with religious, material and cultural resources to adapt to the various challenges associated with processes of neoliberal social transformation. These include, for example, asymmetries and deprivations created by the
reformulation of social policy programs, the reorganisation of work, the growth of economic instability and the increase in labour migration (Barker 2007). Further, Pentecostalism ‘reconstitutes forms of social life in ways that have the effect of embedding neoliberalism’ (Barker 2007, p. 413) for instance by reconfiguring individual values and practices in line with prosperity gospel (that links hard work and faith to material prosperity) or by redefining community and social identity in favour of the nuclear family (and individual responsibility) and away from extended kindship networks (and social responsibilities). This resonates with the experiences of Mixtecos. Indeed, religious converts embraced a new system in which their lives became detached from the traditional system of customary law and catholic religiosity, their identities and relationships were reframed away from the Indigenous village of origin, and they became closer to the evangelical spirituality and way of life in the places of destination.

An important aspect is this changing context is the dialectical interaction between migration and religious conversions in villages like Piñas. Early conversions are closely related to the seasonal emigration of Mixtecos to the north-west of Mexico, and the growth of religious conversions – and the ensuing conflict in, and expulsion of converts from, communities of origin – consequently impacted on the scale and type of migration flows. The largest spike in conflicts took place in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Many of these conflicts were driven by the reactionary nature of evangelism towards some of the core cultural and political practices of Mixteco communities. Due to the system of customary law that governs villages like Piñas, citizenship rights have traditionally been linked to being Catholic and to Catholic ritual (see Figure 11). Thus, the refusal of converts to participate fully as ‘citizens’ – and the inflexibility of others to accommodate for this new belief system – led to conflict and the eventual expulsion of converts from many villages. As explained by a local academic in California:

> It seems that each family, every year, has someone actively participating in the system of usos y costumbres ... So the hermanos cristianos say, We can serve [non-religious] cargos, but the Catholics say no! The system [of usos y costumbres] is one entity, it cannot be separate, it is a system that represents the community. So you could say that the return of the converts challenges the traditional identity and functioning of the community. It ceases to exist. The ‘community’ is no longer one unified vision, but multiple visions. And this is the source of conflict (interview, 21/07/12).

---

47 Between 1976 and 1992, approximately 308 religious conflicts took place in Oaxaca between Catholics and non-Catholics (around 80 of these conflicts occurred in la Mixteca). This included beatings and insults, denial of public services or access to schools, imprisonment, expulsions, and in a few extreme cases, lynchings (Marroquín and Hernández 2009).
After months of work, the church has a renewed and improved appearance. Thanks to the support of the authorities, the community and the migrant citizens, deteriorating paint and prints have been renewed and new religious images have been purchased (male photographer in Piñas, 2012).

This process of conflictive religious change was – and remains – latent among those originating from Piñas. The first members of Piñas to join the IJA were a family that converted while in Baja California in 1983 (Hernández and O’Connor 2013). Upon their return to Piñas with other converts, tensions arose from their attempts to proselytise and their refusal to participate in the catholic aspects of the system of usos y costumbres (customary law). This eventually led to the beginning of expulsions in 1983. As recalled by Lucia, ‘a lot of [Pentecostal] families were expelled … I think that they expelled 23 families at first, then nine more, then four more’ (interview, 20/07/12). The expulsion of converts led to the permanent emigration of Mixtecos away from their communities. Many of those expelled from Piñas moved to Santiago Juxtlahuaca, where they participated in the construction of an evangelical community in Barrio Progreso. But many moved permanently to the north-west of Mexico or to California. There are large congregations of hermanos cristianos (Pentecostal brothers) from Piñas in the San Quintín area (Baja California) and Santa Maria (California). Many of those expelled hold very little regard for their village of origin. As explained by Eugenia: ‘all the family is together and safe [in Santa Maria]. And we do not suffer
discrimination due to our religion … I do not care [about what happens in Piñas], because I never think about returning there’ (interview, 15/06/12).

The impact of religious conversion and ensuing conflict is noteworthy for a number of reasons. In social terms, and as mentioned before, the growth of conversions exemplifies the emergence of alternative ideologies and cosmologies among Indigenous communities. In the case of Pentecostalism, this in particular situates the individual, rather than the community, as the agent that determines religious beliefs and behaviour (interview with local academic in California, 21/07/12). In political terms, the ‘community’ lost a significant number of its ‘members’, particularly men who composed the majority of the migrants. Given that the village had a small population in the past, ‘almost everyone was affected through a close relative’ (interview with Montserrat, 16/11/12). In economic terms, this included many men, who as citizens of the village would otherwise been expected to perform cargos (civic and religious offices), tequio (communal work) and make payments towards projects and celebrations. The expulsion of converts also resulted in the loss of actual and potential remittances. Many converts – and their numerous descendants – rarely contribute to the comitiva del pueblo (hometown association), but rather contribute to fundraisers organised by their Pentecostal church. This was common among participants like José, whose family reside in Santa Maria after being expelled from Piñas: ‘I do not contribute any money towards the Piñas’ association … The money fundraised by the church [is] used to pay for the church’s mortgage in Santa Maria. The church also donates some money to those who need it in Oaxaca’ (interview, 29/06/12).

In recent years, there has been a transition towards a more peaceful religious pluralism though. It was reported that some converts were allowed back in the community as citizens: ‘now there are a couple who are getting involved again and are serving their cargos. They have all the right to be here, as long as they cooperate and serve their cargos’ (interview with Fernando, 02/12/12). Furthermore, a number of converts in Santa Maria have renewed their association with their village of origin. As explained by Enrique:

[Pentecostal] Christians and non-Christians, we talk to each other when it is important. But we [Pentecostal brothers] do not cooperate directly with the comitiva. We have our own body, so we organise the fundraiser among our members. We send money to help towards the buildings of roads, or some social services. But we do not contribute to religious expenses (interview, 20/07/12).
This is just one example of the manner in which Indigenous people in places like Piñas and Santa María are reconstituting themselves as social, political and economic subjects in the face of increasing migration and changing economic, political and social environments.

4.4.6 The ‘Securitisation’ and ‘Selectivity’ of Migration

Finally, a line cannot be drawn between what occurs in Mexico independently of what occurs in the US. Mexico-US migration represents the ‘largest sustained flow of migrant workers in the contemporary world’ (Massey et al. 1998, p. 73) and the Mexico-US border is the most frequently crossed international border worldwide. In this context, one of the great paradoxes of the Mexico-US relationship in the neoliberal era has been that ‘while commercial liberalisation took a step forward, measures to liberalise the free flow of labour took a step backward’ (Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007, p. 107). This has been accompanied by efforts to ‘securitise’ the Mexican-US border and increase the ‘selectivity’ of migrants allowed in through formal channels. As argued elsewhere, major ‘destination’ countries have introduced preferential rules to attract ‘highly-skilled’ migrants, while most claim to have little need for ‘low-skilled’ workers (even when employer demand for such workers remains strong) (Castles et al. 2012). In parallel, many migrants (particularly ‘low-skilled’ workers and asylum seekers) are being increasingly portrayed ‘as a problem – even a threat – to security, stability and living standards’ (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008, p. 3). In the case of the US, immigration policy has ‘devolved to a loose-fitting combination of limited legality and expansive tolerance’ where entry of ‘low-skilled’ workers shifted to a de facto program employing ‘irregular’ migrants under increasingly harsh conditions (Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007, p. 107). It is in this context of increasing ‘securitisation’ and ‘selectivity’ that most Mixteco migrants have made their way to the US in what has become an increasingly unwelcoming political environment (see Chapter 6 for more on this).

The passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986, and the consequent increasing ‘securitisation’ of the Mexican-US border, marks a turning point in the history of Mexican migration to the US (Ayón 2006). IRCA combined an amnesty for ‘irregular’ migrant workers alongside increasing ‘securitisation’ in the form of sanctions against employers who knowingly hired ‘irregular’ migrant workers, and increased border security (Alarcón 2011). The impact of IRCA on the Mixteco population was somewhat different from that on the mestizo one. As explained by Runsten and Kearney (1994, p. 36):
Unlike west-central Mexican *mestizo* communities, where IRCA served to legalise a backlog of US-settled families in addition to the circular migrants, and where significant numbers of US migrants had already obtained legal status before IRCA, with the Mixtec[ō]s it mainly legalised the circular male migrants in a population with few previously legalised members.

Consequently, the impact of IRCA on Mixteco migrants was more limited, as Indigenous migration grew in the post-IRCA period. In other words, relatively few Indigenous migrants were present in the US prior to IRCA. Thus, and although estimates suggest that about half of the migrants from Oaxaca at the time were ‘legalised’ by IRCA, this represented a very small and gender-selective proportion of the total population (Runsten and Kearney 1994; Stephen 2002a). Even for those men that had migrated prior to 1986, the seasonal nature of their trips and limited resources meant that some potential beneficiaries were unable to pursue their applications (Runsten and Kearney 1994). For instance, Miguel – who has worked in California’s agricultural sector in the US since 1985 – explained that ‘I heard about the amnesty of 1986, but I could not get my papers because I was in Mexico at the time’ (interview, 28/05/12). Arturo, who had worked in California since 1984 reported that ‘I applied for my documents during the amnesty [of 1986]. But there were some problems and I could not get them’ (interview, 15/07/12). Indeed, lack of proper financial and educational resources has been a constant obstacle to Mixteco migrants seeking to regularise their migration status.

Importantly, ever since IRCA, ‘irregular’ migrants have faced a more hostile environment in the US. This has worsened following the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, which established more expensive and harsher actions against ‘irregular’ migrants. IIRIRA made it more costly and difficult for migrants to sponsor their relatives or to regularise their migration status, while it expanded the definition and conditions of deportations. IIRIRA also established mandatory waiting periods of three to ten years outside of the US for ‘irregular’ migrants to request a change in their migration status (Stephen 2002a). To the contrary, there have been no recent opportunities for ‘low-skilled’ migrants to regularise their status. Against this background of limited opportunities and increasing ‘securitisation’, many migrants are described as ‘trapped’ (Stephen 2002a; Velasco Ortiz and París Pombo 2014). This is significant given the scale and duration of migration flows. This is illustrated by the experiences of Emma, who has lived and worked continuously in the US since 1982 as an ‘irregular’ migrant and who was unable to regularise her status under IRCA. While some of her youngest children are US citizens, her eldest two have spent their entire lives as ‘irregular’
migrants (remarkably, they were also the only ones among the participant’s children to be attending college). Emma explained that: ‘I am not satisfied with my life here. I want an immigration reform so I can go out to visit my town! I want to be able to go out freely, to go to Piñas to visit my family. I cannot do this now, crossing the line is too dangerous … I live in fear. I do not want to be deported … We need the reform!’ (interview, 30/06/12). As further explored throughout this thesis, this form of involuntary immobility has significant repercussions for the wellbeing of Mixtecos in Santa Maria and Piñas.

Indeed, Mixteco migrants have been severely affected by the ‘securitisation’ of migration which started with IRCA and which continues today. Increased US border enforcement has made it more difficult and costly for new migrants to cross the border. For instance, US Border Patrol’s Operations Blockade and Gatekeeper – which were launched in the context of NAFTA’s imminent passage in 1993 and 1994 – deployed massive resources to intercept migrants in the two busiest crossing points of the border in Ciudad Juarez-El Paso and Tijuana-San Diego respectively (Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007). One of the consequences of such approach was an increase in the number of deaths as migrants took greater risks to reach the US (Cornelius 2001).48 Another consequence is that migrants had to become increasingly indebted to travel to the US. An elder participant, for instance, highlighted that: ‘I paid a coyote to help me cross. That was in 1982, and I had to pay US$70 to cross. In those years one would make US$15-16 a day. Now one has to pay US$3,000-4,000 to cross!’ (interview with Gerardo, 01/12/12). Today it would take at least 57 full days of salary to pay to cross the border (compared to five in the past). In conjunction with this, migrants now also have to walk for much longer and take greater risks.49 A participant, for instance, told of having been ‘stranded for three days in the desert with a group of people without food or water’ while crossing the border in late 2009 (interview with Rosa, 13/06/12). One consequence of this is that migrant stays have grown longer. As reported by numerous participants, most are no longer able to travel in the traditional seasonal manner as the costs and risks associated with migrating are too high. Indeed, it is only young and experienced migrants who continue travelling across the border. The majority of Mixteco children and elders have become immobile (see Figure 12).

---

48 A coalition of human rights organisations puts the number of migrants who died in unauthorised border crossings between 1994 and 2009 at between 3,861 and 5,607 (Jimenez 2009).

49 This calculation is based on the hourly rate of US$8.75 that was paid to migrants in Santa Maria at the time of the interviews (2012-2013).
All of us who are here [in the US] come and get together once a year. We have much more family in Mexico but we cannot see them because of the border – we are separated by the wall and the laws (male photographer in Santa Maria, 2013).

Changes – or lack of thereof – in US migration policies continue to have a significant impact on Mixteco migrants and their relatives. An immigration reform that would have legalised millions of ‘irregular’ immigrants in the US collapsed after legislation failed in Congress in 2006 and 2007 (Alba 2010). The Obama administration similarly failed to implement immigration reform, while deportations increased to record levels under his administration through the highly controversial – and now defunct – Comunidades Seguras (Secure Communities) Program. As illustrated by the experiences of Maria, some participants were directly affected by the deportation of a relative: ‘my whole family has been here [in Santa Maria] since 1992 … but my brother was deported two months ago. His family is here too, but he is stranded in Tijuana (Baja California). He has not been able to cross the line. He tried once, but he got lost for two days in the desert’ (interview, 12/06/12). But many others were affected indirectly through an increase sense of vulnerability and fear. As explained by Eugenia,

---

This information-sharing program between local police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) represented an ‘important force multiplier, strengthening the DHS’s [Department of Homeland Security] ability to identify, apprehend and deport ‘irregular’ migrants (Roseblum 2015, p. 16).
‘you are insecure and anxious because you have no papers. I know about young people that have been detained and deported, and their families are left here … And sometimes one cannot leave the house because of this fear of encountering la migra’ (interview, 15/06/12). Against this background, the implementation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has the potential to allow some young migrants to avoid deportation and to apply for temporary work permits (Batalova et al. 2013). Yet, and as discussed in detail in Chapter 6, many migrants – particularly those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds – may not be able to benefit from DACA. Crucially also, as it stands, DACA does not provide a path to a legal permanent status nor to citizenship (Farmworkers Justice 2016a).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the development of international migration flows between Piñas and Santa Maria in the context of broader economic, political and social change. This serves as a lens through which social transformation processes taking place at the local, regional, national and global level can be conceptualised. Foremost, the mobility of Mixtecos is linked to a number of historical factors such as the limited vitality of agriculture and the expansion of the market economy across villages like Piñas. Here it is important to highlight a continuum between internal and international migration, and between temporary and permanent migrants. Indeed, one cannot fully understand the current situation of Mixtecos in Oaxaca and California without taking into consideration this long history of mobility, and the challenges and opportunities that has come with it.

But it would be wrong to dismiss the seismic magnitude of recent changes. The process of neoliberalisation has been accompanied by important economic, political and social developments. The restructuring of the Mexican and US economy has affected people, villages, regions and industries in differentiating ways. While the north-west of Mexico and California has witnessed the growth of industrial agriculture, the economic base of Indigenous communities in places like Oaxaca has been weakened. Mixtecos migrated in larger numbers, but they remained concentrated in industrial agriculture, an industry that provides them with necessary paid-employment, albeit generally with low wages coupled with poor working conditions. It is interesting that in the context of increasing migration to the north of Mexico and California, Mixtecos have also made contact with Pentecostal churches and that many have renounced not only their catholic faith, but their collective and individual responsibilities towards their village in Oaxaca as established under the systems of usos y costumbres (customary law). Perhaps it is useful
to think of the rise of Pentecostalism among Mixteco migrants a filling a vacuum of social protection. In this context, Barker’s (2007, p. 409) remark that ‘Pentecostal churches have come to function as non-state sites addressing [unmet] social needs’ in ways that harmonise with the conditions of the neoliberalism is illustrative of the role of Pentecostalism at a time of significant change and uncertainty. Finally, one cannot make sense of the histories, experiences and agency of Mixtecos without accounting for the paradox of increasing economic liberalisation and immigration controls and selectivity. Mixtecos are primarily migrant workers, and they have been for decades. Yet, the reality is that in spite of working season after season picking produce on the fields, they have become increasingly immobile in many ways. Not only is migrating to the US costly and difficult, but at present there are few if any opportunities available to those in the US to ‘legalise’ their status, to have access to social security, to have access to pensions, or to family reunification. In this context, it is useful to think further of the repercussions of this social transformation in terms of issues of economic distribution, political representation and social recognition, as covered in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.
Chapter 5: Perspective of Economic Maldistribution

5 ‘The Roots are Here but the Work is Over There’ – Perspectives on Economic Maldistribution

5.1 Introduction

Many studies on migration tend to have a strong focus on the economic aspect of this phenomenon, with questions such as ‘what (economic) factors lead to emigration from communities of ‘origin’?’ or ‘what (economic) benefits does migration bring to communities of ‘origin’?’ often taking centre stage. Yet, primary research with Mixteco participants in Piñas and Santa Maria emphasised that this focus – and these questions – are limited and unable to capture a complex reality where economic factors are not independent from social and political ones, and where the scope of analysis needs to be expanded beyond a focus on income and the community of ‘origin’. Indeed, one of the main issues to emerge from the primary research was the presence of forms of economic maldistribution on both sides of the Mexico-US border.

This chapter’s focus on economic distribution and maldistribution is broad and serves to conceptualise the various concerns expressed by participants and the complexity of their lives. At first sight, concerns over economic maldistribution can be seen as rooted in the depreciation and undermining of subsistence agriculture and local systems of authority and reciprocity in Oaxaca, along with the absence of formal paid-employment opportunities in Indigenous communities. But concerns over economic maldistribution are also imbedded in the concentration of Mixtecos in 3-D [Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning] jobs – such as seasonal agriculture – and their status as ‘irregular’ migrants in California. Indeed, and as predicted by numerous migration scholars, economic maldistribution stands as an important determinant of people’s emigration out of Piñas: ‘there are no jobs’, ‘one cannot make a living’, ‘I needed money to build a house’ and ‘we had too many debts’ were some of the reasons given by participants when questioned about their reasoning for emigrating. Yet, participants in Santa Maria continue to experience this economic maldistribution – albeit in a different form: ‘they pay you so little’, ‘there is no work for months on end’, ‘nothing is free here’ or ‘we have not been able to save anything’ were common testimonials among those who had already migrated.

This chapter is structured in the following manner. Section 5.2 provides a clear demarcation of the meaning of economic maldistribution. It first draws from existing academic literature on the

---

51 This quote is taken from the interview with Jesús, which took place on the 05/12/12.
one hand, and from the lived experiences of participants as Indigenous peoples and as ‘irregular’ migrants on the other. Section 5.3 looks in detail at a number of issues that are relevant to Mixteco participants in Piñas and Santa Maria from a perspective of economic distribution. This emphasises a clash resulting from the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification. In Piñas, concerns over maldistribution are centred on the fact that many non-profit-driven contributions of nature and labour in Piñas are not counted (and thus are undervalued and undermined). In Santa Maria, concerns over maldistribution are centred on the fact that Mixteco migrants are simply counted as sources of labour, as factors of production that are subordinate to the ‘laws of the market’. Section 5.4 draws from the previous discussions to elaborate on the conceptual point regarding the agency of Mixtecos in the context of processes of neoliberal social transformation. This is one of three conceptual points to be raised by this and following chapters. Finally, Section 5.5 draws a number of conclusions.

5.2 Economic Distribution as a Dimension of Social Transformation

This chapter focuses on issues of economic distribution as a means of conceptualising the relationship between migration and social transformation in the context of neoliberalism. This is in line with the broad capabilities-based approach introduced in Chapter 2, which draws from Sen’s (1999) argument that wellbeing and social arrangements should be assessed in terms of what people are able to be and do, and also draws on Fraser’s (1998; 2005) emphasis on social relations and institutions that reproduce or transform economic, political and social asymmetries and deprivations. This initial focus on economic distribution will be further complemented by the analyses in Chapters 6 and 7 on political representation and social recognition.

This focus on economic distribution follows a broad understanding of the ‘economic’ as intrinsically linked to ‘political’ and ‘social’ relationship and institutions. First, this goes beyond an analysis of income or utility per se to recognise that economic facilities or opportunities ‘contribute directly or indirectly, to the overall freedom that people have to live the way they would like to live’ (Sen 1999, p. 38). This emphasises that material inequality and economic dependence can deny ‘some people the means and opportunities to interact with others as peers’ (Fraser 1998, pp. 30-31). Against this background, it is important to critique social relations and institutions that entrench ‘deprivation, exploitation, and gross disparities in wealth, income, and

52 Other scholars employing the capabilities approach have emphasised that having ‘the ability to seek employment on an equal basis as others’ (Nussbaum 2000, p. 8) or having ‘certainty about the material conditions that may prevail in the future’ (such as having a safety net against unemployment, illness and old age) (Stiglitz et al. 2010, p. 53) are important contributors to one’s wellbeing.
leisure time’ (Fraser 1998, pp. 30-31). As explained in detail in the following sections, this broad focus on what people are able to be and do in the context of existing economic asymmetries allows one to dissect many of the challenges and opportunities faced by Mixteco participants in Piñas and Santa Maria.

Second, this also recognises that the ‘economic’ dimension of wellbeing and social arrangements is closely interconnected to its political and social counterparts. While shunning exhaustive definitions, Sen (1999) highlights that economic opportunities are closely related to political freedom and social opportunities among others. And Fraser (1998; 2005) has forcefully argued against the tendency to decouple concerns over maldistribution from those of misrepresentation and misrecognition. Highlighting this connection allows one to recognise that participants’ agency with regards to material inequality and economic dependence is constrained and enabled by distinct social and political relationships and institutions, and vice versa. An analysis that fails to engage with this multifaceted reality would portray an incomplete picture of participants’ concerns over economic distribution, and of their histories, experiences and agency in the context of migration and social transformation in the neoliberal era.

It is important to point out that this broad ‘economic’ focus is in line with the emphasis given by other migration scholars to the ‘capabilities, assets and strategies that people use to make a living’ (Piper 2008b, p. 10). This recognises the challenges and opportunities associated with safeguarding livelihoods in societies of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’ that are stratified by gender, ethnicity, ‘skill’ level and legal status (Olwig and Sorensen 2002). Importantly, this illustrates that peoples’ real freedom to live the way they would like to live is enabled and constrained by a variety of relations and institutions beyond those strictly related to migration. This is not to deny that for many, concerns over distribution are strongly linked to concerns over mobility, and that this mobility can transform or reproduce material inequalities and economic dependences. As recognised by de Haan (2006, p. 5) migration of the ‘poor’ ‘is likely to be less beneficial than the migration by the better off’ precisely because of the conditions of restrictiveness and marginalisation under which certain forms of migration take place in the contemporary world (de Haas 2009). As is the case of those deemed ‘low-skilled’ or set apart as ‘irregular’, migration rarely brings an all-beneficial resolution to concerns over distribution precisely because of the

53 Others have similarly emphasised that the economic dimension of wellbeing is linked to factors such as ‘being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter’ and ‘being able to move freely from place to place’ (Nussbaum 2000, p. 79), or to people’s ‘participation in the political process, the social and natural environment in which they live, and the factors shaping their personal … security’ (Stiglitz et al. 2010, p. 15).
broader social and political relationships and processes in which their mobility (and immobility) is embedded.

5.2.1 Economic Maldistribution in Mexico and the US in the Neoliberal Era

Before going any further it is important to situate concerns over economic maldistribution within the broader context of neoliberalisation that is taking place throughout Mexico and the US. One can borrow from Polanyi (2001 [1944]) to highlight that economic maldistribution is only one aspect of the broader social dislocation instigated by attempts to expand the market economy. Polanyi’s analysis of the English industrial revolution reveals this to be a complex issue: a worker in a factory – or an ‘irregular’ female migrant employed in industrial agriculture – may be exploited and yet be better off financially than she was before. But the same worker may also suffer because her social environment, her standing in her community and her craft are also being destroyed. In practice, while this ‘irregular’ female migrant may be earning more after all, her wellbeing may nonetheless be constrained by her poor working conditions, her lack of access to affordable health care, or her inability to move safely and freely in the face of high transportation costs or the risk of suffering sexual violence. This is particularly accentuated as the social relations and institutions in which her existence was formerly embedded are being dislocated while her dependency on wages and market transactions for bare subsistence are being augmented.

Polanyi’s insight resonates with the much-discussed emergence of a global precariat of which many migrants are said to be a part. As defined by Standing (2011), economic and social insecurity have increasingly become the dominant experiences of this emerging class following three decades of neoliberalism. The precariat is formed by those lacking different forms of labour-related security, a secure social income and a work-based identity that previous generations ‘had come to expect as their due’ (Standing 2011, p. 41). This can be framed in terms of the ‘recommodification’ of labour through the erosion of state and enterprise benefits, the commercialisation and privatisation of social services and the increasing dependence on insecure and flexible employment (Standing 2007). As mentioned before, both potential and actual migrants are said to comprise a large share of this global precariat and are seen as being at major risk of becoming its victims. As explained by Van Hear (2014, p. 115):

---
54 Standing (2011) identifies seven forms of labour security. This comprises labour market security, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction security, income security and representation security. He further identifies the role of social income, which is formed by six elements (self-reproduction, money wage, community or family support through informal mutual insurance, and enterprise, state and private benefits).
Migration is often seen as – and can be – a means of moving out of the precariat, but migrants often find themselves stuck in it in host countries, experiencing insecurity in life and livelihoods. In effect they move out of one section of the global precariat in their homeland to another part in host countries, sometimes indefinitely.

From this perspective, migrants are characterised as a new group of disposable denizens, those who have a more limited range of economic, social and political rights that citizens, those who lack access to state or enterprise benefits and those that can be discarded with impunity (Standing 2011). In other words, this signifies a push to commodify migrants and others as no more than ‘labour power’.

Significantly, this notion of emergent precarity is unable to fully capture the lived experiences of Mixteco participants in Piñas and Santa Maria. As argued by Munck (2013, p. 760), ‘a nostalgic Eurocentric model of labourism permeates Standing’s precariat model and thus renders it not particularly helpful for the majority world’. Notably, the ideal of a social democratic state and a whole corporatist bargaining apparatus has never been a reality for either Indigenous people in Mexico or migrant farmworkers in the US. Thus, while the concept of precarity has significant explanatory power, it neglects a ‘fine-grained analysis of the particular national economies, each with its own industrial and employment history, whose comparison might genuinely extend our understanding of precarisation’ (Breman 2013, p. 135). This is related to the critique of the limitations of Polanyi’s analysis and of the ambivalent nature of social protection that was discussed in Chapter 2. In the particular time and context concerning this thesis, it is not an exaggeration to claim that the majority of Indigenous people and migrant farmworkers – especially those with an ‘irregular’ migration status – never experienced labour-related security, a secure social income and a work-based identity as defined by Standing (2011). Thus, it is not that precarity is not characteristic of the lives these people, but rather that this precarity is not new or emergent at all.

In this context, Burawoy’s (2015) distinction between exclusion and unequal inclusion – two dimensions of contemporary inequality – is particularly helpful in conceptualising specific processes of commodification and precaritisation affecting Mixteco participants in Mexico and the US. On the one hand, the economic maldistribution affecting Mixteco participants in Mexico can be conceptualised as resulting from their ongoing exclusion as Indigenous people. This is rooted in national hierarchies of ‘differentiated citizenship’ that involved historical processes of dispossession, legal discrimination and social exclusion (Castles 2005). An example of this is the
fact that the productive activities of Indigenous people – whether it is subsistence farming, handcrafts, or participation in local systems of authority and reciprocity – have been devaluated as primitive, unskilled or unproductive. In practice, this results in their exclusion from the benefits of health care, social security and pension systems in Mexico that were afforded to waged workers through employment-based social insurance mechanisms. Until recently, social security in Mexico was largely restricted to those employed in the formal private sector or the government, thus excluding many Indigenous people from the ideal of labour-related security and a secure social income.\footnote{This was primarily administered by the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (Mexican Institute for Social Security or IMSS) and the Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado (Social Security and Services for Civil Servants or ISSSTE).}

This has been further heightened as Mexico has become progressively neoliberalised since the 1980s. The expansion of the market economy has weakened Mixteco local systems of authority and reciprocity, while their traditional lands and villages have been abandoned by national and international capital and many of their people have been excluded from labour markets and society. A point of contention could be seen in the extension of welfare – particularly conditional cash transfers – to ‘uninsured’ or ‘poor’ Mexicans, which has grown in parallel to the implementation of neoliberal reforms. Yet, and as explained by Devereux (2013, p. 18) with reference to other countries pursuing neoliberal economic policies, ‘delivering social transfers to the poorest citizens is often interpreted as a palliative measure designed to quell social unrest and deflect calls for alternative economic models or radical political reforms’. Accordingly, and without denying the consequence of welfare programs such as Oportunidades/Prospera (literally opportunities or prosper), for the daily lives of people throughout regions such as la Mixteca, these programs fail to address the power imbalances in society that encourage, create and sustain their lack of inclusion in the first place (see Chapter 7 for more on this).

On the other hand, the experience of Mixtecos is not only defined by their exclusion as Indigenous peoples, but also by their unequal inclusion as migrant workers. The paradox is that while Indigenous people are excluded, some of them – mainly the young and fit – are drawn in as a source of national and international labour. One could draw from Harvey’s (2004) notion of ‘accumulation through dispossession’ to capture the processes through which entities – such as human activity – are turned into commodities by disembedding them from social, community, cultural, or religious forms of regulation and subordinating them to the ‘laws of the market’ (Burawoy 2015; Munck 2013). Given the segmented integration of Indigenous communities such
as Piñas into the market economy, the warning that ‘in many places, and increasingly all over the world, expanding reservoirs of surplus labour make it a privilege to be exploited’ is telling with regards to the experiences of participants in this study (Burawoy 2015, p. 21). One could say that some – mostly the young and fit – move away from exclusion and towards unequal inclusion by leaving Piñas in search of wage labour in northern Mexico and the US.

While the ‘transition’ from exclusion to unequal inclusion provides a number of opportunities to Indigenous migrants, this creates issues of maldistribution. Given their status as Indigenous peoples and as ‘irregular’ migrants in the US, most of those leaving la Mixteca are inserted in the bottom rung of the farm labour market. Those migrating internationally are faced by a long history of institutionalised unequal inclusion. This is related to the flexibility that has been historically ascribed to ‘low-skilled’ migrant labour in particular. As explained in Chapter 4, this flexibility was institutionalised through the Bracero Program and the consequent de facto policy of ‘irregular’ migration that has continue to provided cheap labour to farms in California. But farmworkers in general, irrespective of their migration status, have also historically been ascribed with this flexibility. Farmworkers are some of the least protected workers in the US, and even now many of the protections given by law to others are denied to them. For instance, they were initially excluded from the Fair Labour Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938, which established guarantees of minimum wage and overtime and which set restrictions on child labour. It was not until 1966 that a number of the FLSA provisions began to apply to some farmworkers, however minimum wage provisions applied only to those working on large farms, overtime provisions (for those that worked more than eight hours a day or 40 hours a week) still do not to apply to anyone, and children in agriculture remain the least protected (Courson-Neff 2011; Farmworkers Justice 2016a; Holmes 2013). Farmworkers – and domestic workers – were similarly excluded from the National Labour Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935, which granted others the right to form unions and bargain collectively with their employers. Farmworkers only gained the right to bargain in California under the Agricultural Labour Relations Act (ALRA) of 1975 and after strong campaigning from the United Farm Workers (UFW) (Holmes 2013; Martin 2009), the

56 Children of any age can work on a farm owned or operated by their parents and children over the age of 12 can legally work on any farm with parental consent. Unlike other industries, there is no limit on the number of hours children can work (the only exception is that it cannot be during school hours). Furthermore, children as young as 16 can do work deemed ‘particularly hazardous’ by the US Department of Labour such as operating a forklift or handling or applying toxic agricultural chemicals. In contrast, children outside agriculture must be at least 16 to work (or over 14 in allowed occupations and subject to restrictions). Children outside agriculture are also not allowed to work for more than three hours on a school day and eight hours on a non-school day. Finally, children outside agriculture cannot do hazardous work until they reach the age of 18 (Courson-Neff 2011; US Department of Labour 2016).
scope of this victory was short-lived. In practice, the lives of many migrant farmworkers – including Indigenous ones – have been defined by low wages and poor working and living conditions (Mines et al. 2010; Ramirez and Villarejo 2012; Runsten and Kearney 1994).

5.3 Mixtecos vis-à-vis the Commodification of Nature and Labour

Against this background, an analysis of the histories, experiences and agency of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria reveals important insights into how they have been affected by, and have responded to, processes of neoliberal social transformation (including migration). Many different issues related to economic distribution came up in the interviews and focus groups, and the exercises of participatory photography and participant and site observation. Yet, for practicality and relevance, only a subset of these can be analysed in detail here (and a number of related issues are analysed in Chapter 6 and 7). This analysis emphasises a paradox regarding the manner in which participants in Piñas and Santa Maria have experienced the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification, somewhat following Burawoy’s (2015) analysis of contemporary inequality. On the one hand, the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification have strengthened clashes between what participants and their forefathers have traditionally valued, and that which has been decried as unproductive or primitive by others. One could say that these concerns over maldistribution centre on the fact that many non-profit-driven contributions of nature and labour in Piñas are not counted (and thus are undervalued and undermined). On the other hand, the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification have rendered many people in Piñas (and across la Mixteca) as sources of cheap and flexible labour. In this context, one could say that concerns over maldistribution are centred on the fact that these people are simply counted as sources of labour thus disposing of ‘the physical, psychological, and moral entity “man” attached to the tag’ (Polanyi 2001 [1944], p. 76).

As further explained in the following sections, the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification have impacted Mixtecos in places like Piñas and Santa Maria through various forms of exploitation, economic marginalisation and deprivation.

57 Martin (2012, p. 6) has argued that the failure of ALRA and labour unions to transform the Californian farm labour market is rooted in a combination of factors including flawed union leadership, the changing structure of farm employment through the use of labour intermediaries, and the growth of ‘irregular’ migration. From this perspective, ‘unions found it hard to organise workers fearful of being discovered by Border Patrol agents. It was also difficult to win wage and benefit increases … because newcomers from Mexico were flooding the labour market’. Yet, one could argue that it is counterintuitive and unproductive to blame migrant workers for their own exploitation (Gutiérrez 2010, p. 34; Munck 2015a).
Importantly, while for analytical purposes it is useful to separate what is happening in Piñas from what is happening in Santa Maria, in reality one can trace the connections between issues of maldistribution taking place in Mexico and those taking place in the US. Indeed, one cannot understand one side of the story without looking at the other.

5.3.1 Re-evaluating the Contribution of Nature in Piñas

In Piñas, economic maldistribution is particularly rooted in the depreciation and undermining of the contributions of small-scale agriculture and governance systems of authority and reciprocity. This emphasises the increasingly dominant understanding of ‘value’ as inherent only in those goods and services that can be exchanged in the market in pursuit of profits (Shiva 1989). This resonates with Polanyi’s (2001 [1944]) well known critique of land and labour as ‘fictitious commodities’ under a market economy – where the value of nature and life is sought to be controlled, regulated and directed by the market and disembedded from social relations. But the exclusion and undervaluation of certain forms of labour and nature has also been central to feminist critiques of orthodox economics that highlight a ‘myopic approach’ based on ‘the belief that value results only when (predominantly) men interact with the market place’ (Waring 1999, p. 15). This ‘myopic approach’ has also come under criticism due to its assumptions that nature, women and Indigenous people are unproductive, ‘not because it has been demonstrated that in cooperation they produce less goods and services … but because it is assumed that “production” takes place only when mediated by technologies for commodity production’ (Shiva 1989, p. 4).

In terms of nature, the neoliberal social transformation has been accompanied by the private industry and government disdain for, and abandonment of, small-scale or subsistence agriculture. This is highly problematic as the majority of those that remain in Piñas, and those that return from Santa Maria, continue to work in family fields. Before going any further, it is necessary to address the many shortcomings of this form of agriculture to avoid the risk of romanticising it. As explained by participants, this form of agriculture involves physically demanding work as ‘the land is very dry and the huates (corn stover) hurt people’s hands’ (interview with Eugenia, 15/06/12). The terrain in Piñas – and across la Mixteca – is rugged, the fields are rain-fed which reduces reliability of production, and people have no access to industrial machinery such as tractors or harvesters. In terms of a traditional economic analysis, this form of agriculture also performs poorly. As explained in Chapter 4, the yields are small and they provide people with little, if any, monetary
income in return.\(^{58}\) This is not surprising as many in the region could no longer make a living solely out of agriculture due to insufficient land or soil erosion (Nagengast et al. 1992), while the situation in Piñas and other rural areas in Mexico has become increasingly perilous over the years as the government has retracted its support from small-scale agriculture in an effort to ‘liberalise’ the country (Fox and Haight 2010).

Yet, the fact is that people in Piñas continue to highly value their fields and their output in a manner that is irreducible to market transactions or profit-seeking goals (Bartra 2006; García Barrios and García-Barrios 1994). This is in line with Bartra’s (2006) argument that small-scale or subsistence agriculture in Mexico brings a number of often-neglected social, cultural and environmental contributions.\(^{59}\) In practice, small-scale agriculture in Piñas is important from a perspective of economic distribution as the fields continue to provide locals with important basic items for consumption (see Figure 13). This is significant given the many deprivations faced by Mixtecos in Oaxaca in particular and by Indigenous people in Mexico in general. As documented by García Barrios and García Barrios (1994, p. 113) with regards to other villages in la Mixteca:

families value their cornfields highly because they obtain many useful consumption goods from them … When [they] produce corn, they supply themselves with grain that is superior to that available in the local market … the cornfield or milpa constitutes a very rich and complex agroecological system. Squashes, various types of beans, dry peas and chillies are grown there, along with a wide variety of other plants used as food, medicine, forage or for traditional rituals. Birds and mammals make their home in the milpa, and can be hunted; and hornets and beetles produce larvae which are collected as well. The sub products of the milpa, some to a greater and some to a lesser extent, play a fundamental role in the peasant economy, providing an important dietary complement and thus reducing monetary outlays for animal and human consumption.

---

\(^{58}\) While the total output per family is unknown, no participant reported earning any monetary profits from the harvests on a regular basis. As explained by Fernando, ‘I have corn, coffee and banana plantations, but aside from that there is not much work on the fields. We hardly ever get enough to sell’ (interview, 02/12/12).

\(^{59}\) According to Bartra (2006), this form of agriculture generates a relative level of auto-sufficiency, security and sovereignty in terms of employment and access to food. This is important in the Mexican context as the rural society is confronted by fewer economic options and a population exodus, and the urban world is challenged by a growing number of precarious denizens who are dependent on the informal economy. But this form of agriculture is also central to the livelihood of Mexico’s identity as a nation of Indigenous, immigrant and mestizo cultures. In this context, the restoration, preservation and development of many of these cultures – their linguistic, political, legal, religious, musical and culinary customs and traditions, and their ancestral knowledges – is deeply related to this domestic economy. Finally, peasant or subsistence agriculture is important from an environmental perspective. In particular, at a time where nature is becoming increasingly commodified, this form of agriculture stands as an alternative in which nature remains socially embedded.
In the case of Piñas, it was common to find that while participants were frustrated at the lack of paid employment in the village, they were equally appreciative and proud of the yields of their fields. This included foods such as corn, beans, bananas, pumpkin, chillies, pineapples, quelites (wild greens) and chicatanas (flying ants) that still form the basis of their diets. Importantly, participants were equally appreciative of other natural resources (such as water and wood) that they had access to. In reality, this is more significant than it would appear at first in terms of economic distribution.

**Figure 13. Cornfields in Piñas**

_Corn is the mother seed of many civilizations. Today in the Mixteco context corn serves as a direct source of food, or one that we can sell or exchange for other food items. Our cornfields are also a way of keeping our lands productive in the absence of our migrant relatives_ (male photographer in Piñas, 2012).

This is important for two reasons. First, people in Piñas value the contribution of small-scale agriculture as it provides them with a degree of food security. Indeed, many noted that ‘in other countries one has to buy everything. Here we have fruit and water to spare’ (interview with Montserrat, 16/11/12). This was often contrasted to the situation in Santa Maria where participants rely almost entirely on wages and market transactions for their subsistence. As explained by Alberto:  

_Even if worse comes to worst, people [in Piñas] still have some tortillas, a little bit of chilli, salt or herbs to eat. Even if there is no work, you can live. But here, we all go around like crazy borrowing_
money. One has to prepare and plan ahead ‘Oh no! There will not be work next week,’ and one gets worried. But that does not happen in Piñas. You are freer there (focus group, 18/01/13).

This concern over food security is particularly relevant given that research with Indigenous farmworkers in the US has documented that they have had to cut back on food to pay for other expenses; and that many also consume high levels of junk food, candy and soft drinks, which are more convenient to buy, store, prepare and consume (Mines et al. 2010). In this context, it is interesting to find that this availability of food was one of the reasons given by participants for staying in Piñas: ‘I want to stay here. Because here we have everything. We have fruit, we have water’ (interview with Gerardo, 01/12/12). And this was also one of the reasons given by migrants about their desire to return: ‘[in the future I would like to live] in Piñas. When I am no longer able to work. Over there I do not have to pay rent. And there is always fruit [to eat], and one does not have to pay for it’ (interview with David, 15/07/12).

Second, people value the contribution of small-scale agriculture in Piñas from a ‘health’ perspective. Participants in Santa Maria in particular contrasted the quality of food in Piñas to that in the US in terms of the perceived impacts on their health. For instance, the likes of Arturo and Patricio complained that ‘[in Piñas] we have fruit, but we cannot bring it here. [The fruit] here tastes like chemicals only’ (interview, 15/07/12) and that ‘all the food [in Santa Maria] is plastic’ (interview, 27/01/13). This concern was explained further during the focus group in Santa Maria:

_We now live in an era when everything is quick, so even our meals have to be quick. They are like plastic, this so-called ‘fast food’ … In our town, the fattest children would be the healthiest ones. Those that are too skinny would probably be very ill. So when a child is a bit chubby in Piñas, it is a good thing because they have enough to eat and they are strong. But here it is not the same. In Piñas, if we are going to eat chicken, the chook is probably five to six months old, but who knows about the chooks here … The food is healthier there. And here what we see is that people get new illnesses. Here we get diabetes, [high] cholesterol – these are illnesses that we do not hear much about in our town. In Piñas one may suffer from an infection or something to do with bacteria, but here we hear so much about colon cancer and other things. This has to be related to all these plastic foods_ (Javier in focus group, 18/01/13).

Again, this is significant given research has shown the prevalence of lifestyle illnesses (such as high blood pressure, high serum cholesterol, obesity, anaemia and dental problems) among Indigenous farmworkers (Bade 2004). Indeed, accessing ‘healthy’ food is a big challenge for many as their meals are usually provided by a _lunchera_ (lunch truck) which generally serves overpriced and unhealthy fast food options only and they have limited access to cooking
facilities due to living in overcrowded conditions (Bade 2004; Duncan et al. 2009). In this context, it is the contrast to life in Santa Maria that emphasises some of the often-neglected contributions of nature in Indigenous villages like Piñas.

5.3.2 Re-assessing the Value of Labour in Piñas

The expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification have also depreciated and weakened the contributions of local governance systems of authority and reciprocity. This implicitly neglects the value of diverse forms of labour that coexist in Piñas. As explained in Chapter 4, Indigenous people in regions such as la Mixteca are confronted by a virtual lack of paid employment that has encouraged emigration to the north of Mexico and the US. As summed up by Mateo: ‘in our village there are no problems, but there is no work. Those that want to build a house, or do something like that, have to emigrate’ (interview, 19/06/12). Yet, this lack of paid employment is not a realistic reflection of the economic activities of participants. People in Piñas work, and they do so in forms of work that are unrecognized or undervalued by the market economy. While the many neglected economic contributions of women are discussed in detail in Chapter 7, this contradiction applies to men in Piñas as well. For instance, all male participants reported working on the family fields, while a number of them also reported serving a cargo (civic and ceremonial offices) under the system of usos y costumbres (customary law) whereby they contribute towards the administration and upkeep of the community’s government, assets and religious celebrations. Yet, most of them do not earn a wage from these activities and would be considered as ‘inactive’ or ‘unproductive’ in mainstream economic accounts.

The system of usos y costumbres (customary law) exemplifies this contradiction. While this system is not profit-driven, it generates a number of often-neglected contributions (just like small-scale

---

60 In Piñas, there are an estimated 91 cargos (civic and religious offices) in any one year (Mines et al. 2010, p. 79). This system was explained in detail by Pedro:

*At the top we have the agente municipal (municipal president) who changes every year on the 28th of December. Then there are the comisionados (commissioners). There is a comisionado for the forest, for reforestation and so on. There are twelve comisionados in total, ten from here [Piñas] and two from San Jorge [a nearby village]. So aside from the agente municipal, there is one substituto (deputy), two alcaldes (mayors), one secretario (secretary), two sindicos (syndics), two regidores (councilmen), eight topiles (assistants) and eight policemen. Aside from that there a number of committees: the committee of roads, the committee of drinking water, the one in charge of the CONASUPO (Diconsa) store and the telephone booth. Each committee has four members who also rotate every year (interview, 30/11/12).* 

In most villages across la Mixteca, such as in Piñas, women do not perform cargos (civic and religious offices) and they do not have voting-rights in community assemblies. In some though, women are required to serve as promotoras de salud (health coaches). In Piñas for instance, there are seven promotoras (coaches) every year. However some villages have gone further, and have also recently granted full citizenship rights and responsibilities to women including voting rights in community assemblies (Stephen 2014).
agriculture). This local system of authority and reciprocity requires men to provide ‘unpaid’ labour as a condition of their continuous citizenship in the community. While citizens receive no wages for their services, their contribution ensures their rights to, among other things, communal land (for farming or to build a family home) and communal resources (such as wood, water or wild game). As explained by one local academic in California: ‘as members of the community they have the right to be there, the right to hold lands, the right to have their children attending the local school, the right to have access to electricity, water and so on. [The right] to have their house in the town and be buried in the cemetery … But they only have those rights if they participate in the system of usos y costumbres’ (interview, 21/07/12). Furthermore, an important aspect of this system has been its role in what Ventura Luna (2010, p. 49) refers to as the ‘prestige economy’ that contributes to the social, economic and political reproduction of the community. Given that this system of authority and reciprocity is traditionally hierarchical – with young men starting in low cargos (civic and religious offices) and moving up with age and experience to more important positions – status and respect are gained by serving the community.

The economic contribution of the system of usos y costumbres (customary law) was an issue debated by participants. Many were critical of it due to its burdens. ‘The system of usos y costumbres [is problematic]. We need to have wages for those serving cargo offices,’ was a complaint heard often (interview with Carlos, 25/11/12). This was perceived to be a contributor to the emigration of people from the village, as locals often become indebted during the tenure of their cargo (civic and ceremonial offices): ‘people go to the other side, but they return with very little. Men here have to serve cargos and that is free labour, so many become indebted. So they emigrate to pay back the debts and save a little bit of money to makes ends meet the next time they have to serve a cargo’ (Ofelia in focus group, 11/01/13). Yet, participants were also incidentally appreciative of goods and services that they received in return for this ‘free’ labour. This was again contrasted to the situation in Santa Maria: ‘here [in Piñas] there is no money, but one does not have to spend money. Here everything is free, but over there you have to pay for everything. People pay a lot of money in rent, and electricity bills. They even have to pay for their garbage [collection]’ (interview with Romina, 16/11/12). As in the case of small-scale agriculture, it is the contrast to life in Santa Maria that often highlighted the contributions of the system of usos y costumbres (customary law). Interestingly, many of the goods and services that cost the most in Santa Maria (such as utility bills, food, and housing), are those that are ‘subsidised’ in Piñas through this system of authority and reciprocity (see Figure 14).
Chapter 5: Perspective of Economic Maldistribution

Figure 14. Bills and More Bills in Santa Maria

One arrives from work, and even if you are tired, you have to deal with the bills. When they arrived, when they are due, when they can be paid so that they do not cut the services, and so on and on. So many bills even make you emotionally sick. This is different in Piñas, at least there you do not have to pay for so many things as you have to in this country (male photographer in Santa Maria, 2013).

The system of usos and costumbres (customary law) contributes in another important way to the wellbeing of people in Piñas. This is through its influence on the formation and functioning of comitivas del pueblo (hometown associations) among migrants in the US. As mentioned in Chapter 4, one characteristic of the migration of Mixtecos has been the degree to which they have pursued and achieved the social, economic and political reproduction of their communities across borders through organisations such as these (Rivera Salgado and Escala Rabadán 2004).

As explained by this local academic in California:

We see more participation due the system of usos y costumbres compared to non-Indigenous migrants. [Mixtecos] continue to be members of their town. They never lose that. Even the children born here [in the US], not all but many of them, identify themselves with the town of their parents. And even if they speak no Mixteco, they are still interested in the town, in its development, and the belonging to the town (interview, 21/07/12).
In this context, this system of authority and reciprocity ties people from villages such as Piñas to their community, it ‘encourages them to return and to maintain their status as members’ (Ventura Luna 2010, p. 64). In practice, migrants are expected to meet certain obligations despite the physical distance separating them from Piñas. ‘The thing is that those that are not here have to contribute with money from wherever they are [in the U.S]. Many do not approve of this, but that allows them to maintain their rights [in the community]’ (interview with Fernando, 02/12/12).

These obligations are coordinated by comitivas del pueblo (hometown associations) in Santa Maria and San Diego in conjunction with the autoridad (local government) in Piñas. The comitiva del pueblo (hometown association) in Santa Maria has been officially working since ‘around 2000-2002, when the people organised themselves out of need’ (interview with Mateo, 19/06/12). As explained by a former member of this organisation:

> We send money [to Piñas] because even though we are not there, we continue to agree with the people. Every time there is a new government there, they ask us for help … We get a list with all the names of the people of Piñas that are in the US and we contact them. There is also a comitiva in San Diego. The members of the comitivas change every year [like the autoridad in Piñas] (interview with Arturo, 15/07/12).

Interestingly, all male participants in Santa Maria (bar one young man) confirmed their regular contribution to the comitiva del pueblo (hometown association). They were proud of this organisation and their work with it. As explained by Andrés, ‘I am involved with the comitiva. When I am united with them, I have their support and I feel better than I do when I am alone’ (interview, 01/02/13).

Throughout this time, this organisation has overseen a number of diverse activities. ‘The comitiva assists when someone dies in the U.S. They fundraise money to send the deceased back to Piñas. They also respond to official requests from the people of Piñas. There are calls for support when money is needed for something in the community like fixing the church and so on’ (interview with Mateo, 19/06/12). Among other works, they have ‘contributed funds to buy new furniture for the classrooms [in the primary school], and beds for the shelter [for school children]’ (interview with local teacher in Piñas, 16/12/12), ‘improved the road going to Piñas’ (interview with Manuel, 27/05/12), ‘built the second floor of the municipal agency’ (interview with

61 There are three exceptions. First, women are not required to provide contributions in the same way that they are mostly excluded from serving cargos (civic and religious offices). Thus single (or widowed) female participants were never approached by this organisation. Second, elderly male migrants were also not required to provide contributions. This seems to be a recognition of their age, inasmuch as a recognition of their previous contribution under the system of usos y costumbres (customary law) in Piñas or through the comitiva del pueblo (hometown association) in Santa Maria. Finally, some religious converts that were expelled from Piñas in the last decades of the twentieth century have severed all ties with the village and thus have had no contact with the organisation (although some contribute independently towards non-religious expenses).
Roberto, 27/05/12), and ‘purchased machinery: a backhoe [for the roads] and a dump truck [to carry sand and construction materials]’ (interview with Mauricio, 28/05/12). Against this background, the ongoing contributions of the system of *usos and costumbres* (customary law) – now reconfigured beyond the geographical borders of Piñas – is salient in terms of the provision of important goods and services (which are neither delivered by the Mexican government nor by the ‘market’).

This analysis of the often-neglected contributions of nature and labour in Piñas reveal the important contributions of small-scale agriculture and local systems of *usos and costumbres* (customary law) towards the wellbeing of participants. This highlights that their histories, experiences and agency are embedded in particular social relations that often differ from the textbook model of the ‘economic’. But this also emphasises that the status of land and labour is not static and their economic contribution to the wellbeing of participants has changed – and it is likely to continue to change – in the face of the increasing expansion of the market economy and associate processes of commodification in rural Mexico. As emphasised in Chapter 4, the expansion of the market economy has pushed for the reconfiguration of local economies away from self-reproduction, reciprocity and community or family support, and towards a dependence on wages and market transactions. In this context, the social reproduction of villages like Piñas has grown tied to mobility and emigration. Against this background, one cannot gain a full picture of participants’ concerns of economic distribution without taking into consideration the many challenges and opportunities faced by migrants in Santa Maria.

### 5.3.3 Re-embedding Labour in Social Relations in Santa Maria

Concerns over economic maldistribution travel with Mixteco migrants from Piñas to Santa Maria. In this context, the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification has rendered many people in Piñas (and across *la Mixteca*) as sources of cheap and flexible labour. This is closely related to their removal from social, community or cultural forms of regulation and their subordination to the ‘laws of the market’; whereby migrants are incorporated into the bottom rung of the farm labour market and are increasingly dependent on seasonal wages and market transactions for their subsistence. This concern rings true to Polanyi’s (Polanyi 2001 [1944], p. 75) critique of labour as a fictitious commodity which highlights that labour is just ‘another name for a human activity which goes with life itself, which in its turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life, be stored or mobilised’. This emphasises that what matters from a perspective of economic distribution is not only the income that migrants are able to produce (and remit back
to Piñas), but also the terms and conditions of their incorporation into the labour market in Santa Maria (Rosewarne 2010). Indeed, these singularities provide important insights into the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco participants in the context of broader neoliberal social transformation processes.

Participants in Santa Maria experience a radical transition in which they became extremely reliant on wages for their subsistence. The situation is complex since Mixtecos are amongst the most recent groups to occupy the bottom rung of the farm labour market in California, providing cheap and flexible labour to labour-intensive seasonal exportable crops such as strawberries. This means that their work and their incomes fluctuate during and outside the agricultural season. While the strawberry season in Santa Maria officially runs between March and December (California Strawberry Commission 2016), the ‘peak’ of the season – when there is plenty of work available and higher wages can be earned under the piece-rate system – lasts only between June and July. As explained by Cristobal, working in the field ‘is a really tough job. One has to make more and more boxes to get paid well … You get paid US$1.55 per box, so if you make 50 or 60 you can earn more than US$100 per hour. But that good number of berries only lasts for a month, [afterwards the harvest declines]’ (interview, 04/02/13). Indeed, wages vary considerably within the agricultural season according to the abundance of produce in the fields and the skill and age of the worker.62

But the situation also changes as the season comes to an end. Only one in five participants working in agriculture held year-round jobs, while some were able to secure employment for only four or five months a year. This is not surprising as research has shown that that only 60 per cent of farmworkers work more than 180 days a year (Farmworkers Justice 2015). Notably, off-season work is often less profitable as farmworkers are often only able to secure a limited number of hours on random days compared to the relatively more stable timetable of on-season work (see Figure 15). Thus, while a Mixteco farmworker may earn US$1,000 or US$2,800 a month during the peak-season (for one to two months), she may earn nothing or very little for months before and afterward. In this context, it is not surprising that at least 25 per cent of farmworker families live under the poverty line, while many live on meagre incomes (Farmworkers Justice 2015). This dependence on low-paid and seasonal work for their ongoing subsistence is accentuated by the lack of alternative job opportunities and the increasing risks

62 For instance, Mauricio – who is relatively young – reported earning ‘US$2,800 a month during the peak [of the season]’ (interview, 28/05/12) while Roberto – who is older – reported earning ‘US$1,000 at the moment because there is work, but less at other times because when there is no harvest, there is no money’ (interview, 27/05/12).
and costs associated with crossing the Mexico-US border at the end of the agricultural season. This reliance thus reveals a challenging reality of economic maldistribution.

This situation is complicated by the fact that migrating to Santa Maria represents a severing from other forms of maintenance such as self-reproduction, reciprocity and community or family support. In reality, those in Santa Maria are increasingly reliant on market transactions for their subsistence. Many participants in Santa Maria reminisced about the many goods and services that were ‘free’ in Piñas. This stands in stark contrast to the reality of Santa Maria where participants depend primarily on seasonal wages and market transactions to access most goods and services (with the significant exception of children’s basic education). As summed up by Ricardo ‘[in the US] you have to pay even for the air [you breathe]. Rent, telephone, transport, food, everything’ (interview, 25/11/12). As noted in Figure 15, many rely on loans to get by through the off-season, thus accruing debts and interest that need to be paid when work starts again. As put by Jorge: ‘money is not enough to cover all of our expenses [‘el dinero no alcanza’]. It is a cycle – I do not earn a lot of money, and then when there is no work I have to ask for a loan and then I become indebted’ (interview, 16/06/12).

**Figure 15. Work During the Off-Season in Santa Maria**

*There is not much work for us in the winter – my husband can only work three to four hours a day tending the blackberry fields. I cannot work because there is not work for everybody. We barely make enough to pay for our food, but we do not make enough for the rent … One has to get a loan*  

---

63 Participants valued highly that there are no school fees in Santa Maria. They also valued that education is available to all children irrespective of their migration status, that children are able to learn English and that they have ready access to a local high school (which is not available in Piñas).
and it is not until the season really starts in April that we can work and pay off the debts (female photographer in Santa Maria, 2013).

One can gain a better understanding of this situation by problematising the fact that as a group of mostly ‘low-skilled’ ‘irregular’ migrants employed in agriculture, participants in Santa Maria are denied access to many aspects of social protection that have been traditionally associated with the decommodification of labour. Indeed, social insurance programmes such as unemployment benefits, health care, subsidised housing and aged pensions – which tend to be linked to labour force status and are financed from contributions by workers and their employers – are all out of reach for most of them despite the fact that they pay these contributions. As noted in previous sections, this exclusion from social insurance programmes also affects Mixtecos in Mexico. Lack of access to health care provides a good example of the impact of this lack of protection in the US. This is particularly important given that many Mixteco migrants work in an industry characterised as ‘hazardous’ in terms of fatalities, injuries and work-related ill-health (ILO 2016). In this context, it is not surprising to find that participants had many complaints and concerns regarding their health such as ‘bad stomach aches, nausea and vomiting … when you work a lot’ (Alberto in focus group, 18 January/01/13), ‘back pain … from crouching and carrying heavy boxes’ (Francisco in focus group, 18/01/13), ‘rheumatism [after] it rains and when it’s cold’ (Javier in focus group, 18/01/13) and many others. But they also expressed more long-term concerns. As summarised by Marian, ‘the field finishes you’ (interview, 06/02/13). This reflects a common knowledge that as migrants grow older their bodies are no longer able to cope with the requirements of the fields because of the demanding nature of their work and the associate decline in their health: ‘I know that older people in Piñas work too. But with us it will be different, by the time we are 70 we will be finished by all the work here. One ages quicker here [uno se acaba más rápido aquí]’ (Javier in focus group, 18/01/13).

Mixteco migrants face important difficulties in accessing health care due to ‘systemic barriers like lack of insurance, high costs, transportation difficulties, long waits, and undocumented status plus cultural barriers such as language and unfamiliarity with US medical culture’ (Mines et al. 2010, p. 71) (see Figure 16). Significantly, and given the structure of the US health system,

---

64 Farmworkers are regularly exposed to chemicals on their skin and respiratory irritants (such as pesticides), and other dangerous conditions (ranging from inappropriate access to meal and rest breaks, a lack of safe drinking water and sexual harassment) (interview with attorney in California, 08/07/12). Similarly, and due to the structure of farm labour, workers experience constant mental and psychological stress. In particular, ‘the piece-rate system creates a situation in which labourers work at full capacity as long as possible, and considerations such as health and accident risk are often secondary to production’ (Bade 2004, pp. 209-210).
Mixteco farmworkers have an extraordinarily low level of insurance coverage that hinders their ability to pay for health care (Bade 2004; Mines et al. 2010). Among participants in Santa Maria, only one had health insurance. Aside from children and pregnant women that access health services through the provisions of Medi-Cal (California’s Medicaid health care program) for low-income households, participants relied on a number of different strategies to navigate around the barriers associated with not having insurance. They self-medicate, use ethno-specific (folk) treatments, visit private doctors, consume nutritional supplements sold by fellow migrants, or seek emergency care for serious conditions at the local hospital. Participants’ limited access to quality and affordable health care is not only a consequence of existing forms of economic maldistribution, but also a determinant of its continuity. For instance, while Raúl relied on ethno-specific treatments for an illness in his legs he complained that ‘I am unable to work and sometimes I cannot walk. We are living off our savings, because my wife cannot work as she is looking after our little children and I cannot help’ (interview, 30/05/12). Similarly, while Estela had sought help from private doctors she explained that ‘they give me tablets to make it better for a while. [But] I have to go back to the doctor at the start of every season because I feel weak and suffer from depression’ (interview, 15/07/12). In this context, the cost of being unable to access health care varies from being unable to work, to living with chronic mental or physical illnesses, to becoming indebted while paying for ineffective treatments.

65 ‘Irregular’ migrants have limited access to care for ‘emergency’ conditions only. An ‘emergency’ condition is manifested by acute and severe symptoms where failure to get immediate medical attention would endanger the patient’s health, seriously impair her bodily functions, or cause serious dysfunction to an organ or body part. Significantly, migrants can incur significant debts for the continuation of services or follow-up care after their ‘emergency’ had been resolved (Farmworkers Justice 2016b).
This is one of the hospitals that services Santa Maria. Migrants can only access free services in case of an emergency, meaning life or death. If it is not such a serious case one has to pay a lot of money for any service. Another barrier we face in terms of health is that interpreting services are often insufficient. There are interpreters available via the telephone, but some nurses ignore this and talk to you without an interpreter. In many cases, we depend on our children’s help [to be able to understand the nurses] (male photographer in Santa Maria, 2013).

A complex picture of economic maldistribution in Santa Maria emerges when one takes into consideration what work participants do, how they live, and what challenges and opportunities they face in doing so as ‘low-skilled’ ‘irregular’ migrants, as Mixtecos and as farmworkers. One could argue that their migration results in their subordination to the ‘laws of the market’ as they become disembedded from social or community forms of regulation. But this is not simply an issue of geographical distancing, in as much as it is the result of existing labour and migration laws. In this context, while one can celebrate the fact that despite significant barriers participants are able to access much needed paid employment and that their children are able to access much needed education, one must equally problematise the broader context of material inequality and economic dependence in which this takes place.
5.3.4 Economic Maldistribution, Nature and Labour in Piñas and Santa Maria

Important lessons can be gained from this analysis of the relationship between the expansion of the market economy and participants’ concerns over economic maldistribution. Many non-profit-driven contributions of nature and labour in Piñas have been undervalued and undermined by this social transformation. Yet, as highlighted in previous sections, both subsistence agriculture and local systems of authority and reciprocity provide important contributions to the wellbeing of participants. One may not be able to make a profit from the sale of corn or other local produce, but one may still value having a degree of food security or having access to quality and fresh food. Similarly, one may not be paid in cash for one’s work, but one may value having access to farmland and natural resources, retaining one’s social standing as a member of the community, or partaking in the organised collaboration between the autoridad (local government) and the comitivas del pueblo (hometown associations).

As the next section explores, people in Piñas and Santa Maria have found ways to navigate around existing constraints, but the reality remains that the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification in rural Mexico have sustained the economic marginalisation, exploitation and deprivation of Indigenous people. In this context, and while the social reproduction of families and the community in Piñas is intrinsically linked to mobility and emigration, the transformative aspects of these flows remains limited exactly because of the conditions under which they take place. In particular, this social transformation has been accompanied by attempts ‘to separate labour from other activities of life and to subject it to laws of the market’ (Polanyi 2001 [1944], p. 171) which leaves participants vulnerable to risks of economic marginalisation, exploitation and deprivation. This is particularly the case for migrants such as those in this case study, who due to their ‘low-skills’ are employed in an industry that provides poor and seasonal incomes at best, and who due to status as ‘irregular’ migrants are denied access to many aspects of social protection that have been traditionally associated with the decommodification of labour.

5.4 The Agency of Mixtecos in the Neoliberal Era

One of the key insights that emerges from analysing the histories and experiences of Mixteco participants in Piñas and Santa Maria is the need to engage with their agency in the context of broader neoliberal social transformation processes. One could despair at the many challenges faced by Mixtecos as Indigenous people in Oaxaca and as ‘irregular’ migrants in California.
Indeed, the existence of exploitation, economic marginalisation and deprivation reflects the presence of relationships and institutions that hinder their wellbeing across borders. Yet, it is dangerous to lose sight of the agency of Mixtecos, however limited. As this section emphasises, Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants are not voiceless or passive victims. To the contrary, much can be learnt from how they have responded to, adapted to, or challenged processes of neoliberal social transformation.

This engagement with the agency of participants requires a nuanced and context-specific approach that goes beyond the traditional agency-structure binary. This is a difficult area in migration studies in general (Bakewell 2010; de Haas 2014). In the literature, migrants (and to a lesser extent those that do not migrate) are more often than not portrayed as either passive powerless victims or rational entrepreneurial agents. But this is a very limited understanding of agency: the first view ignores the actions and power of individuals and communities in the face of systemic social, economic and political inequalities, while the second imposes a narrow and individualised modus operandi on people and neglects the significant weight of such inequalities (de Haas 2014). One does best being ‘sceptical both of atomistic theories that deny the importance of structural constrains on individual decisions, and structural theories that deny agency to individuals and families’ (Massey et al. 1998, p. 50). Arguably, this requires a conceptualisation of agency that is rooted in a critical understanding and explanation of migration and social transformation processes as occurring in a particular time and context.

This emphasis on specificity is significant for two interconnected reasons. First, by looking at agency in a particular time and context one can point out that in reality structure is not a unified set of constraints. Structures enable and obstruct the agency of people differently based on factors such as their ethnicity, ‘skill’, gender, class, age and more. Thus, a focus on specificity recognises the salience of these inequalities in enabling or constraining one’s agency. In terms of migration, this recognises that ‘in reality structures simultaneously constrain the migration of particular groups while facilitating the migration of other groups’ (de Haas 2014, p. 29). To give an example, the histories and experiences of Mixteco participants are likely to be very different from those of an upper middle-class mestizo Mexican. The latter is more likely to have the financial resources, language and educational skills necessary to migrate comfortably and safely under a student visa or a high-skill visa (opportunities which are simply out of reach of most participants in Piñas and Santa María), while she may also be driven by very different motivations. In this context, Carling’s (2002) notion of ‘involuntary immobility’ – which refers to
the growing number of people who wish to migrate, but do not have the ability to do so – can be seen as just one example of the complex and differentiating nature of structure.

Second, this emphasis on specificity also recognises that agency is not always exercised in the same way. ‘In reality, people can and do react in varying and often unpredictable ways, ranging from compliance, through informal subversion, to open resistance’ (Castles 2015, p. 11). This recognises that people’s agency, however limited or constrained, is expressed in different forms. In terms of migration, this is important as it expands the analytical boundaries to reflect a fuller assessment of the relationship between agency, structure and mobility. Agency in migration studies has traditionally been referred to in terms of the movement of people (their decision to leave, their act of moving or setting up residency in another place, their engagement in transnational practices and so on). However, this only provides a one-sided view of agency. As argued by de Haas (2014, p. 25), a ‘truly agentic view on migration should … capture both non-migratory and migratory behaviour’. Foremost, this is related to the complex and differentiating nature of structure that was described above (such that many who wish to move are unable to do so, but also that many who wish to stay immobile are unable to do so too). Significantly, this also emphasises that other actions – beyond those narrowly related to one’s mobility – are also of analytical importance.

5.4.1 The ‘Double-Movement’ as a Lens for Conceptualising Agency

A useful framework for conceptualising the relationship between agency and structure in the context of neoliberal social transformation processes can draw from Polanyi’s (2001 [1944]) concept of double-movement. This highlights the various actions of individuals, families and communities to re-embed the economy in social relations and counter the social dislocation brought on by an expanding market system and associated processes of commodification. Writing in the Latin American context, Munck (2015b, p. 434) argues that a plethora of sovereignty, social justice and environmental movements – that bring ‘to the fore the democracy of civil society and the social value of all we do’ – are all part of this double-movement. In the context of international migration, Castles (2015, p. 9) has similarly argued that:

---

66 This is somewhat encapsulated in the definition of mobility as ‘the capability [or real freedom] to decide where one lives’ which allows one to point out that ‘enhanced mobility is not only the freedom to move – it is also the freedom to stay in one’s preferred location’ (de Haas and Rodríguez 2010, p. 178). This reveals that in many cases, the movement of people is not the result of an increase in the opportunities and choices available to them but rather the result of those choices becoming more constrained.
Social transformation processes are mediated by local historical and cultural patterns, through which people develop varying forms of agency and resistance ... The recent upsurge in international migration, especially between poorer and richer economies, can best be understood through examination of these complementary changes and their complex linkages. Here, too, we can examine agency – for instance, in movements demanding human rights and social inclusion for migrants, which have emerged in many places.

This framework allows one to conceptualise the interaction between agency and structure as taking a myriad of forms that are responsive to temporal and spatial contexts. For instance, while Polanyi’s work on the double-movement involved diverse action ranging from seeking protection for child labourers to achieving the provision of rural drainage, contemporary commentators have argued that present-day forms will ‘in all likelihood, not lead to a revival of post-World War settlement and social contract’ precisely because of the character of current changes (Munck 2002, p. 19). Fraser (2013, p. 132) in particular has argued for the need to ‘integrate our longstanding interest in non-domination with the equally valid interest in solidarity and social security’. This emphasises the need to go past the single-minded concern ‘with the corrosive effects of commodification upon communities …[and avoid] neglect[ing] injustices within [and between] communities’. In other words, this extends the focus of analysis beyond responses to marketisation per se, to include responses to hierarchies, exclusions and forms of domination that are not strictly grounded in the expansion of the market economy (such as racial subordination, colonial legacies, sexism and patriarchy) but which remain central to current processes of social transformation.

Importantly, while the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification may well be a global process, its effects are mediated through cultural patterns and historical experiences (including hierarchies, exclusions and forms of domination which exist within and between communities). As argued by Polanyi (2001 [1944], p. 159), ‘the “challenge” is to society as a whole; the “response” comes though groups, sections, and classes’. Some of the responses in the case of Mixtecos in Piñas and Santa Maria have already been discussed in previous sections and chapters. The individual and collective agency of participants can be seen in their decisions to undertake ‘irregular’ migration (despite the enormous costs and risks) to gain access to much-needed paid employment. But other developments, such as the growth of religious conversions that was investigated in Chapter 4, can also be seen as a response to the
social dislocation caused by the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification (Barker 2007).

5.4.2 The Reconfiguration of Local Systems of Authority and Reciprocity

A first example of the way in which processes of neoliberal social transformation are mediated through cultural patterns and historical experiences can be found in the ongoing reforms to the system of usos y construmbres (customary law) in Piñas. This local system of authority and reciprocity is evolving to accommodate growing challenges such as the expansion of the market economy in the village, the emigration of large numbers of men, the growth of Pentecostal churches and an emergent mentality that favours individual financial gain. Rather than abandoning this system, participants have chosen to reform it in order to ensure its relevance and functionally. As explained by Jesús:

\[
\text{the system is constantly changing, every decade there is a reform put in place to attract back those citizens that have left. For instance, before the role of the commissioner was three years long, now it is only 1.5 years. Before fathers were expected to take over the cargos of their sons, but now \[the system\] waits for them to return. And migrants serve in other ways: they give financial contributions, like a tax and also voluntary donations} \text{(interview, 05/12/12).}
\]

The most obvious reform has been the extension of the system to the translocal level. As mentioned in previous sections, migrants in Santa Maria are expected to contribute through the hometown association. This has brought much-needed funds and has led to a revitalisation of traditional practices in Mixteco communities such as Piñas (Kearney 1995; Rivera Salgado 2000). In addition, the system has recently been simplified by reducing the number of religious celebrations taking place each year, thus decreasing the number of office-bearers and resources needed. As explained by Bernarda, \text{‘in the past \[the system\] was more complicated. There were many saints, many mayordomos, too many debts. They removed the other saints, and they left San Juan [Saint John the Baptist] only. He has always been the patron saint of the town’} \text{(interview, 17/11/12). Similarly, and as explained in Chapter 4, the system has been made more flexible to accommodate the beliefs of the hermanos cristianos (Pentecostal brothers).}

Interestingly, not all Indigenous communities in Oaxaca have implemented the same reforms. Here it is important to remember the political dilemma posed by Polanyi’s finding that the double-movement might equally take a ‘progressive’ or a ‘reactionary’ form. For instance, there are communities in which the political participation of women has been expanded. While women in Piñas are still unable to vote at local assemblies and continue to be ineligible to serve most
cargos (civic and religious offices) under the system of usos y costumbres (customary law), women in communities such as San Miguel Tlacotepec (a Mixteco community in the district of Santiago Juxtlahuaca) and Teotitlán del Valle (a Zapoteco community in the district of Tlacolula) are now eligible to vote in local assemblies and to hold an office (Perry et al. 2009; Stephen 2005). ‘The degree of inclusion of women in local models of citizenship in Oaxaca’s Indigenous communities varies greatly’ and this participation has ‘more room to develop’ (Stephen 2014, p. 48). Arguably, and keeping in mind the existing heavy work load of Indigenous women in Oaxaca, this extension of responsibilities and rights represents a significant step towards the expansion of the political representation of women.

However, not all responses have led to ‘progressive’ change. For instance, some communities have chosen not to be flexible about long-distance membership as a way to discourage emigration. As explained by this state official in Oaxaca:

> In many communities it is still thought that the migrant should return to give his community service, to serve a cargo, which is fine. But considering the current state of the border, the fact that is almost sealed, it is very hard for migrants to return. It is to risk one’s life. And coyotes will take US$5,000-10,000. So in many communities migrants are being expelled. Their citizenship rights are being suspended because they did not return to give do their community service, or to serve a civil or ceremonial office or so on. So there is abuse, migrants' houses, lands and rights are taken away (interview, 12/11/12).

In contrast to the steps taken to expand the political representation of women, this threat of ‘civic death’ (Fox and Bada 2008) significantly reduces the political representation of migrants and increases the risk of economic maldistribution. This also demonstrates that people – even those coming from similar geographical areas or ethnic backgrounds – respond to, adapt to, or challenge processes of neoliberal social transformation in varying ways.

5.4.3 The Development of Broad-based Indigenous Organisations

A second example of the way in which processes of neoliberal social transformation are mediated through cultural patterns and historical experiences can be found in the development of Indigenous organisations in Santa Maria. The histories and experiences of participants in particular emphasise the need to look beyond traditional forms of organising to reveal the agency of people. In Santa Maria for instance, it can be seen that efforts to improve the working conditions of farmworkers through traditional forms of collective organising have been limited. As explained by this migrant leader in Santa Maria:
In 1999, workers organised a strike without the support of the UFW … The Union arrived once everything was organised and did not do much. A lot of the strike leaders were fired, but they did not care because they won and they succeeded in demanding their jobs back … On that occasion workers stopped work for four or more hours until the boss agreed to negotiate better wages and working conditions. Things improved for a while, but then got bad again (interview, 11/06/12).

This is complicated as the agricultural industry in Santa Maria appears void of traditional forms of labour organising. Indeed, no participant reported having received any assistance from a formal workers’ union, and the United Farm Workers (UFW) – one of the largest unions representing farmworkers across California – ‘has some Indigenous outreach workers, but they have no presence in Santa Maria’ (interview with attorney in California, 08/07/12). Tellingly, this is not specific to Indigenous farmworkers only, as unionisation decreased across industries in the US throughout the 1980s and 1990s in the face of a hostile political environment and waves of deindustrialisation and outsourcing (Milkman 2015). Against these systemic barriers, the agency of participants to fight for better working conditions is further limited by barriers such as their ‘irregular’ status, their limited ability to speak Spanish or English, and their restricted knowledge of their rights under US law (interview with attorney in California, 08/07/12).

Yet, Indigenous migrants have become organised in other ways. This sheds light on the conditions and constraints within which they manoeuvre and it reveals aspects of their agency. As pointed out by Briones (2009a, p. 10) in her study of overseas female domestic workers, it is necessary to ‘go beyond discussions of their agency per se, to how they can continue to practise agency despite structural constraints’. For instance, one of the most important organisations created by Indigenous migrants and servicing Mixteco farmworkers in Santa Maria and across California is the Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (Binational Front of Indigenous Organisations, or FIOB) (Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004b). The FIOB ‘was created to help other countrymen from Oaxaca to have their rights upheld and to organise cultural events’ (interview with migrant leader in Santa Maria, 11/06/12) (see Figure 17). Organisations such as this bring attention to the growth of a ‘pan-ethnic’ Mixteco and Indigenous identity among migrants, which resulted from the shared experiences of racially based oppression and discrimination in northern Mexico and California (Nagengast and Kearney 1990). This organising also draws attention to the common history of organizing shared by national and international migrants at both sides of the

---

67 The experience of Enrique, an older and quite experienced migrant, is telling of this reality in which few take action at the individual level: ‘the year before last, I had a very big fight with a boss … He did not clean the bathrooms every twenty days or every month. He did not provide us with water to drink or to rinse our hands. No toilet paper. But things changed after we fought. I do not let things like that happen to me. [But] many others are afraid to fight because they have no papers’ (interview, 20/07/12).
Indeed, many Mixteco and Indigenous leaders in northern Mexico and the US ‘are veterans of three decades of strikes and land struggles in Baja California’ (Bacon 2015). Significantly, the relevance of ‘pan-ethnic’ identities, and the connection between organisers in Mexico and California, continues until today. For instance, the FIOB is present in towns and cities across rural and urban California, northern Mexico and Oaxaca; and while its membership was initially limited to Mixteco and Zapoteco migrants from Oaxaca, over time Indigenous migrants from all over Mexico have joined (interview with state official in Oaxaca, 12/11/12).

**Figure 17. Mixteco Activists in Santa Maria**

This colleague is sharing with other countrymen information about our labour rights, and the need to protect oneself against heat and pesticides. These are important issues because ranchers and companies do not give us enough information. Many people are vulnerable to workplace abuse or health hazards (male photographer, 2013).

A significant aspect of the collective agency of Mixteco participants and others involved with organisations, such as the FIOB, is how they have engaged with issues of political representation and social recognition that could be inaccurately seen as unrelated to issues of economic distribution. It is notable that in response to the subordination of Indigenous migrants to the ‘laws of the market’, they have sought to reconnect with, and strengthen, their embeddedness in
broader social relations in Oaxaca and California. It is telling that the FIOB was formed ‘in response to the anniversary in 1992 [of the conquest of the Americas] in the context of needing to talk about the Indigenous side of the story’, and that since then they expanded their focus to address economic, political and social concerns. For instance, with regards to issues of political representation in Oaxaca they have to ‘organise around issues such as the political, economic and social situation of Indigenous people and their communities’; and with regards to issues of social recognition they have ‘help(ed) to coordinate annual Indigenous cultural events in California … so that people now feel proud of their identity and about their history’ (interview with state official in Oaxaca, 12/11/12).

In this context it is also important to point out the manner in which Indigenous migrants, through organisations such as FIOB, have sought to address injustices within communities. For instance, there have been efforts to address hierarchies, exclusions and forms of domination based on sexism and patriarchy. Indeed, the development of female leadership within the organisation is remarkable:

When the organisation began back in 1991, it was all men … But then we set the goal of incorporating wives, cousins, friends, and sisters-in-law to ensure the leadership was shared with women … In 1994 the first woman was elected as the ‘women’s coordinator’. Now, in California, the majority of them are women! So the FIOB has gone a long way in terms of gender, this is really one of its main achievements: women are back in the position that they deserve, the position where they should have been for a long time (interview with state official in Oaxaca, 12/11/12).

Similarly, efforts to address these hierarchies, exclusions and forms of domination beyond the organisation are also noteworthy. Among others, the FIOB has developed initiatives such as Mujeres Indígenas en Liderazgo (Indigenous Women in Leadership or MIEL) that seeks to develop female leadership through interactive female-led workshops in Mexico and the US. In particular, MIEL is assisting in the development of ‘an extensive network of Indigenous women who are not only becoming politicised and educated about prominent social and political issues, but are also being empowered to play an active role in their households, their migrant communities, and their hometowns’ (Gutiérrez 2010, p. 34).

The examples of the ongoing reforms to the system of *usos y construmbres* (customary law) in Oaxaca and the development of Indigenous organisations in California demonstrate some of the ways in which Mixtecos have responded to, adapted to or challenged processes of neoliberal social transformation. This illustrates a variety of responses to the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification that seek to strengthen forms of social or
community regulation. Interestingly, some of these actions are ‘progressive’ in nature (while others are not). Similarly, some of these have a focus on the village, while others have a focus on the ‘pan-ethnic’ or the workers’ collective. Finally, some of these actions reach beyond marketisation per se, to include responses to other hierarchies, exclusions and forms of domination. This includes efforts to counter the negative effects of sexism and patriarchy, or those of colonial legacies, which precede the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification in Piñas and Santa Maria, but which remain central to the nature of current processes of social transformation.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco participants in Piñas and Santa Maria through a broad focus on economic maldistribution. This analysis investigated some of the ways in which processes of neoliberal social transformation have impacted the lives of Indigenous people in Oaxaca and ‘irregular’ migrant farmworkers in California. First, this analysis emphasised the need to reassess and reinstate the economic ‘value’ of nature and labour in communities like Piñas against dominant frameworks that undervalue or neglect their contributions. In practice, this highlights that material inequality and economic dependence is being ameliorated through the contributions of small-scale agriculture and local systems of authority and reciprocity. But importantly, the status of nature and labour is changing, and the sustainability of these systems of production and governance remain threatened as local economies shift towards a dependence on wages and market transactions. Second, this analysis also revealed the need to question the terms and conditions of migrants’ incorporation into the labour market in Santa Maria at a time when the mobility and wellbeing of those who Faist (2008, p. 39) calls ‘(economically) wanted but (socially and culturally) unwelcome migrants’ is being restricted. This involves interrogating what work they do, how they live, and what challenges and opportunities they face as ‘irregular’ migrants farmworkers. This analysis thus reveals that participants navigate between societies stratified by factors such as ethnicity and migration status, and that while migrating to Santa Maria provides participants with much needed access to paid employment, they are still confronted by various forms of exploitation, economic marginalisation and deprivation.

Against this background, this chapter further analysed the agency of Mixteco participants in Piñas and Santa Maria in the context of broader neoliberal social transformation processes. It argued for a conceptualisation of agency that is rooted in a critical understanding and
Chapter 5: Perspective of Economic Maldistribution

explanation of migration and social transformation processes as occurring in a particular time
and context. This approach draws from Polanyi’s concept of the double-movement and from
contemporary critiques that emphasise the need to look at the way in which people respond to,
adapt to, or challenge the effects of the expansion of the market economy upon communities,
without losing sight of hierarchies, exclusions and forms of domination that exists within and
between them. Based on the examples of ongoing reforms to the system of usos y construmbres
(customary law) and the development of Indigenous organisations, this chapter emphasised that
the agency of Mixtecos can be seen in efforts to strengthen forms of social or community
regulation to counterbalance some of the corrosive effects of the expansion of the market
economy and the associated processes of commodification. Significantly, these examples also
illustrated the variability of responses in terms of the direction of social reform, the grouping
according to different political, ethnic or economic collectivities, or the decision to target
inequalities that precede the current wave of marketisation and commodification.
6 ‘Driving without Fear is a Privilege’ – Perspectives on Political Misrepresentation

6.1 Introduction

The title of this chapter reflects one of the main concerns expressed explicitly by participants in Santa Maria (and often in Piñas), where everyday acts taken for granted by others gain a new meaning if you are an ‘irregular’ migrant in the US (or an Indigenous person in Mexico). As described by this young participant, driving without fear – fear of being stopped by police, fear of having one’s car impounded, or worse, fear of being deported – is a ‘privilege’ from which he, and most of his friends and relatives were barred. Like this, many of the challenges and opportunities encountered by participants in Piñas and Santa Maria are related by their lack of inclusion in political terms. This emphasises the need to investigate the relations and institutions that sustain forms of political representation and misrepresentation in Mexico and the US in the current era.

As in Chapter 5, this focus on political misrepresentation is broad and serves to conceptualise the various concerns expressed by participants and the complexity of their lives. As discussed further below, this focus emphasises that participants (like any other people) ‘cannot fully flourish without participating in political and social affairs, and without being effectively involved in joint decision-making’ (Sen 2002, p. 79). In this context, while being able to hold a licence may seem trivial to some, it is illustrative of the ways in which forms of political misrepresentation filter down to impact the everyday lives of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria. As this chapter demonstrates, an analysis of existing inequalities such as this can provide crucial insights into current processes of neoliberal social transformation (including migration).

This chapter is structured in the following way. Section 6.2 provides a comprehensive explanation of the meaning and context of political misrepresentation with reference to broader theoretical and empirical detail. Section 6.3 analyses the way in which forms of political misrepresentation impact the everyday lives of participants. This section particularly investigates the temporal uncertainties that participants hold with regards to their mobility and employment in the face of existing inequalities. Section 6.4 draws from the previous discussions to conceptually elaborate on the reach and limits of the nation-state. This emphasises both the inadequacies of existing ‘national’ policies when targeting minorities such as Mixteco migrants,

---

68 This quote is taken from the interview with Judas, which took place on the 31/01/13.
and the manner in which participants engage with alternative epistemologies and practices of ‘citizenship’ and political participation that reach below and beyond the ‘national’. Lastly, Section 6.5 presents a number of conclusions.

### 6.2 Political Representation as a Dimension of Social Transformation

This chapter engages with the histories, experiences and agency of participants relating to issues of political representation. In response to the question ‘what constitutes political representation?’, one could reply in a narrow and liberal sense that political representation implies having control over one’s environment, including ‘the political entitlements associated with democracies in the broadest sense’, thus incorporating ‘opportunities of political dialogue, dissent and critique’ (Sen 1999, p. 38). A broader conceptualisation is provided by Fraser’s (2005, p. 75) definition of political representation as a precondition to parity of participation in social life. Representation pertains both ‘to the boundary-setting aspect of the political’ and to ‘the procedures that structure public processes of contestation’. In other words, representation is as much about inclusion or exclusion from ‘the community of those entitled to make … claims on one another’, as it is about the ‘terms on which those included in the political community air their claims and adjudicate their disputes’. From this perspective, political misrepresentation takes place ‘when political boundaries and/or decision rules function to deny some people, wrongly, the possibility of participating on a par with others in social interaction – including, but not only, in political arenas’ (Fraser 2005, p. 76).

Conceptualised in this way, it is clear that political representation is embedded in broader economic and social relationships and institutions. For instance, one’s ability to overcome forms of economic or social inequality may be enabled or constrained by one’s ability to form or join a workers’ union, elect a government official, or access due process in courts. Fraser (1998; 2005) highlights that political representation is essential to address issues of maldistribution (such as the existence of disproportionately high rates of unemployment and poverty among a group

---

69 Other scholars employing the capabilities approach have emphasised that being ‘able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association’ are important contributors to one’s wellbeing (Nussbaum 2003, p. 42). This understanding of political representation can be seen as encompassing aspects of Marshall’s (2000[1949]) evolving citizenship. In particular, this includes the civil and political strands of citizenship that enable individual freedom (in terms of personal liberty, speech, thought and faith, property and access to justice) and the right to partake in the exercise of political power (through holding office, voting and related activities).

70 For instance the likes of Stiglitz et al. (2010, p. 50) have suggested that having a political voice ‘can ensure the accountability of officials and public institutions, reveal what people need and value, and call attention to significant deprivations’.
or their overrepresentation in low-paying or dangerous work) and misrecognition (including the marginalisation or exclusion of a group in public spheres or their subjection to cultural attitudes that demean them). In this context, having a political voice can enable one to articulate and guard a set of individual or collective interests with respect to one’s economic and social concerns.

Conversely, one’s ability to overcome forms of political misrepresentation is also facilitated or circumscribed by numerous economic and social factors. Existing inequalities mean that not everyone is capable of participating effectively in political choices that govern one’s life, and that many are effectively denied the opportunities of political dialogue, dissent and critique needed to participate on par with others. At the most basic level, this is taken to imply that ‘a certain level of social and economic welfare is needed before people can take advantage of formal political rights’ (Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 11). But one could extend this to argue that one’s employment in 3-D jobs or one’s membership in an ethnic or religious minority could potentially lead to forms of misrepresentation, while one’s standing as an ‘educated’ male or one’s membership in an ethnic or religious majority could do the reverse. Indeed, an issue that is often neglected is that ‘the capacity to influence public debate and authoritative decision-making depends not only on formal decision rules but also on power relations rooted in the economic structure and the status order’ (Fraser 2005, p. 79).

### 6.2.1 Political Representation in Mexico and the US in the Neoliberal Era

Before proceeding any further, it is essential to situate participants’ concerns of political misrepresentation within the broader context of social transformation taking place in Mexico and the US. In particular, to comprehend participants’ histories, experiences and agency it is necessary to understand the significance of their status as Indigenous people and as ‘irregular’ migrants. In this context, it is important to note that participants in Piñas and Santa Maria include two groups – Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants – that have traditionally challenged notions of citizenship, rights and belonging under the liberal ideal of the nation-state and who have often not been included under such a model. Importantly, this also sheds light on the commonalities between those not included in the current neoliberal era, thus emphasising

---

71 This more comprehensive definition can be seen as encompassing aspects of Marshall’s (2000[1949], p. 32) social strand of citizenship which established a range of rights ‘from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society’.
Chapter 6: Perspectives on Political Misrepresentation

the manner in which national hierarchies of citizenship complement and interact with international hierarchies in complex ways (Castles 2005).

Castles and Davidson (2000) highlight their cases as examples of ‘de facto’ and ‘formal’ exclusion from the ideal of citizenship. ‘De facto’ exclusion points to the existence of certain groups ‘usually marked by race, by ethnicity or by being Indigenous peoples, who are denied full participation as citizens’. Like many Mixtecos in Mexico, ‘they may have the right to vote, but social, economic and cultural exclusion denies them the chance of gaining political representation or of having any real say in the decisions that affect their lives’ (Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 11). Indeed, Indigenous people in countries such as Mexico are confronted with ‘a system wherein their position as a small and politically marginalised minority translates into a very limited capacity to influence institutional design or policy-making or to hold governments accountable for their decisions’ (Murphy 2014, p. 234). Similarly, ‘formal’ exclusion ‘applies above all to immigrants … people who belong to society as workers, tax-payers and parents, yet are denied full political participation. Even [‘irregular’] immigrants may be long-term residents but do not enjoy many basic rights’ (Castles and Davidson 2000, pp. 10-11). This reflects similar processes to those encapsulated in Sassen’s (2002; 2009) concepts of ‘unrecognised citizenship’ and ‘informal citizenship’, and Parreñas’ (2001a) idea of ‘partial-citizenship’. Arguably, this can also be seen as tantamount to the processes of exclusion and unequal inclusion that have been addressed in previous chapters and which capture important aspects of contemporary inequality.

Before going any further, it is important to stress that the current lack of inclusion of Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants (among other groups) is not a gift of social evolution. To paraphrase de Genova’s (2002, p. 439) study of ‘illegality’ and ‘deportability’, ‘there is nothing matter-of-fact about the “illegality” of undocumented migrants’. To the contrary, states and policies have been fundamental in actively creating forms of political misrepresentation. As described in Chapter 4, Mixtecos and other Indigenous people in Mexico have historically been marginalised in economic, social and political terms. With regards to issues of political representation, it is notable that the founding Constitution of 1917 made no mention of

---

72 ‘Unrecognised citizenship’ refers to the condition of those who are ‘authorised yet unrecognised’. This includes citizens (for instance women or Indigenous people) who are discriminated against or who are not recognised as political subjects. ‘Informal citizenship’ denotes the condition of those who are ‘unauthorised yet recognised’ and includes ‘irregular’ migrants, who are excluded from formal citizenship but who are bound to their communities of residence through informal social contracts (Sassen 2009). Similarly, ‘partial citizenship’ broadly refers to the ‘stunted integration of migrants in receiving nation-states’ (Parreñas 2001b, p. 1130) as they are left unprotected by labour laws or are excluded from pathways to citizenship or family reunification.
Indigenous peoples and no mechanisms were established to ensure their political inclusion (Singer Sochet 2014). In practice, the assimilation of Indigenous people was promoted into an imaginary homogenous, monolingual and monocultural mestizo Spanish-speaking nation-state, which resulted not only in their deprivation of employment, educational opportunities and public services but also in their subjection to systemic violations. As documented by Nagengast, Stavenhagen and Kearney (1992, p. 1) over 20 years ago, Mixtecos in Mexico suffered from ‘the denial of rights to their land, their culture, and their language … torture, ill-treatment, and extra-judicial execution of political activists … repression of independent political organisations; and … exploitation and extortion … as peasants and workers’.

Contradictory changes have taken place amid broader social transformations including the transition away from the one-party system rule of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI), the implementation of neoliberal economic reforms to land ownership and agriculture (Bartra 2006), and the political upheaval brought on by the Zapatista uprising of 1994 (Cabrero 2013). For instance, in 1992 the country’s constitution was reformed to recognise Indigenous people and the multiethnic character of Mexico (although in the same year the doors were opened to the privatisation of ejido land, and indirectly that of comunidades agrarias). It was also in this setting that the constitution was once again reformed in 2002 to recognise a very limited and disputed form of Indigenous autonomy in response to the 1996 San Andrés Accords between the federal government and the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation or EZLN) (Anaya-Muñoz 2005; Sieder 2002). Paradoxically though, this last set of reforms is so limited – and so different from the essential points of the Accords – that it is illustrative of the continual lack of inclusion of Indigenous people in Mexico in the neoliberal era. To give an example, these reforms failed to implement nation-wide change by delegating the actual recognition and regulation of Indigenous autonomy to state governments; they thwarted efforts to promote Indigenous political participation and representation at the national level by failing to redefine electoral districts or open avenues to Indigenous participation without the mediation of non-Indigenous political parties; and they weakened opportunities for self-determination by receding from the transfer of funding and

---

73 As of 1992, ejidos can be privatised and sold, while comunidades agrarias must be converted into an ejido before they can be privatised and sold (Stephen 2002b). See footnote 26 for an explanation of the history of these two types of communal lands.
decision-making powers (Anaya-Muñoz 2004; Stavenhagen 2001). In short, not much has fundamentally changed for better. Hence, and on par with major economic and social issues addressed in Chapter 5 and 7, a significant problem faced by Indigenous people in Mexico continues to be the lack of spaces for participation in fundamental decisions – from what happens to natural resources in their territories, to having a say in the definition and planning of ‘development’ at the state and national level, to being able to effectively participate in the electoral process (Singer Sochet 2014). It is thus not surprising that demands for political inclusion remain in force in Mexico.

But participants are also confronted with issues of political misrepresentation due to their status as ‘irregular’ migrants in the US. Just as with Indigenous people in Mexico, the creation of an ‘illegalised’ population ‘has been a relatively lengthy – and always social and legal – process’ (Sharma 2008, p. 109). This can be traced back to the Immigration Act of 1924 and to large-scale deportation programmes such as Operation Wetback in 1954 (Ngai 2014; Sharma 2008). Ever since, the passage of laws such as IRCA in 1986, and IIRIRA in 1996 – and the implementation of programmes such as Operations Blockade and Gatekeeper in 1993 and 1994, and Comunidades Seguras (Secure Communities) between 2008-2014 – have all aimed at ‘securitising’ the Mexico-US border and enhancing the deportability of ‘irregular’ migrants. Notably, and as mentioned in Chapter 4, many of the relatively recent changes form part of a ‘lopsided process of development in North America, in which rising capital mobility and growing US investment south of the border coincided with repressive efforts to limit the cross-border movement of Mexicans’ into the US (Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007, p. 99).

This has led to various forms of misrepresentation which compromise the overall wellbeing of ‘irregular’ migrants. Despite the passage of time and the large number of ‘irregular’ migrants in the US, immigration reform has repeatedly failed in recent years. While initiatives such as the ‘Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals’ (DACA) have the potential to allow some ‘irregular’ migrants to avoid deportation and to apply for temporary work, it is crucial to note that young migrants from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds face important barriers. For instance,

74 Other significant limitations include the failure to recognise Indigenous territories as the fundamental material base of Indigenous reproduction (the reforms barely mentioned the ‘places in [which Indigenous people] inhabit’) and the categorisation of Indigenous communities as entities of public interest (thus denying their status as legal entities and collective bearers of rights). In economic terms, the reforms neglect claims for collective rights to natural resources (they do not include any reference to the ‘collective’, just as the concept of territory is omitted) and they ignore calls for compensation for damage caused by the exploitation of natural resources by the state in Indigenous territories. Significantly, the reforms also establish that rights to natural resources in places inhabited by Indigenous peoples are still subject to, and limited by, the rights acquired by others and by pre-existing forms of land tenure and ownership recognised by the Constitution (Anaya-Muñoz 2004).
the fee of US$465 is prohibitive for many, while others are isolated from advocacy networks that could potentially provide them with assistance. Many more may simply not qualify because they do not meet the educational requirements (Seif et al. 2014). These are significant barriers for Mixteco youth in Santa Maria given financial and educational barriers. Aside from these barriers, it is important to emphasise that deferred status ‘is temporary and does not provide a path to legal immigration status or citizenship’ (Farmworkers Justice 2016a). In short, there are no meaningful alternatives for ‘irregular’ migrants – particularly for those employed in ‘low-skilled’ jobs such as agriculture – to regularise their migration status.

As demonstrated by the latest presidential campaign in the US and the wealth of media and academic writing on the topic, ‘irregular’ migration remains a highly politicised and controversial issue. Indeed, many would dispute the extent (if any) to which ‘irregular’ migrants should enjoy a degree of political representation despite the informal social contracts formed by them and their communities of destination through work, family and other ties. Against recent portrays of ‘irregular’ Mexican migrants as ‘rapists’ and ‘criminals’ who should be removed, this thesis follows Carens (2013, p. 157) on maintaining that ‘even if we accept the state’s right to control immigration as a basic premise, that right is not absolute and unqualified’. In particular, the ‘state’s right to deport ‘irregular’ migrants [and to deny their formal inclusion] weakens as the migrants become members of society’. To do otherwise has severe negative consequences. This does not only deny migrants the possibility of participating on a par with others in social interaction, but it can also undermine their overall wellbeing. For instance, and as noted by Nagengast, Stavenhagen and Kearney (1992, p. 1) over 20 years ago, ‘because they are without papers, [Mixtecos] are denied access to laws that protect civil rights, rights to fair housing, and fair labour practices’. Here, one can draw a parallel between the refusal to include current ‘irregular’ migrants and the refusal to include ‘others’ (such as Indigenous people) in the past. This highlights that political injustices, with long-lasting economic and social consequences, can occur when a democratic majority fails ‘to include people who belong’ (Carens 2013, p. 154). In this context, it is again not surprising that the demand for inclusion of ‘irregular’ migrants remain strong.

6.3 Mixtecos and the Temporal Uncertainties of their Mobility and Employment

The histories, experiences and agency of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria reveal important insights into the nature of neoliberal social transformation processes. A variety of concerns related to issues of political misrepresentation were raised by participants that illustrate some of
Chapter 6: Perspectives on Political Misrepresentation

the challenges and opportunities faced by them as Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants in Mexico and the US. An important concern relates to the need to examine how they experience different temporalities with regards to their mobility and their employment. This refers to the perceived lack of control that participants hold over critical issues that affect them. In particular, this temporal uncertainty can be seen as the micro expression of broader forms of political misrepresentation that effectively denied them the ability to participate in political choices that govern their lives. In this context, concerns relating to when they move (and how they move), and when they work (and how they work), reveals that social transformation processes (including migration) can buttress certain socio-spatial scales and temporal frames to the detriment of those that are not included as full and equal members of society. In particular, this focus on time and control highlights that particular forms of political and socioeconomic organisation result in ‘qualitatively different experiences’ of time and uncertainty (Wajcman 2008, p. 65).

The following sections thus focus on participants’ insecurity about temporariness and permanence relating to their limited mobility and about contrasting temporalities relating to their employment. Indeed, many aspects of their lives seem to be fast or rushing out of control, while others seem suspended or even stagnant, thus producing ‘a sense of time that is particularly uncertain and untrusted’ (Griffiths et al. 2013, p. 19). This is in line with broader critiques that highlight that marginalised groups, such as ‘low-skilled’ ‘irregular’ migrants, are positioned in a way that they have little control over time-space relations (Boersma 2016; Massey 1994; Sharma 2014). In this context, ‘a focus on the temporal dimensions of such experiences can provide a critical anchor for understanding the process, dynamics and possibilities of the migration process’ and arguably of broader social transformation processes as well (Cwerner 2001, p. 15).

6.3.1 Lack of Control over One’s Mobility

Participants’ perceptions of time, the speed of life and the control – or lack thereof – they hold over it, is grounded in their experiences of limited mobility. This is dominated by an uncertainty about temporariness and permanence that has a complex relationship to their experiences of political misrepresentation. As explained by Cwerner (2001, p. 21), ‘for a large period of one’s immigrant life (sometimes for the whole of its duration), the inescapable alien status is bound to dominate many of the times of one’s immigrant experience’. In the case of participants, this uncertainty begins with their initial travel from Mexico to the US. The fact that this trip now takes longer than before – due to factors such as the increasing ‘securitisation’ of the border – is just one of the challenges and contradictions they face:
I used to think that going to the north was straightforward: you leave here and you arrive there. Like we travel within Oaxaca, you take your car and you go. But it is not like that. Migrants have to suffer, they have to pay the coyotes, they may try a first time and if they fail they will be returned. But they will try again and again. There are days and nights in which they do not eat. They have to carry their own water or otherwise they do not make it (interview with local teacher in Piñas, 16/12/12).

In this context, participants like Zara contrasted the ‘old days’ when ‘it was quick, it took only two hours’ against recent travels that ‘took a long time. It was interminable and ugly, we walked for five days and four nights’ (interview, 18/11/12). But this experience of limited mobility as grounded in uncertainty affects not only those migrating. Many in Piñas for instance recalled the anxious time spent waiting for news about their relatives who were crossing the Mexico-US border: ‘from the first day they go, I cry and worry. This lasts every day until they call me to tell me that they have arrived safely. These are very long days’ (interview with Laura, 26/11/12). Significantly, this uncertainty is not experienced by those that are able to travel across the border freely. As mentioned elsewhere, it is the mobility of the marginalised that tends to be the most controlled and which results in greater insecurities.

Furthermore, this uncertainty about temporariness and permanence remains with participants over time as migrant’s trips now take longer than before and many are staying indefinitely in Santa Maria in the face of increasing immigration controls and other factors, such as the persistent lack of economic opportunities in Oaxaca or the growth of family reunification in California. In this context, those in the Piñas wait ever-longer periods of time for the return of their migrant relatives. As explained by Luis, ‘families are separated, and you cannot count on them on a daily basis’ (interview, 27/11/12). While the extent of family abandonment as a widespread problem was questioned by female participants in Piñas, the cost of long separations was particularly emphasised in relation to those children that are left behind (see Figure 18). This is an issue that has produced a plethora of research and which is explored further in Chapter 7 (Dreby 2007; Dreby and Stutz 2012). For now, it is important to highlight that this waiting was echoed by a number of older participants discussing the emigration of their adult children who have similar experiences to Luisa: ‘[migration] has brought me no benefits … it is an experience of abandonment’ (interview, 18/11/12). In this context, the initial ideals – generally that of a short

75 This was an issue discussed at length during the focus group (11/01/13), with some like Teresa arguing that ‘there are many women and families that have been abandoned. The man emigrates and then he forgets about them. And the mother is left alone. That happens here [in Piñas] and everywhere else’, while others like Alicia pointed out ‘that does not happen a lot. Only a few women and families [have been abandoned]’.
and financially rewarding trip – gives way to a reality in which, for some, the periods of stay become indefinite and the financial rewards are limited.

**Figure 18. Children left Behind in Piñas**

There are women who are abandoned. The man migrates supposedly to bring a better future for their children, but the opposite happens. This picture represents the way children wait for their parents to come back to spend the holidays with them. Many migrants return for the celebrations, but others do not return and the children are left waiting (female photographer in Piñas, 2012).

In this context, participants’ experiences of time as waiting are largely shaped by their status as ‘irregular’ migrants. Indeed, many in Santa Maria are literally waiting for an opportunity to regularise their migration status: ‘even if they wanted to come back they cannot do it. They are waiting to get their [emigration] papers …my husband, he has not been able to come back [to Piñas] for six years now’ (interview with Carmen, 17/11/12). The current stalemate in negotiations for immigration reform – particularly one that could benefit ‘low-skilled’ ‘irregular’ migrant workers – means that many ‘just have to wait and wait even longer’ (interview with Mateo, 19/06/12). Participants in Santa Maria often talked about the broad impacts of this form of political misrepresentation:

One lives with fear of the police and la migra. And you cannot get a social security number or a license. And this has an impact. Say for instance that your car gets taken away [because you were stopped driving without a valid license], you then have to pay a lot of money to get your car back. And some people simply do not have that money, so they lose their cars. This is just one example of the impacts of this lack of reform in our lives (interview with Manuel, 27/05/12).
Chapter 6: Perspectives on Political Misrepresentation

This form of political misrepresentation has further impacts on the employment opportunities of participants in Santa Maria. In particular, and as argued by Griffiths et al. (2013, p. 17), migrants’ uncertainty about temporariness and permanence can confine them ‘into precarious work, which can be thought of as work without temporal rhythm … in which the routines and security of employment may be absent’.

6.3.2 Lack of Control over One’s Employment

Indeed, and as implicitly argued in Chapter 5, participants’ employment at the bottom rung of the farm labour market is characterised by conflicting temporalities of waiting and rushing. As noted by Holmes (2013, p. 50) in his analysis of Indigenous migrant farm labour in the US West Coast, the farm labour hierarchy is ‘determined by the asymmetries in society at large – specifically around race, class, and citizenship – and reinforces those larger inequalities’. Accordingly, participants in Santa Maria complained that: ‘just because they see someone is from Oaxaca they give him the toughest job … As if that was the only thing we were good for’ (Javier in focus group, 18/01/13). Similarly, others explained that ‘most people that leave go without [immigration] papers, so they suffer from that disadvantage. Without papers one cannot get any of the good jobs, without papers you cannot achieve anything’ (interview with Ricardo, 25/11/12). This is significant as the ‘responsibilities, anxieties, privileges, and experiences of time differ from the top to the bottom of this labour organisation’ with those at the bottom faring worse not only in terms of their health status and their financial security, but also in terms of their experiences of time and the control they have over their, and others’, labour (Holmes 2013, p. 50) (see also Figure 19).
This is my husband. He is a professional painter and he worked in painting and construction for almost seven years. He lost his job because he did not have papers – allegedly they began checking if workers had papers and they fined employers with undocumented employees. He was fired before they fined his boss. Since then he has had to work on the fields. The biggest difference is that he used to earn much more money before. He worked 40 hours a week and earned between US$450-$500 a week, every week of the year. In the field one works up to 70 hours a week and earns on average US$380 a week, but only when there is work. In the winter he earns US$168 a week – and he is fortunate to have work. Many of our countrymen are out of work those months (female photographer in Santa Maria, 2013).

An important concern that emerges from analysing the histories, experiences and agency of participants is the little control they hold over their employment. On the one hand, as ‘irregular’ migrants employed in seasonal agriculture, they faced long periods of waiting throughout the off-season when the majority are out of work and only a few are hired on a sporadic basis. As summed up by Manuel, ‘it is different for those working in the fields, because as soon as winter arrives there is no more work’ (interview, 27/05/12). On the other hand, as ‘irregular’ migrants employed in seasonal agriculture, they faced periods of rush throughout the season. Within the farms, participants like Emma reported that ‘the problem is that there is too much pressure: “work faster! Do more!”’ (interview, 30/06/12). This is institutionalised through various formal mechanisms (such as the piece rate system) and informal mechanisms over which participants have little control. For instance, it was reported that ‘some bosses also do not give you a proper break [to eat and rest], just 15
minutes [a day] and that is it’ (interview with Marian, 06/02/13) or that ‘in this country, we are in a rush, we do not eat well, and if the lunchera does not arrive on time we are left hungry if the boss says so’ (Moisés in focus group, 18/01/13). Importantly, this fast and frenzied time stands almost as a counterpart to the suspended and stagnant time during the low season described above. Whether one waits or not for the start of the next season is not a real choice. The majority of participants wait because there are no other job opportunities for them in Santa Maria, but also because returning to Piñas at the end of the season is no longer an option due to the ever-greater risks and costs associated with crossing the Mexico-US border. In this context, this tension can be seen as a quasi-requirement of their employment.

6.3.3 Political Misrepresentation, Mobility and Employment in Piñas and Santa Maria

The engagement with participants’ uncertainties regarding their mobility and employment reveals one of the ways in which current forms of misrecognition affect people lives. In this context, the lack of control that participants have over their temporariness and permanence, and over contrasting temporalities of waiting and rushing, is illustrative of broader inequalities resulting from particular forms of political and socioeconomic organisation that are shaping the neoliberal era. For instance, the fact that participants at both sides of the border face longer periods of travel, settlement and return is not the result of ‘natural’ distances or barriers between Mexico and the US. On the contrary, the fact that trips are taking longer – and are more dangerous and costly – runs contrary to the significant improvements in transport and technology, which in other cases are assumed to compress time and space (Bauman 1998). Longer travel times are rather the result of specific state policies that, while tacitly condoning the employment of ‘irregular’ migrants as farmworkers, have sought to make the entry and stay of these migrants more difficult and costly. In practice this means that ‘for these groups, spatial and temporal norms and orders at play in global capitalism may work out quite differently in terms of the way their time is structured and experienced’ (Boersma 2016, p. 118).

6.4 The Reach and Limits of the Still-Present Nation-State

This chapter has so far discussed participants’ concerns with regards to forms of political misrepresentation taking place in Piñas and Santa Maria. This has emphasised their lack of inclusion as Indigenous people in Mexico and as ‘irregular’ migrants in the US, whereby this filters down to produce temporal uncertainties over their mobility and employment. One of the key insights that emergence from analysing the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco
participants in Piñas and Santa Maria is the need to engage with the influence and the bounds of the nation-state. As argued in Chapter 3, this does not deny that the nation-state remains a key economic, social and political unit. However, it does emphasise the need to explore the links between global, national, regional and local dimensions of social transformation and migration and how people navigate within and across these borders. This section engages with this issue from two perspectives. First, it questions the reach and limits of ‘national’ policies with regards to ‘minorities’ such as Mixtecos. And second, it explores multiple scales through which Mixtecos exercise forms of political representation in spite of constrains imposed by the nation-state.

6.4.1 ‘National’ Policies and Ethnic Minorities

As the previous sections have demonstrated, the wellbeing of participants is partly framed by relations and institutions that sustain forms of political misrepresentation in Mexico and the US. This is illustrative of the continuing importance of the nation-state in shaping patterns of inclusion and exclusion in the neoliberal era. For instance, immigration and labour laws influence the mobility and employment opportunities of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria, but one could equally point out that ‘non-migration’ policies ‘shape the social, economic, political and cultural fabric of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’ societies and therefore migration in powerful, albeit predominantly indirect, ways’ (de Haas 2014, p. 21) (see Chapter 7 for more on this). In this context, it is important to note that the development of ‘national’ policies often fails to include or reach minorities in significant ways. This section in particular questions the development of recent policies to engage with, and support, Indigenous Mexican migrants in the US.

Much has been written about policies implemented by the US and Mexican governments in their roles as archetypical ‘immigration’ and ‘emigration’ states (see for instance Fitzgerald 2006; Massey and Pren 2012). While many of the recent developments in US immigration policy where covered in previous chapters, changes that have influenced contemporary forms of political misrepresentation have also taken place in Mexico (Arias Cubas 2012b). Recent years have witnessed a modest departure from la política de no tener política (no policy politics) of the 1970s and the 1980s (García y Griego 1988), in which the Mexican government sought to maintain the status quo regarding the constant flux of Mexican migrants to the north while avoiding direct confrontation with the US government or any direct engagement with the migrant population. The 1990s for instance witnessed a phase of ‘damage control’ that saw the implementation of a number of programmes directed to Mexican migrants in the US in order to repair the growing rift between them and the ‘official party’ of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional
Revolutionary Party or PRI), as well as a tool for negotiating support for the implementation of NAFTA (Durand 2004). This phase included the implementation of the Programa Paisano in 1989, the Grupos Beta in 1990 and the now defunct Programa para las Comunidades Migrantes en el Extranjero (Program for Mexican Communities Abroad or PCME) in 1990 as well. Another significant development included the 1996 and the 1997 constitutional reforms, which sought to expand the political representation of migrants by respectively allowing absentee voting in national elections and the acquisition of a second nationality (Arias Cubas 2012b). However, while the turn of the twenty-first century was initially hailed as a phase of ‘shared responsibility’ between the governments of Mexico and the US (Durand 2004), this has been ultimately characterised by the unilateral implementation of border enforcement policies by the US and relatively weak migrant engagement policies by Mexico (Delgado Wise and Márquez Covarrubias 2006; Yrizar Barbosa and Alarcón 2010). The latter is exemplified by the establishment of the Programa 3x1 para Migrantes (3x1 Programme for Migrants) in 2002 or the creation of the Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterier (Institute for Mexicans Abroad or IME) in 2003 (Arias Cubas 2012b).

The extent to which these policies and reforms actually reach Mixtecos in Santa Maria and other Indigenous migrants in the US is questionable. The majority of participants reported never receiving any assistance or any service from the Mexican federal government even when prompted. For instance, no mention was ever made of the Programa Paisano or the Grupos Beta even among those who had recently returned to Mexico or those that had recently crossed the Mexico-US border. Similarly, no mention was made of the Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterier (Institute for Mexicans Abroad or IME) even among key informants or among those participants that were active in community organising in Santa Maria. In this context, one can presume that participants have very little knowledge or first-hand experience of any of these programs.

There was also very little discussion on the Programa 3x1. This last omission is significant not only because of the emphasis given to remittances in the international development community, but also because of how active the comitiva del pueblo (hometown association) in Santa Maria has

---

76 These programs respectively seek to combat abuses and corruption on the part of Mexican authorities towards Mexican migrants returning to or visiting Mexico and to provide assistance for migrants travelling through Mexico and its borders in the form of first aid, social services, shelters, and search and rescue operations.

77 IME assists the organisation of Mexican communities abroad and develops diverse service programs in areas such as education, health care and business promotion.

78 This is a funding scheme that aims to match every dollar invested by migrant organisations with one dollar each from federal, state, and municipality governments to finance social and infrastructure projects in communities of ‘origin’.
been in supporting the *autoridad* (local government) of Piñas with financial contributions. Only two participants in Piñas, both of whom had previously served high-ranking cargos (civic and religious offices) mentioned that: ‘we have used the “3x1”, but it does not support every type of work we want to do. Like the refurbishment of the church and other things like that, so we do [these works] without it’ (interview with Jesús, 05/12/12) and that ‘we have occasionally used the 3x1, but some community members do not want to have to wait [for the government bureaucracy]’ (interview with Fernando, 02/12/12). This is not unexpected as research has shown that communities in Oaxaca tend to participate less in the *Programa 3x1*, and thus receive fewer funds, than those in the traditional (and mostly *mestizo*) ‘emigration states’ of Zacatecas, Jalisco, Guanajuato and Michoacán in spite of the significance of individual and collective remittances for local economies in Oaxaca. Among others, García Zamora (2005, p. 12) attributes this differences to the ‘long ethnic-community tradition of accomplishing many social projects … without government intervention’, while Krannich (2014, p. 23) emphasises the ‘still existing scepticism of Indigenous migrants towards the Mexican government … based on their experiences of governmental discrimination and suppression’.

In this context, is interesting that the one program that participants spoke about was the provision of *matrículas consulares* (consular identification cards). This statement – ‘from the Mexican government, the only assistance has been the granting of my matricula. That is the only official form of ID that I have, so it has been very useful in dealing with the bank and the telephone company’ (interview with Raúl, 30/05/12) – is rather representative of the experiences of participants in Santa María. Nonetheless, for a population that more often than not lacks a valid form of ID rather few hold one of these *matriculas* (identification cards). This may be related to the costs associated with obtaining this ID (interview with migrant leader in Santa María, 11/06/12), but this could also be related to the existence of other barriers. For instance, migrants need to make an appointment in order to apply for this ID. This requires one to speak or write Spanish, a significant challenge for participants in Santa María as almost half spoke little or no Spanish. This is further complicated as migrants are required to provide a form of ID (a license, a passport, a school certificate, etc.) with their application. This is another challenge, as many participants are virtually ‘undocumented’ in Mexico (see Figure 20). As explained by this migrant leader in Santa María, ‘there are many people who are not even registered [in Mexico] and who have no form of valid ID. This is a big

---

79 These ID’s have been offered since the mid-nineteenth century, but it was only recently that they became a valid form of ID for both regular and ‘irregular’ migrants in numerous financial institutions, counties, and police departments across the US.

80 Out of 25 participants interviewed in Santa María, only nine reported holding a valid consular ID, while another two participants reported holding one in the past (one ID had expired and the other one had been lost).
problem among our people’ (interview, 11/06/12). These challenges illustrate some of the gaps existing in the design and implementation of programs targeting Mexican migrants that fail to respond to the specific needs of Indigenous migrants.

Figure 20. Oaxaca’s Civil Registry in Santa Maria

This photo reflects one of the problems that people in our community have. Many of them are really undocumented – they do not have any valid registration or identification document either in their place of origin or here. As an activist I have collaborated with other colleagues to bring the civil registry of Oaxaca so we can attend the needs of our countrymen (male photographer in Santa Maria, 2013).

Furthermore, it is also important to note that participants in Santa Maria have received little benefit from the constitutional reforms that allow for the acquisition of a double nationality or to exercise the right to vote in federal elections through absentee voting provisions. The opportunity of obtaining a second nationality is irrelevant to most given their current ‘irregular’ status and the lack of avenues for regularisation. Similarly, participants have gained little from the reform to allow absentee voting due to the conservative design and implementation of the reform. A significant barrier for ‘irregular’ migrants is that many of them lack a valid credencial de
elector (voting ID card), which was needed to vote from abroad but which paradoxically could only be obtained in Mexico (Gutierrez et al. 2012). As noted in the research diaries:

many Mexican-born people are willing – but unable – to vote because they are not registered with the Instituto Nacional Electoral … They could travel to Tijuana to get a credencial de elector, but the process is lengthy and only those who are (i) able to cross the border safely (that is, people with papers) and (ii) had another form of valid Mexican ID (consular ID or birth certificate) can do it in practice (research diary, log 4, 2012).

Since August 2016, changes have been implemented to allow migrants to obtain their credencial de elector (voting ID cards) while abroad (Instituto Nacional Electoral 2016). While this is a significant step in eliminating formal barriers, other challenges mentioned above – such as requisites to speak Spanish to arrange bureaucratic procedures or hold a valid form of ID – are likely to continue to limit the ability of Indigenous migrants to participate as equals in this political exercise.

Drawing from this discussion one can point out that many of the policies and programs implemented by the Mexican government fail to reach Mixteco migrants in places like Santa Maria. This is related to the little direct contact between consular officials and Indigenous migrants, and to other institutional barriers in the design and implementation of programs that neglect the special circumstances of Indigenous migrants. This may be due to the inability of officials to function beyond monolingual and monocultural contexts, but it is also the result of ongoing discrimination against Indigenous people that leads to the low priority given to them in several of the existing programmes for the migrant population in general. For instance, recent research with consular officials revealed that while most recognise that Indigenous migrants have different needs, there is very little knowledge of what these needs are, of their communities and their particular characteristics. Furthermore, this research found that negative stereotypes that exist at the national level in Mexico (for instance, that Indigenous people are ‘backward’ or ignorant, or that they have a conflictual relationship with authorities) are reproduced among consular officials in the US (Délano and Yescas 2014).

Finally, it is significant that despite the long history of Indigenous migration, until recently there were no programmes developed to address the specific challenges faced by Indigenous migrants (Délano and Yescas 2014). As highlighted by this state official in Oaxaca: ‘I do not know any programs on behalf of the [Mexican] Federal government to support Indigenous migrants. I do not know of any program or any institution … Perhaps in terms of the double citizenship the consulates play a role. But they do
not have a focus on Indigenous migrants either’ (interview, 12/11/12). Possibly the only federal initiative targeting Indigenous migrants is the Directrorio de Hablantes de Lenguas Nacionales de Apoyo Consular (Directory of Speakers of National Languages of Consular Support). Launched in 2009, its aim is to locate community translators to support the provision of consular protection in criminal or administrative cases. Yet, the success of this initiative has been limited given the lack of funding and training available for potential translators (Délano and Yescas 2014). But perhaps more importantly, aside from this initiative, little attention has been given to the broader needs of Indigenous migrants in terms of the provision of health or educational services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate, or in terms of the development of community activities such as those targeting non-Indigenous Mexican migrants.

6.4.2 Alternative Spaces of Political Representation

While this focus on ‘national’ policies emphasises the experiences of participants as Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants within specific nation-states, it is necessary to not reify this as the only ‘container-space’ of participants’ lives. The nation-state is not the sole locus of political representation. The nation-state matters, but participants’ lives and experiences are expressed within particular time-spaces that go beyond strict ‘national’ contexts (Kearney 2000; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). Among other time-spaces, what happens at the ‘state’ level in California and in Oaxaca, and what happens at the ‘local’ level in Santa Maria and Piñas, also influences forms of political representation. This multi-scalarity is encapsulated in the concept of Oaxacalifornia, ‘which implies both a fusion of aspects of life and society in Oaxaca and in California and a transcendence of them’ (Kearney 2000, p. 182). This is also captured in this thesis’ primary research findings, which have highlighted the interconnections between what takes place in multiple socio-spatial scales through translocal and transnational social relations. Interestingly, this demonstrates that Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants are able to navigate between these different scales to secure a degree of political representation below and beyond the reach of the nation state.

Notably, policies implemented at the state level have addressed the increasing significance of migration in places like California and Oaxaca. California’s significant transition from the time of Proposition 187 (which sought to deny ‘irregular’ migrants and their children access to social, educational and health services) to recent reforms that encourage ‘integration rather than deportation’ (Ramakrishnan and Colbern 2015) is a case in point. To return to the title of this Chapter, ‘driving without fear’ is a ‘privilege’ from which most participants were excluded due to
their migration status. For ‘irregular’ migrants who have lived and worked in California for years (and sometimes decades), this denial is not only likely to increase their likelihood of driving without licenses and without insurance, but it could also limit their everyday mobility and increase their reliance on expensive forms of transport. As described by participants, this denial could also result in heavy costs and associated damages following an encounter with police (see Figure 21). Furthermore, while an official driver’s license could serve as an important source of identification (needed to open a bank account, for instance), the lack of it could potentially land one in deportation proceedings following a common minor traffic violation (Singh Guliani 2014). It is important to note that since 2015, and against a backdrop of anti-immigrant rhetoric at the national level, California has granted ‘irregular’ migrants the right to obtain driver’s licenses as part of a state-level immigration overhaul (Medina 2015; Ramakrishnan and Colbern 2015). In this context, this and other recent changes (such as extending access to in-state tuition and professional licenses to ‘irregular’ migrants), while restricted in their geographical and legal scope, are likely to have a positive economic, political and social impact on the wellbeing of ‘irregular’ migrants.

Figure 21. Impounded Cars in Santa Maria

All these cars are for sale. These are the cars that have been taken away from migrants who do not have a valid license for California. One has to pay more than US$1,800 if you want to retrieve
but often our cars are not worth that much. Sometimes it is more expensive to recover your car than it is to leave it. So many people leave them … But the saddest thing is that you need a car to go to work, to bring food home, or go to wash clothes [in the laundromat]. Besides, the cars are expensive. You have to sacrifice other things in order to be able to buy one in the first place (male photographer in Santa Maria, 2013).

But changes have also taken place in Oaxaca as the state government has developed its own migration policies. For instance, the Instituto Oaxaqueño de Atención al Migrante (Oaxacan Institute for Attention to Migrants or IOAM) was created in 1999 to serve the growing emigrant population in Mexico and the US (interview with state official in Oaxaca, 12/11/12). As explained by one state official in Oaxaca, ‘Ninety per cent of our programs focus on Indigenous migrants’ (interview, 12/11/12). Among other functions, the IOAM provides legal representation to prisoners in the US and along the Mexico-US border, it assists migrants to obtain the double nationality for their children, and it funds the repatriation of deceased migrants back to Oaxaca. The IOAM also works to improve the coverage and accessibility of various federal programs, such as the Programa 3x1 or the Fondo de Apoyo a Migrantes (Fund to Support Migrants), among Indigenous communities in Oaxaca (interview with state official in Oaxaca, 12/11/12). A significant development since 2010, and after the election of the first non-PRI governor in Oaxaca in almost 80 years, is that the IOAM was under the direction a former Indigenous migrant leader (Krannich 2014). This reflects the active participation of Indigenous migrant organisations in campaigning against the rule of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI) in Oaxaca. This is also a noteworthy departure from the status quo of government institutions in Mexico in which there is little if any Indigenous representation. Thus, while substantial gaps remain regarding the needs of Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico and the US, this is a step towards the inclusion of Indigenous people in state decision-making.

Perhaps the most significant space in which Indigenous people secure a degree of political representation is at the local level in Piñas and Santa Maria. As argued by Stephen (2014, p. 47), ‘one of the key challenges in rethinking concepts about citizenship in the context of transnational/transborder Indigenous communities is incorporating Indigenous epistemologies of citizenship into broader notions of political participation’. This is as much about ‘decolonising the definitions of citizenship’ (beyond the relationship between an individual citizen and the nation-state) as it is about starting a ‘conversation about the organisation of political participation

81 The Fondo de Apoyo a Migrantes (Fund to Support Migrants) is a relatively new scheme created in the aftermath of the US financial crisis to support returned migrants in creating micro-businesses.
through transnational and/or non-national strategies’. As described in Chapter 5, participants’ active and ongoing engagement with the system of *usos y costumbres* (customary law) and *comitivas de pueblo* (hometown associations) can be seen as an example of the ways in which Indigenous people try to circumscribe the restrictive reach of the nation-state and respond to some of the challenges imposed by the expansion of the market economy and other forms of exclusion and domination. After all, it is important to recognise that it is at the community level that participants have the opportunity – however limited by external constraints – to participate effectively in political choices that govern their lives. As also explained in Chapter 5, another example of the manner in which Indigenous people have sought to secure a degree of political representation is through the work of pan-ethnic Indigenous organisations. In this context, organisations like the *Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales* (Binational Front of Indigenous Organisations, or FIOB) and the associated *Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño* (Binational Centre for the Development of Oaxacan Indigenous Communities or CBDIO) act as intermediaries between Indigenous migrants and all levels of government and they also fill important gaps neglected by current policies.

The CBDIO in Santa Maria, for instance, has collaborated with the Santa Barbara Country government, the Oaxacan state government, and the Mexican state government in providing important services to Mixteco migrants. This migrant leader in Santa Maria provided an example of the work of the CBDIO:

> It brought Oaxaca’s civil registry to Santa Maria in 2008 and 2011 to give out birth certificates, as many people have no form of valid identification. On a day-to-day basis, they also help people to complete paperwork to gain access to social or health services provided by the US government – like Medi-Cal or food stamps for the children – and other paperwork needed to obtain a consular ID, a rental application, and so on. *[The CBDIO]* also organises workshops for migrants on topics such as tenant rights and pesticides. In the past, *[they]* have also helped people to recover stolen wages – that is when farmers refused to pay wages for work that has been done – by submitting a complaint to the court in Santa Barbara or through the Santa Barbara’s Labour Commission (interview, 11/06/12).

But Indigenous organisations have also innovated to fill in the gaps left by – or created by – current government policies. One of the best examples is the training and provision of interpreting services to assists Mixteco migrants in the US. Indeed, ‘*[the FIOB]* were the first to create a nation-wide network of Indigenous interpreters in the US back in 1996. The migrants were the pioneers …
Chapter 6: Perspectives on Political Misrepresentation

years before the Mexican government realised the importance of these services’ (interview with state official in Oaxaca, 12/11/12).

A final point is that while most participants in Santa Maria have received services from groups and organisations such as the FIOB and the CBDIO, few of them were actively involved as members. Plausible explanations for this lack of political engagement include the weight of existing commitments to the comitiva de pueblo (hometown association), heavy workloads and limited spare time for organising, as well as ‘a lack of broad political consciousness or belief in the broad transformative potential of those organisations’ (Beard and Sarmiento 2010, p. 219). In spite of this, the impact of this political engagement in the wellbeing of some participants was remarkable. As noted by Manuel:

I have learned about my own identity and values … My self-esteem has gone up because of this. When Mixteco is your first language, even if you speak Spanish, people look at you in a funny way and say things like ‘oh you are a Oaxaqueña’. And you feel humiliated. But with the organisation I have learnt that the issue is not whether I can speak Spanish or not, nor whether I am an ‘Oaxaqueña’ because of my height or because of my colour … we are all equal. For instance, many people from other states, from Michoacán or Jalisco, they now ask me for help on how to register a vehicle or how to get in contact with the Mexican consulate. And I think to myself, ‘not much of a Oaxaqueña, hey!’ I feel big, I feel empowered again (interview, 27/05/12).82

Just as in the case of participants’ engagement with the system of usos y costumbres (customary law) and the comitiva de pueblo (hometown association), the active engagement of even a few of them with this type of organisation provides an example of other epistemologies and practices of ‘citizenship’ and political representation that reach below and beyond the nation-state and that contribute to their wellbeing.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the political dimension of neoliberal processes of social transformation and its impact on the wellbeing and mobility of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria. Through a focus on issues of political misrepresentation, this chapter emphasised that the histories, experiences and agency of participants is best understood against a background of informal and formal exclusion of Indigenous people in Mexico and of ‘irregular’ migrants in the US. In this context, it is undeniable that the nation-state continues to play a central role in sustaining forms

82 Oaxaqueña (literally, little Oaxacan) and Oaxaco are pejorative epithets used by mestizo Mexicans to degrade Indigenous people from Oaxaca.
of political misrepresentation. This is not just a technical or theoretical debate as existing laws and institutions deny the likes of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria the opportunity to participate on par with others in social interaction, to use Fraser’s words. In practice, these existing forms of misrepresentation result, for instance, in temporal uncertainties that affect participants’ mobility and employment in Mexico and the US. Amid broader processes of neoliberal social transformation, this emphasises that although some individuals and groups ‘may be clearly linked to the global spatial and temporal orders at play, they may find themselves not in command, but rather “on duty”’ (Boersma 2016, p. 122) due to the little control they hold over critical issues that affect them.

Furthermore, this chapter investigated the reach and limits of the ‘national’ by exploring the links between different dimensions of social transformation and migration and how people navigate within and across them. As the discussion of the inadequacies of existing ‘national’ policies targeting Mexican migrants in the US demonstrated, misrepresentation affects the way issues are framed, problems are constructed, solutions are proposed, and policies are developed to the detriment of Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants. In this context, it is not only problematic that participants had little, if any, knowledge of, and engagement with, existing policies and programs targeting Mexican migrants, but also that there are no real alternatives in place on behalf of the Mexican government to include and support Indigenous ‘irregular’ migrants in an effective way. In this context, it is important to highlight alternative epistemologies and practices of ‘citizenship’ and political participation. Indeed, the nation-state is not the sole locus of political representation. In particular, this chapter emphasised the role of ‘state’ and ‘local’ level developments to demonstrate the various scales through which participants exercise forms of political representation in the current era. It is important that at a time when national governments in Mexico and the US continue to uphold the informal and formal exclusion of Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants, state governments in Oaxaca and California are implementing initiatives to include these populations. Crucially, participants are also able to secure a degree of political representation at the local level in Piñas and Santa Maria. In this context, the widespread and ongoing engagement of participants with the system of usos y costumbres (customary law) and comitivas de pueblo (hometown associations), and the more limited but active engagement of some with Indigenous-led migrant organisations, illustrates some of the ways in which Mixteco participants exercise a degree of influence over critical issues that affect them in Mexico and the US.
7 ‘A Good Life is When You Have all Your Family Together and they all Have Access to Work, Education and Health Care’ – Perspectives on Social Misrecognition

7.1 Introduction

This final analytical chapter engages with issues of social recognition in Piñas and Santa Maria. This complements the analyses in Chapters 5 and 6 to provide a more holistic understanding of the many challenges and opportunities faced by Mixtecos in Mexico and the US. The focus on social recognition questions institutionalised patterns of disrespect and disesteem that may hinder one’s ability to be healthy and educated, but also to have a family live or a stable job. This brings attention to concerns raised by participants such as Raúl, who emphasised his desire for what ‘should be a “normal life”. One in which you have enough to ensure that your children are educated and do not lack anything’ (interview, 30/05/12). This reflects the salience of inequalities embedded in social hierarchies which lead to the exclusion of certain individuals and groups from social life at the local, national and transnational level. As argued throughout this chapter, while these hierarchies can be based on factors such as ethnicity, migration status and gender, recent developments have also led to the subordination of individuals and groups based on the neoliberal ideological and institutional emphasis on hard-work, self-reliance and individual responsibility. In this context, an analysis of existing forms of social misrecognition provides crucial insights into the wellbeing and mobility of participants in Mexico and the US in the current era.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 7.2 provides a comprehensive definition of the meaning of social misrecognition as used in this chapter. As done previously, this involves a two-step process, which draws from existing academic literature and from the lived experiences of participants. Section 7.3 analyses in more detail the experiences of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria in light of this focus on social recognition. This particularly examines the impact of recent social policies to target the ‘poor’ in Mexico in transforming existing forms of inequality that affect Indigenous people in general, and Indigenous women in particular. Section 7.4 draws on previous discussions to highlight the importance of recognising the differentiated impact of processes of social transformation and migration across social relations such as gender and age. Finally, Section 7.5 presents a number of conclusions.

---

83 This quote is taken from the interview with Luis, which took place on the 27/11/12.
Chapter 7: Perspectives on Social Misrecognition

7.2 Social Recognition as a Dimension of Social Transformation

This chapter’s focus on social recognition is the final building block of an analysis that seeks to better capture the relationship between migration and social transformation as experienced by Mixteco participants in Mexico and the US in the neoliberal context. This chapter proposes that issues relating to the life, welfare, and social relations are the locus of social recognition. This draws from existing academic literature to highlight issues of analytical and practical concern. For instance, Sen (1999, p. 39) refers to ‘social opportunities’ as ‘the arrangements that society makes for education, health care and so on, which influence the individual’s substantive freedom to live better’.84 From here, one can induce that issues of concern include being healthy or being literate along with the relations and institutions that facilitate or obstruct this.

One can also draw from Fraser’s (Fraser 1998; 2005) discussions on misrecognition to elaborate further. According to Fraser (Fraser 2000, p. 113) misrecognition ‘does not represent the depreciation or deformation of group identity, but social subordination – in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life’. Against this background, she emphasises the role of social relations of gender, class, ethnicity or religion as the locus of this misrecognition (although arguably this could also include migration status). To quote Fraser (1998, pp. 25-26) further:

To be misrecognised, on this view, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down on, or devalued in others’ conscious attitudes or mental beliefs. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction and prevented from participating as a peer in social life as a consequence of institutionalised patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem. When such patterns of disrespect and disesteem are institutionalised, for example, in law, social welfare, medicine, public education, and/or the social practices and group mores that structure everyday interaction, they impede parity of participation, just as surely as do distributive inequities.

84 Along this line, scholars employing the capability approach highlight the role of health, education and social connections or affiliations as central to one’s wellbeing (Nussbaum 2003; Stiglitz et al. 2010). For instance, Nussbaum (2003, pp. 41-42) emphasises the importance of being able to ‘have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished [and] to have adequate shelter’. She also points out the importance of being able to ‘imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in … a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education’. She similarly draws attention to the importance of being able to ‘live with and toward others, to recognise and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction’ and the importance of ‘having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others’.
In this context, issues of concern can be expanded to include many of the harms of misrecognition that Fraser (1998) identifies: whether this is discrimination in employment, health care and housing; exclusion and marginalisation in public spheres; institutionalised forms of violence; or harassment and disparagement in everyday life. In this context, this focus on social recognition provides real insights into asymmetries and deprivations that are important components of social transformation processes, including migration.

This focus on social recognition reflects the interest of migration scholars in ‘social development’ or ‘social rights’ (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008; Piper 2008a; c). This involves comprehensive issues such as social cohesion, equality, wellbeing and security, which are capable of ‘bring[ing] to the fore an array of social and political themes which have received less attention during the recent euphoria on the economic development impact of migration in general and remittances in particular’ (Hujo and Piper 2010a, p. 2). Empirically, this focus on social recognition also echoes participants’ reflections on the importance of ‘hav[ing] your own house, proper transport and a good job, and to be with your family here in the community’ (interview with Montserrat, 16/11/12) or ‘hav[ing] work, a healthy life and your family’ (interview with Zara, 18/11/12). This emphasises under-explored issues such as the importance of family life or access to social services in places of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’. Practically, this focus on recognition also complements previous discussions on distribution and representation. As this chapter demonstrates, the social does not stand in opposition to the economic or the political, nor is it secondary or residual to them. To the contrary, social issues of concern are intrinsically interlinked to economic issues of distribution and political issues of representation.

To go back to the example of the ‘irregular’ female Mixteco migrant employed in industrial agriculture given in Chapter 5, one could point out that her wellbeing, for instance, is affected by a form of compounded misrecognition that limits her ability to access adequate health opportunities among other challenges. In Mexico, this is related to living in a rural area (which restricts her access to low quality health centres that are often understaffed and undersupplied); her status as an Indigenous person (which results in discriminatory or culturally inappropriate practices from service providers); or her employment outside of the ‘formal’ sector (which excludes her from entitlements to healthcare plans and other employee benefits) (Programa de...

---

85 Discussions also pointed out issues that have been debated in previous chapters. Among other things, participants emphasised the importance of being able ‘to live where I grew up … But working out of the field: without sun, without cold, without having to crouch’ (interview with Marian, 06/02/13) or of ‘all of my family hav[ing] their [migration] papers. So we could all go to Mexico, but we could also all live here together’ (interview with Enrique, 20/07/12).
Chapter 7: Perspectives on Social Misrecognition

las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo 2010). In the US, this is associated with the likelihood of being uninsured due to her migration status (which excludes her from many sources of public funding), her employment in a low-paying industry (which offers less, if any, health benefits to its employees) or her limited fluency in Spanish or English (which also hinders her ability to navigate the health system in the US) (Schenker et al. 2015). Along with this restricted access to health opportunities, one could point to her limited access to formal educational opportunities, her lack of access to decent housing conditions, her sacrifice of family life or her endurance of gender discrimination in public and private spheres as indicative of forms of social misrecognition. Importantly, this is rooted in deeper institutions and social practices that, by devaluing, dehumanising, or disrespecting Indigenous people, ‘irregular’ migrants and, in her case, women, lead to her unequal and incomplete inclusion in social life.

7.2.1 Social Recognition in Mexico and the US in the Neoliberal Era

Previous chapters have argued that the histories, experiences and agency of participants in Piñas and Santa Maria are embedded in broader relations and institutions that sustain forms of economic and political inequality. In this context too, participants are also confronted by different inequalities that lead to their social subornation. In the context of Mexico and the US, the likes of Rivera Salgado (2014, p. 32) have emphasised that ‘political elites and working-class people have long seen both [I]ndigenous peoples and migrants as less than full citizens and, in some cases, less than full human beings’. To give an example, the first national survey by the Consejo Nacional para Prevenir La Discriminación in Mexico (National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination or CONAPRED) revealed that at least one in three respondents believe that ‘Indigenous people will always have a social limitation because of their racial characteristics’ or that ‘the only thing Indigenous people have to do to get out of poverty is to not behave like Indigenous people’ (Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación 2005). Indeed, the association of Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants with negative characteristics (such as ‘primitive’, ‘dirty’ or ‘unproductive’ for the former, or ‘illegal’, ‘criminal’ or ‘dangerous’ for the latter) in everyday talk and political rhetoric is telling of the existence of ingrained inequalities that not only sustain forms of misrecognition, but also forms of maldistribution and misrepresentation as explained in Chapter 5 and 6.

A useful way of understanding current forms of social misrecognition is provided by Anderson’s (2010; 2015) conceptualisation of ‘Failed-Citizen’ and ‘Non-Citizen’. These concepts highlight the increasing ideological and institutional emphasis given by patterns of interpretation and
evaluation to the ideal of ‘hard-working, self-reliant individuals prepared to take responsibility for themselves’ in the neoliberal era (Anderson 2015, p. 48). This line of argument can be seen as complementary to that of Burawoy’s (2015) and Castles’ and Davidson’s (2000) in capturing important aspects of contemporary inequality. In this context, the ‘Failed-Citizen’ refers to individuals and groups (such as the welfare ‘dependent’, the ‘disabled’, the ‘criminal’ and arguably the Indigenous) who are perceived or portrayed as failing to live up to this neoliberal ideal; while the ‘Non-Citizen’ is excluded from this ideal in the first place. Interestingly, this conceptualisation points out the commonalities between these two groups:

In the United States, for example, a felony conviction by anyone in a household may be grounds for the household’s eviction from public housing, and in many states convicted drug felons lose the right to vote, to Medicaid, to food aid, public housing and to any form of government education grant for life … Effectively citizenship is reduced to a minimal right to be present. Put like this, and purged of its moral claims, the distinction between the Non- and the Failed Citizen begins to look more hazy (Anderson and Hughes 2015b, p. 4).

Aside from the importance of detailing these shared experiences to build solidarity and understanding among groups, emphasising the common ground between the ‘Failed’ and the ‘Non-Citizen’ is vital as it allows one to recognise the complex interrelation between national and international forms of social misrecognition, and the mobility and wellbeing of individuals and groups. For instance, it is the Indigenous, the welfare ‘dependent’, the ‘disabled’ or the ‘criminal’ who is most likely to have less access to favourable migration opportunities. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that managing ‘the global poor, in their guise as the “unskilled”, the low waged, the desperate’ (while attracting the ‘highly-skilled’) is increasingly seen as a sign of an effective immigration regime (Anderson 2015, p. 44).

Forms of social misrecognition are sustained by a variety of relations and institutions that deny some people an equal standing in social life based on factors such as their ethnicity or immigration statues (or their gender or their religion). An example of this can be found in the limited opportunities available to participants to access education. Indeed, it is telling that Mixtecos in Mexico and the US struggle to access quality education and that low levels of schooling – and illiteracy – are common. As mentioned in Chapter 4, illiteracy rates in la Mixteca are greater than the average at the state and national levels (Mindek 2003) while Indigenous migrants in the US have lower levels of schooling than other Mexican (non-Indigenous) migrants.
In this context, a variety of economic, social and political factors – from the lack of availability of schools, to the ongoing pressure to emigrate in search of paid employment, or the ubiquitous weight of racism and discrimination – all contribute negatively to their ability as Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants to attend school, to learn to read and write, and to gain important language skills.

In Mexico, this limited access to quality formal education is fundamentally linked to relations and institutions that have failed to include Indigenous people. As argued by Mines et al. (2010, p. 2):

One contributor to their disadvantaged status is the systematic discrimination of the colonial and Mexican governments and the *mestizo population in general ... As a group they have been intentionally deprived of employment and educational opportunities and public services commensurate with their share of the population.

Thus, while *de jure everybody has the right to free education in Mexico (from preschool to high school) and the state has a commitment enshrined in Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution to ensure the quality and suitability of educational materials and methods, educational infrastructure and teachers (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos 1917); the reality is that educational opportunities for Indigenous people in villages such as Piñas are hindered by ‘the high numbers of students per teacher, frequent teacher absenteeism, high costs of travelling long distances to schools, as well as linguistic barriers for monolingual students’ (Ulrichs and Roelen 2012, p. 12). This is further complicated by other factors like the significant hidden costs of public education in Mexico (such as the need to buy school uniforms and supplies as well as paying unofficial fees known as *cooperaciones*), which represent a heavy burden for Indigenous households with limited resources (Sawyer et al. 2009).

86 Low levels of schooling and illiteracy were also common among participants in Piñas and Santa María. No participant had gained a bachelor’s degree, while only four had finished high school. Notably, 12 female participants had no schooling at all, while another six had not completed primary school.

87 The education system in Mexico has oscillated between two strategies with regards to the country’s Indigenous population: the dominant strategy has historically emphasised the need for assimilation, while the second has supported the preservation of Indigenous languages and cultures. ‘According to the contemporary discourse, education for all Mexicans should be intercultural, but for the Indigenous people it should be bilingual-intercultural, including teaching the mother tongue in school’ (Tinajero & Englander 2011, 170). Education for Indigenous children is administered by the DGEI and consists of preschool and primary school (as it is the case in Piñas). Yet, and as noted by numerous critics, the quality of education for Indigenous people remains low while the goals of bilingualism and interculturalism remain unfulfilled (Hamel 2017; Schmelkes 2000).

88 These and similar issues were raised by participants, who protested that ‘there are limited opportunities to send children to study at high school outside [of Piñas] or to bring a high school to the community. [Sending children to study away] is [prohibitively] expensive, mostly because of the distance and the cost of travelling’ (interview with Bernarda, 17/11/12) or that ‘the school could be upgraded. For instance, we have no access to the Internet. And some of the teachers are bad, [in other places] teachers are stricter, and children learn to speak Spanish better’ (interview with Juan, 29/11/12). While some positive developments have taken place (for instance the community now has a middle school and girls are increasingly given more support by their own families and the state to continue with their studies), the reality is that even now ‘most people do not study past middle school’ (interview with Montserrat, 16/11/12).
The situation in the US is similarly complex. While the right to free education is also safeguarded in the US (no matter one’s migration status, as established in Plyler v. Doe), research has long shown that factors such as the economic status and ethnicity of migrants, and ‘the social context that receives them and shapes their adaptation’ can negatively influence the educational opportunities and achievement of Mexican migrants and their children in the US (Portes and MacLeod 1996, p. 271). Research with Indigenous migrants has also shown that factors such as migration status, age of arrival, quality of schools or English language proficiency all play an important role in determining the opportunities available to them (Sawyer et al. 2009). In this context it is important to note that adult migrants face a conundrum in which their limited formal education stands as a significant barrier to their everyday lives, but where real opportunities to overcome this are also limited. This issue that was often discussed by participants. As explained by Javier: ‘if we could speak English, we could have many more and better opportunities. And people may say, “well there is a college, and they offer free language classes”, but when you work from the moment the sun goes up to the moment the sun goes down you have no time or energy to study. This affects everything’ (focus group, 18/01/13).

This initial analysis of participants’ limited access to quality educational opportunities works as a lens through which one can situate forms of misrecognition vis-à-vis broader inequalities. In this context, it is important to emphasise that the issue at stake is not only that some are deprived of real opportunities to access quality education based on their ethnicity or their migration status (among other factors), but that this denial also helps to reproduce the lack of inclusion experienced by Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants in other aspects of their lives. For instance, one’s inability to read and write – or to speak Spanish or English – may hinder access to health services when interpreting services are unavailable and it may also make it more difficult to gain employment outside of the agricultural fields (López and Runsten 2004; Mines et al. 2010). 89 But formal education and language skills are also important, given the increasingly selective nature of migration regimes that differentiate between potential migrants on the basis of ‘human capital’. For those with less education and qualifications there are not only scarce ‘regular’ migration opportunities, but there are also few if any opportunities to become regular for those that are somewhere in the continuum of irregularity. For instance, in order for participants – or their children – to be eligible for deferred status under the Deferred Action for

89 This issue was emphasised by numerous participants. As explained by Marian, ‘I would like so much to study. To learn to read and write, to learn English. That way I could help my children [more] … Education is good, as one is able to choose a job. Also, without education one cannot go out, because you do not understand many things’ (interview, 06/02/13).
Childhood Arrivals (DACA), they are required to be ‘currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, [or] have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate’ (US Citizenship and Immigration Services 2016b). Taking this one step forward in terms of regularising their migration status, ‘applicants for naturalisation must demonstrate an understanding of the English language, including an ability to read, write, and speak words in ordinary usage’ (US Citizenship and Immigration Services 2016a). Indeed, for participants in Piñas and Santa Maria, lack of formal education and language skills stands as a primary barrier to their wellbeing in general and to their mobility in particular.

7.3 Mixteco Women, Social Policy and Markers of Inequality

While previous chapters have focused primarily on the histories, experiences and agency of participants as Indigenous people in Piñas and as ‘irregular’ migrant farmworkers in Santa Maria, this section engages further with the opportunities and challenges some of them faced as women in particular. This emphasis on gender is important, as previous research has shown that ‘most, if not all, aspects of migration affect men and women differently, thus establishing gender as a crucial factor in our understanding of the causes and consequences of international migration’ (Piper 2008a, p. 1287). As this section also emphasises, gender plays an important role in mediating broader processes of neoliberal social transformation as well. This is particularly relevant since a long history of internal migration, the prolonged process of economic restructuring and the associated agricultural crisis in la Mixteca, along with the growth of religious pluralism and the more recent ‘securitisation’ of the Mexico-US border, have not only led to the incorporation of more women into migration, but they have also altered gender roles in communities like Piñas and Santa Maria. In this context, much can be learnt from analysing forms of social misrecognition that affect Mixteco women in the contemporary era.

Focusing on the impact of social policy on the lives of women provides one window, of a myriad of possible windows, through which the histories, experiences and agency of female participants can be analysed. Social policy involves public interventions that have the potential to influence the wellbeing of participants due to their capacity to sustain or transform social relations and institutions that underpin current forms of inequality. This has the potential to impact ‘both positively and negatively in areas such as class, race, ethnicity and gender, as well as in regard to the access that different groups have to resources, recognition and participation’ (Hujo and Piper 2010a, p. 17). In this context, this focus on social policy also allows one to conceptualise the role of non-migration policies in influencing specific patterns of inclusion that are central to
contemporary processes of social transformation (including migration). Yet, in line with arguments in Chapters 5 and 6 that point out the significance of the expansion of the market economy for distribution and representation, this section echoes critiques that call attention to how new social policy models have come to ‘discipline’ those who do not conform to the neoliberal ideological and institutional emphasis on ‘hard-work’, ‘self-reliance’ and ‘individual responsibility’ described above. As argued throughout this chapter, this ideological and institutional emphasis individualises the responsibility for existing asymmetries and deprivations, while it reemphasises the nuclear family (in particular women as mothers) as those responsible for tackling such inequalities. In this context, rather than transforming social relations and institutions that underpin current forms of misrecognition, this new wave of social policy perpetuates the lack of inclusion of Indigenous women from social life in places like Santa Maria and Piñas.

7.3.1 Failed-Citizens and Non-Citizens in the US

The role of social policy in producing forms of inclusion, and hence exclusion, has been investigated by other migration scholars (Anderson and Hughes 2015a; Chang 2016[2000]; Hujo and Piper 2010b). Interestingly, their analysis emphasises the differentiating power of social policies within countries of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’, but also across them. While the influence of social policy on existing forms of social misrecognition in Mexico is analysed in detail below, it is important to note that countries of ‘destination’ with relatively liberal immigration policies (such as the US) often restrict immigrants’ access to social programs ‘as a means of deterring entry… or to produce a stratified labour force…’ (Hujo and Piper 2010a, p. 21). In the words of de Haan and Yaqub (2010, p. 212), ‘social policy vis-à-vis migrants is a double-edged sword’ inasmuch as it has the potential to protect and support them in practical ways, but also as it has the potential to exclude them due to their status as non-citizens. Indeed, this last was the case with participants in Santa Maria, as they were excluded from social programs (all non-emergency health and welfare programs) due to their status as non-citizens (Boyd and Pikkov 2008).

Importantly, current patterns of interpretation and evaluation that uphold a neoliberal ideological and institutional emphasis on ‘hard-work’, ‘self-reliance’ and ‘individual responsibility’ are sustaining the lack of inclusion of diverse groups in the current neoliberal era. For instance, Chang (2016[2000]) has long argued that commonalities exist between ‘citizen’ welfare or workfare workers (particularly African Americans) and non-citizen immigrant workers (particularly ‘irregular’ migrants) in the US. On par with their marginalisation from the formal
economy and their hyper-criminalisation, these are populations that have been aggressively targeted through welfare ‘deforms’ – to use Chang’s term – since the 1990s where the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) ‘served to reinstitute many of the worst measures aimed at regulating poor women of colour and immigrant women, as well as their labour and reproduction’ (Chang 2016[2000], p. 9). In this context, it is important to remember that many of the restrictive provisions of PRWORA were aimed directly at migrants (Boyd and Pikkov 2008). Against this background, the only social assistance programs that female participants in Santa Maria had access to were those targeting US-born children in low or very-low income households. Programs such as California’s Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids (CalWorks) or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides crucial support for many families with children, but its reach is limited due to its conditionality on migration status. Significantly, and as explained in detail in the following sections with regards to social policy programs in Mexico, CalWorks and WIC also follow an atomistic and materialistic logic that fails to transform many of the relations and institutions that underpin current forms of misrecognition in the first place.

In this context, it is important to point out the shared experiences of those who are increasingly ‘disciplined’ by social policy and those that are denied its benefits (Anderson 2013; 2015). While some employers and politicians have continued to pit one against each other by exploiting racial conflicts and social hierarchies, Chang (2016[2000], p. 149) reminds us that both groups have become increasingly disenfranchised and facing common challenges due to the punitive nature of social and migration policies:

The work performed by these groups and their labour conditions are strikingly similar: invisible, unsafe, unsanitary, hazardous, low-paid service work. Their labour is not seen as contract labour, or a service that they provide to society for which they should be compensated. Instead, their labour is constructed as either charity, opportunity, privilege, community service, repayment of a debt to society, or as punishment for a crime. In the case of welfare recipients, the ‘crimes’ are being poor, homeless, or ‘unemployed’. In the case of immigrants, they are criminalised for entering the country (presumed ‘illegally’, of course) and for consuming resources to which they allegedly have no rights. In both cases, employers invoke these

---

90 Under the mantra of ‘end[ing] welfare as we know it’, the PRWORA either eliminated or reduced funding for several welfare programs, while it also restricted eligibility and emphasised work requirements.
constructions of immigrant and workfare workers as undeserving criminals indebted to society in order to coerce these workers into exploitative work, justify this exploitation, and counter organising among these workers. In this context, Anderson and Hughes (2015b, p. 4) argument that the community of value is defined from outside by exclusion, and from inside by failure, but the excluded also fail, and the failed are also excluded’ highlights the way in which current patterns of interpretation and evaluation (that disrespect or devalues certain individuals and groups in a myriad ways) reinforces the lack of inclusion of ‘irregular’ migrant women (among other groups) in the US.

7.3.2 The Role of Oportunidades in Differentiating Mexico’s ‘Poor’

The role of social policy in producing forms of inclusion, and hence exclusion, is also present in Mexico. In particular, participants’ experiences of social policy in the current neoliberal era are framed through their engagement with Oportunidades, the country’s largest social program.91 Oportunidades is a conditional cash transfer program that provides scholarships for school-age children along with small amounts of cash for their families’ food and energy consumption. In terms of its design, the program has a focus on improving ‘human capital’ with ‘conditions’ or ‘co-responsibilities’ emphasising the importance of individual responsibility in investing in children’s education, health and nutrition to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty. This conditionality implies that ‘beneficiaries’ – adult women and their children – must continuously comply with a set of ‘co-responsibilities’ in order to receive their payments (and failure to comply leads in the termination of payments). In this context, while Oportunidades does not stress work requirements, its emphasis on conditionality through a system of reward and punishment shares similarities with other social policy models that seek to ‘discipline’ the ‘poor’.

In terms of its implementation, it is notable that Oportunidades was introduced in the 1990s to mitigate the high levels of poverty and inequality that resulted from structural adjustment reforms. Paradoxically, the program can be seen as forming part of the country’s ‘two-track approach to rural development’ in which Indigenous people and other rural populations are increasingly and solely targeted through social programs designed for the unproductive ‘poor’ rather than through providing agricultural support for small and medium-scale farmers (Fox and

---

91 This program was previously known as Progresa and was recently rebranded and expanded as Prospera. Given that primary research was conducted before the newest incarnation of the program, the arguments of this section reflect on the structure, rationale and impact of Oportunidades in 2012-2013.
This forms part of the growing differentiation between industrial and subsistence agriculture that was discussed in Chapter 4. As explained in more detail by Appendini (2014, p. 6), as these populations were re-categorised ‘as “inefficient” and “uncompetitive” and were excluded from government credits and subsidised inputs, technical assistance and market outlets … they became subject to social programs … which encouraged the development of petty commerce and provided food rations and stipends to poor households’. This was evident in Piñas too, where despite the significance of small-scale agriculture (see Chapter 5), no participant reported receiving any form of agricultural support from the government. Similarly, an exhaustive search of all government data-sources available online revealed the existence of only five ‘recipients’ of only one agricultural program – the Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo (Program for Direct Assistance in Agriculture or ProCampo) – in the entire village (Secretaría de Agricultura 2015).

Against this background, it is not surprising that Oportunidades has emerged as a dominant tool of social policy in rural Mexico (and as the country’s best-known public policy ‘export’). This is exemplified by the supremacy of Oportunidades in Piñas. While agricultural support is virtually non-existent, data from the Mexican government reveals 511 ‘beneficiaries’ of Oportunidades in the village (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social 2015). As mentioned sarcastically by this key informant: ‘in Piñas, there is only Oportunidades’ (interview with local teacher in Piñas, 16/12/12), and while ten participants reported receiving between US$44-207 per family in a bimonthly basis, many others complained openly about being excluded from the program. Yet, one cannot deny that Oportunidades brings short-term benefits to its recipients. As summed up by Yanes (2011, p. 51), ‘because of its continuity, coverage and the outlay of resources, it would be impossible for this not to be the case’. Indeed, participants greatly valued the contribution of Oportunidades in enabling some of them to send children to school and in supporting the families’ budgets. For instance, a young participant described that ‘I would not be able to go to school without it’.

92 In recent years, the federal government has started to roll out new programs such as Setenta y Más and the Seguro Popular that extend age pension and health insurance to sectors of the population who were not enrolled in traditional government or private insurance programs.

93 This program was recently rebranded as ProAgro Productivo.

94 Oportunidades is considered a pioneer in anti-poverty programs having been replicated in over 50 countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia (World Bank 2014). Its focus on human capital, and its emphasis on conditionality through a system of reward and punishment, has become increasingly universal in the development of social policy targeting the ‘poor’.

95 Not everybody who appears to be eligible for this program is in fact a ‘beneficiary’ of it. Participants complained that ‘Oportunidades supports very few people. In my family, only my grandmother gets support from the government. I do not get Oportunidades even though I have a child’ (interview with Romina, 16/11/12), while others protested that ‘there is no scholarships or support for the education of my granddaughters. No Oportunidades either. Nothing’ (interview with Luisa, 18/11/12). For more on errors of exclusion from the program among Indigenous people see Sariego Rodríguez (2008).
Chapter 7: Perspectives on Social Misrecognition

(interview with Martha, 27/11/12), while an older participant similarly reported that ‘it allows me to buy clothes, shoes [for my children] and their school bags’ (interview with Dora, 18/11/12). Importantly, for those without migrant relatives, Oportunidades is one of the few – if not the only – regular source of income in the face of the chronic lack of paid employment in the village.

7.3.3 The Limits of Oportunidades in Transforming Existing Inequalities

Against this background, it is important to interrogate the contribution of the Oportunidades program to enhancing the overall wellbeing of participants in the light of existing forms of misrecognition. This emphasises that the logic, design and implementation of the program fails to address the institutions and social practices that lead to the unequal and incomplete inclusion of Indigenous people (particularly women) in social life. This section examines the way in which the program reproduces institutionalised patterns of disrespect and disesteem against Indigenous people, while it neglects broader structural factors that encourage, create and sustain the lack of inclusion in the first place. In terms of women in particular, this also scrutinises the program’s reinforcement of gendered social relations of reproduction within the household and the gendered economic structure of society that devalues female work and denies them secure paid employment.

First, it is notable that the program does not address existing forms of social misrecognition that limit the overall wellbeing of Indigenous participants (such as entrenched discriminatory views of Indigenous people as ‘unproductive’ and ‘poor’ or bias against non-Spanish speaking Mexicans). This is significant because, as noted before, ‘institutionalised patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem’ can hinder wellbeing (Fraser 1998, p. 25). In particular, critics note that the program continues to follow a ‘colonialist logic’ that sees the ‘poor’ as ‘Indians who are ignorant and burdened with many children’, who need to be disciplined or controlled through the imposition of ‘co-responsibilities’ (Yanes 2011, p. 51). Indeed, the likes of Smith-Oka (2013, p. 3) have gone as far as calling Oportunidades ‘a social structural adjustment program’ that seeks to modify and rationalise the domestic sphere of Indigenous lives into the mestizo mainstream. Thus, rather than addressing some of the entrenched social issues faced by Indigenous people, Oportunidades appears to sustain them.

Beyond the lack of consultation with Indigenous people in the design of the program, there are gaps in its implementation that neglect the specific needs of Indigenous ‘beneficiaries’. For
instance, despite the large representation of Indigenous people in the program, there are no ‘special provision[s] to address the higher levels of Indigenous poverty and marginalisation’ (Ulrichs and Roelen 2012, p. 7). A simple example of this is the inability of the staff employed under the program to function beyond a monolingual and monocultural context (Sariego Rodríguez 2008). Participants in Piñas expressed frustration that ‘my payments stopped coming months ago; it may even be a year now … I have tried fixing it … they tell me not to worry, but they do not tell me when or how they are going to fix it! And you see, some of us speak Mixteco only, so there is no way of solving anything’ (interview with Bernarda, 17/11/12). But this also affects Indigenous women during health workshops and medical consultations, which are delivered by Spanish-speaking mestizo staff (Sariego Rodríguez 2008). This linguistic and cultural barrier was described in the following manner: ‘people that speak Spanish and English always disregard us; they pretend we are not here. We cannot understand each other. It is as if you were on the phone and someone was not on the other end of the line’ (Teresa in focus group, 11/01/13).96 In this context, it is important to recognise that the absence of appropriate linguistic and cultural competences once again hinders participants (particularly women, who have lower levels of education and less Spanish-speaking skills) the possibility of participating equally with others in social interaction.

Second, the program provides no remedies to broader barriers faced by affected Indigenous participants. Indeed, it is remarkable that against a background of growing inequality, unemployment and declining rural livelihoods, the program’s ‘theory of change … places the sole responsibility for moving out of poverty on individuals, making it dependent on their individual choices and behaviour’ (Ulrichs and Roelen 2012, p. 17). Implicitly, the logic of the program follows that if only ‘poor’ mothers could look after their children better, and ‘poor’ children could achieve higher educational, health and nutritional standards, the circle of poverty may end as the next generation of school-leavers could enjoy better employment opportunities. Critically, this emphasis on individual responsibility fails to address important structural factors that encourage, create and sustain the lack of inclusion of Indigenous people in the first place (Ulrichs and Roelen 2012).

To give an example, the logic that the inter-generational circle of poverty may end as the next generation of school-leavers enjoy better employment opportunities is flawed by the systemic lack of employment opportunities available to participants in Piñas (and rural Mexico in general).

96 This lack of language skills or cultural competence has also been highlighted as an obstacle to the effective delivery of services to Indigenous migrants in the US (Farquhar et al. 2008). This was also discussed in Chapter 6 with regards to the inadequacies of current policies targeting Mexican migrants in the US.
Similarly, the logic that children will achieve higher educational, health and nutritional standards if only individuals make the ‘right’ choices and adopt the ‘right’ behaviours is undermined by the persistent lack of basic quality services and infrastructure. In this context, the great concerns expressed by participants – that ‘the clinic is unattended during the weekends and sometimes the doctors go away during the weekdays without giving notice to anyone’ (interview with Regina, 16/11/12), that ‘education is much needed and the telesecundaria [distance education system] we have is not sufficient’ (interview withMontserrat, 16/11/12) or that ‘the power service and the roads need to be improved [because] during the rainy season we are sometimes left without electricity for months and there are landslides’ (interview with Fabiola, 22/11/12) – can be seen as a fundamental barrier to the success of programs such as Oportunidades and to the actual enhancement of participants’ overall wellbeing.

Third, it is notable that the burden of ‘co-responsibility’ that Oportunidades is premised upon falls primarily on Indigenous women as mothers, thus reinforcing gendered social relations of reproduction. Indeed, the program, its raison d’être and its modus operandi have been subject to much feminist appraisal already (Jenson 2009; Molyneux 2006; Smith-Oka 2013). These critiques emphasise a distinction between programs such as Oportunidades (which demonstrate an elementary degree of gender awareness), and those that aim to challenge existing gender roles and relations by paying attention to gender inequalities and promoting equality (Jenson 2009; Smith-Oka 2013).7 This highlights that the goals of Oportunidades inconsistently address gender inequalities as ‘they represent a combination of equality measures (for the girls) and maternalist measures (for their mothers)’ (Molyneux 2006, p. 436). In other words, while the program acknowledges the importance of improving ‘human capital’ among girls, explicit consideration of adult women is overwhelmingly focused on their role as mothers without regard to other political, economic or social concerns.

In particular, Oportunidades is based on ‘normatively ascribed maternal responsibilities, in effect making transfers conditional on good motherhood’ (Molyneux 2006, p. 438). As part of her ‘co-responsibilities’ a mother must ensure that her children attend school and their vaccinations are up to date; she must attend talks on health and nutrition at the local clinic, and she must take part in community labour programs (such as sweeping streets and cleaning schools). This is a significant challenge for Indigenous (and non-indigenous women) as ‘there is still this idea that

---

7 Gender awareness is arguably central to the management and design of Oportunidades. As summed up by Molyneux (2006), this was one of the earliest programs in Latin America to entrust the principal responsibility (and the financial transfers) to women as the heads of their households. The program also has a focus on women’s health and education (although the focus is on maternal health only and the education of girls not adult women).
women should not leave [the community] to study, [but that] they should stay and be housewives’ (interview with Montserrat, 16/11/12). Furthermore, there is little time to actually fulfil such conditions. It is illustrative that 12 out of 16 female participants in Piñas described their primary occupation as ‘housewife’ even when most of them also worked on the family fields and a couple worked in local retail. As Margarita exclaimed, ‘I clean the house. I grind the corn and make the tortillas. I do everything’ (interview 21/11/12). Interestingly, no male participant reported ‘housework’ as their primary occupation. This gendered division was partly explained by Javier when explaining that ‘I do not have anything against my fellow men, but there are some who are extremely machos … I believe in equality: both men and women have rights. But many times, men expect women to do much more – even if they work as much [as men do]!’ (focus group, 18/01/13). Crucially, by failing to incorporate men in any serious way, the program fails to problematise – but rather reinforces – the social relations of reproduction that emphasise the role of women as solely nurturing and caring for children and doing domestic work. Against this background, Oportunidades can be seen as leading to ‘a shrinking political space for women to make claims for full citizenship, especially a social citizenship founded on equality between adult women and men’ (Jenson 2009, p. 471).

Finally, Oportunidades does little to challenge the gendered economic structure of society. The rationale of the program fails to recognise the actual work of Indigenous women and their calls to be included into secure paid employment. To reiterate, while female participants reported their involvement with various economic activities (such as looking after children or elders on an everyday basis; raising animals and tending the family fields; serving their community as health promoters on a yearly basis; or running small convenience stores), the program demands the fulfilment of ‘co-responsibilities’ exclusively by women with little regard for the many other economic contributions (and time requirements) of women’s work. This contradiction became apparent while conducting participant and site observation in Piñas:

I went to clean and sweep the local school today … I worked with many of the women of the village … I was there as a favour to my friend … who sometimes works by selling health and beauty products. She had to travel out of town the same day that she was required to clean her daughter’s school as a condition of Oportunidades … She either travelled to Huajapan to collect her orders so she could deliver them and get paid, or she stayed in Piñas to clean to school so she could ‘qualify’ for her cash transfer (research diary, log 13, 2012).

Similarly, the program neglects Indigenous women’s calls to enhance their overall wellbeing by being granted access to secure paid employment. Participants in Piñas emphasised repeatedly
that ‘the main issue is the lack of jobs and opportunities’ (interview with Montserrat, 16/11/12). Research on Oportunidades has found that ‘when asked what type of government program they most want, the women consistently spoke first of jobs’ (Adato et al. 2000, p. xviii). As explained in more detail by Adato et al. (2000, p. 89), ‘while women like, appreciate and need the benefits of [Oportunidades], they ask for government programs that will give them skills that will help them engage in productive activities and earn income’. In Piñas, participants explained that ‘I would like women to be more independent … I would like it if there were jobs that women could do: like sewing and embroidering’ (interview with Martha, 27/11/12); while others argue for the need ‘to have jobs: secure jobs that allow us to earn enough to pay for our daily expenses. A factory or something, where both men and women could work’ (Carolina in focus group, 11/01/13). Importantly, this focus on providing secure paid employment represents the antithesis of current social policy towards Indigenous women in rural Mexico.

7.3.4 Social Misrecognition and Social Policy in Piñas and Santa Maria

This analysis of existing social policies reveals the way in which programs like Oportunidades sustain current forms of misrecognition. One could draw on Chang’s (2016[2000]) critique of social policy in the US to emphasise that programs such as Oportunidades regulate women’s labour and reproduction, while it marginalises them in other ways. Prima facie, it is notable that Oportunidades fails to alter many of the relations and institutions that sustain the lack of inclusion of participants as Indigenous people in general and as women in particular. Indeed, feminist critiques of the program that emphasise that ‘long ago we learned that women could be the object of public policy, and even a certain public generosity, without them being incorporated on equal terms into social and political citizenship’ (Jenson 2009, p. 472) resonate broadly with the experiences of female participants. At a deeper level, such programs represent a diluted form of inclusion for those deemed ‘unproductive’ or ‘poor’. It is crucial to emphasise that the imposed ideals of ‘hard-work’, ‘self-reliance’ and ‘individual responsibility’ neglects the existence of ingrained inequalities that reinforce the social subordination of various individuals and groups. In this context, the redefinition of Indigenous women as ‘beneficiaries’ (rather than citizens) with ‘co-responsibilities’ (rather than rights) raises fundamental questions about the diagnosis of, and proposed cure for, ‘poverty’ in the neoliberal era. Yet, while this could be seen as a move away from the ‘logic of a citizenry with demandable rights and a state forced to materialise them’ (Yanes 2011, p. 51), in the case of Indigenous women this also represents a continuation of historical relations and institutions have failed to include them.
Chapter 7: Perspectives on Social Misrecognition

7.4 Recognising Differences Across Social Relations

Processes of social transformation and migration are mediated by, and have differentiated impacts across, social relations. This section scrutinises the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco women young people and some of the challenges and opportunities faced by them in Piñas and Santa Maria in the context of existing forms of misrecognition. Foremost, women and youth should stand as social categories of interest in their own right, because both the effects of global, national and local changes – and the agency of individuals and groups in these contexts – are mediated by a myriad of cultural patterns and historical experiences (including society norms regarding gender and childhood) (Castles 2015). Indeed, few would dispute that women’s or children’s experiences of change, their incorporation into migration, and their agency in these contexts differs from that of adult males in significant ways (de Haan and Yaqub 2010; Piper 2008b; Velasco Ortiz and Paris Pombo 2014). But this focus on women and youth also serves to illustrate the existence of other inequalities and deprivations. Indeed, and as implicitly argued throughout this thesis, diverse forms of contemporary inequality are additive and intersectional. As argued by Piper (2008b, p. 1), the intersection of gender with other social relations (such as ethnicity, class, migration status and generational cleavages) forms ‘a complex map of stratification… with its own dynamics of exclusion/inclusion and power relations’.

7.4.1 Mixteco Women and Experiences of Migration

Much can be learnt from the experiences of Mixteco women vis-à-vis processes of neoliberal social transformation and migration. An important insight is that immigration and working environments affect the mobility of women in different ways. For instance, research carried out in the 199 emphasised the development of gendered patterns of migration among Mixteco migrants working in industrial agriculture (Zabin 1994), whereby Mixteco women and children were concentrated in lower-paying jobs in north-west Mexico, while Mixteco and mestizo men gained employment in higher-paying jobs in California. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this movement represents a departure from the migration patterns of previous generations of ‘Mexican’ migrants (where wives and female relatives stayed in rural communities of ‘origin’ while men migrated to work alone in the US). But this movement also highlights that ‘differences in labour market institutions and work environments within the same sector…

---

98 Recent years have seen the proliferation of research on the experiences of migrant women – albeit much of this has focused on the migration of women as domestic workers (see for instance Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Parreñas 2001a). Research has also focused on the experiences of women and children in transnational families (see for instance Dreby 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2005).
resulted in barriers to entry to US agricultural labour markets for Mixteco women’ (Zabin 1994, p. 187). It was not only harder for Mixteco women to cross the Mexico-US border (their mobility was restricted for instance by the risk of sexual violence in the crossing and by social norms that prescribed that they should travel with a male relative), but the lack of flexibility and the high risks of the Californian labour market were also less compatible with their dual role as wage workers and mothers. For instance, high levels of unemployment at the time meant that it was comparatively harder for Mixteco women in California to miss work if their children were sick, as employers were likely to replace them quickly and with ease. Similarly, comparatively strict enforcement of child-labour laws (and the unavailability of alternative child care options) meant that infants could not be brought along to the fields, and that older children could not work alongside their mothers, thus further restricting women’s ability to gain employment in California.

More recent research has also emphasised the differentiated impact of US immigration, labour and social security laws on women and youth (Stephen 2002a). For instance, while the Special Agricultural Workers (SAW) legalisation program – a provision of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 – was not intended to exclusively provide legal residency to adult men, this was the result because at that time the vast majority of agricultural workers were men (see Chapter 4 for more on this). The fact that many women and children then joined these men led to the growth of mixed-status households, whereby differences in migration status have strong implications for power relationships at home and in the workplace. Of the 25 participants in Santa Maria, only one male migrant was able to regularise his status as a result of IRCA. It was a similar among returned migrants in Piñas (only one male was able to regularise his status). Importantly, while one of these migrants was able to regularise the status of his wife and children in the late 1990s (after 7 years of living as ‘irregular’ migrants in the US), the other had only been able to regularise the status of his wife even though his children had lived permanently in the US since the late 1980s. As mentioned previously, many of these migrants are described as ‘trapped’ due to their inability to regularise their migration status. In line with this, more recent developments to ‘securitise’ the Mexico-US border and increase the deportability of ‘irregular’ migrants have impacted women differently. For instance, women in Piñas have been affected by the increasing periods of waiting associated with family separation (see Chapter 6). Importantly, this has a material connotation as women take on more responsibilities while their partners are away. But those in Santa Maria have also been affected as they, alongside the men, have become more immobile. While some male participants reported recent travels between Mexico and the
US, this was not the case for female participants. Some quoted the increasing costs and dangers associated with crossing the Mexican-US border, and others were fearful of becoming separated from their US-born children due to the high risk of not being able to return to Santa Maria.

But Mixteco women also face other challenges related to the gendered social relations within and outside their households. As explained by this state official in Oaxaca:

*The main challenge for women is not only education. Language is an issue — many of them are monolingual [and do not speak Spanish or English]. The other challenge is that while women in our communities already have a lot of work… work is multiplied for a migrant woman. They do not only have to do all those things that they were doing here, but they also go to work on the fields — or the restaurant or the hotel — with their husbands, and they have to learn to drive which is also a challenge… And they suffer discrimination, and they may suffer [sexual] harassment by the fields’ supervisors…*(interview, 12/11/12).

These challenges thus include the serious time constraints confronted by those who run their households and work the fields on their own after their partners, fathers or sons emigrate or by those that have to balance the demands of farm work and domestic work in the US (see Figure 22) (D'Aubeterre 2007; Stephen 2002a). Women's greater time constraints combined with their limited ability to speak Spanish or English, to be able to read and write, to use a computer or to be able to drive leads to greater isolation (Velasco Ortiz and París Pombo 2014). For instance, it was common to hear complaints about the relative immobility of women and their dependence on male relatives or *raiteros* (paid-rides) for transport in Piñas and in Santa María.99 Interestingly, although less common, there were also cases of female participants in Santa María who had taught themselves to drive in order to overcome this conundrum. Among others, Rosa explained that 'one of the best things about migrating has been to be able to buy my car and learn to drive. I learned here… I thought myself how to do it. I am independent now and I decide when and where to go’ (interview, 13/06/12). Yet, the example of Rosa also illustrates the manner in which female participants face inequalities that are additive and intersectional. Soon after her interview, Rosa’s car was impounded after she was stopped by police and was found to be driving without a license (which at the time was unavailable to ‘irregular’ migrants in California).

99 Among others, Margarita complained that ‘when my dad left for the US, my grandma was sick and we struggled a lot because no one could drive her to the hospital’ (interview, 21/11/12).
In the absence of a migrant relative (who is usually the father of the family), the responsibility of working the land and maintaining production falls upon mothers and their children… For women there are more responsibilities when their husbands migrate – they have to take care of the house, of the children and the lands by themselves (male photographer in Piñas, 2012).

Finally, Indigenous women are also more vulnerable to specific forms of racial discrimination and gender violence than their male counterparts. These are difficult issues to discuss, as female participant rarely spoke about them openly. Male participants argued that women are more vulnerable to discrimination as they are more ‘visible’: ‘there is discrimination [against Indigenous people] everywhere… but some of it targets women. People look at them down if they walk down the street carrying a child on their backs or if they wear long skirts’ (Javier in focus group, 18/01/13). Furthermore, a key informant spoke of domestic violence against Indigenous women as ‘a huge issue that is ingrained but not talked about by the people… although attitudes towards it have changed with the younger generations’ (attorney in California, 08/07/12). This key informant also spoke of the presence of sexual
Chapter 7: Perspectives on Social Misrecognition

harassment at work from field-supervisors, ‘in other words sex for work… as [another] big issue that goes totally under-reported. I estimated that only 1 in 10 victims comes forward about it due to a “culture of shame” and “victim blaming” that is associated with sexual violence’ (attorney in California, 08/07/12). Against this background, it is important to emphasise the relations and institutions that sustain these forms of discrimination and violence. For instance, one must stress that the vulnerability of Mixteco women to sexual violence and harassment is rooted in a combination of social, economic and political factors which results in a ‘severe imbalance of power between employers and supervisors and their low-wage, immigrant workers’ (Human Rights Watch 2012). Among others, women’s limited fluency in Spanish and English and their fear of reprisals – of more abusive treatment, of dismissal from work or the threat of deportation – hinders their ability to report and fight abuse.

7.4.2 Mixteco Youth and Experiences of Migration.

Indigenous youth also face diverse opportunities and challenges in Piñas and Santa Maria. It is important to note that studies on Indigenous migration have so far ‘…rarely consider youth as a social category of interest’ (Velasco Ortiz and París Pombo 2014, p. 12). This seems to be the case in other geographical contexts too, where childhood and youth have been overlooked by interest in gender as an intra-household cleavage (de Haan and Yaqub 2010, pp. 203-204). Yet, the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco children and youth are important for numerous reasons. As argued by de Haan & Yaqub (2010, p. 204):

Children [and youth] can differ from adults in some ways that may alter how they are incorporated into migration: physiology, psychology, life experiences, knowledge, legal protections and restrictions, and society’s norms regarding childhood. These can mean that, as migrants, children have particular vulnerabilities; limited opportunities for documented migration; age-specific responses to incentives and risks; limited independent access to shelter or basic services or livelihoods; and in parallel to gender constructions, are subject to varied legal and social norms, restrictions and expectations as ‘children’ [and as ‘youth’].

The histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco children and youth in relation to broader processes of social transformation and migration can be captured in three groups. First, there are numerous children in Piñas that have experienced migration first handed or through the
emigration of their parents and older siblings. Some of them remain in Piñas with their mothers, but others grow up with the grandparents. Thus this entails different experiences of family separation (Sawyer et al. 2009). One local teacher in Piñas described the different patterns of family separation in terms of the experiences of the young people left behind:

\[\text{I think that there is nothing wrong with emigrating, people need to earn money. But they should not forget about their families. There is one lady, and her children were young. And her husband emigrated and abandoned them. Now her daughters are grown up ladies, but their father never returned... There are also children who have never met their fathers. They left when the child was one or two, and the child does not remember. They do not know their father. And there are also children that stay behind with their grandparents. And some of these grandparents become the actual parents of the children... (interview, 16/12/12).}\]

Interestingly, there was a lot of debate on the economic benefits of this separation among the participants. Some young participants, who were the children of male migrants, described this as a form of compromise that had been beneficial to them and their families. As told by Martha: \[\text{[My father] does not like going to the US, but he has to go to support the family... But we have come a long way... I am the first woman in my family to study high school... [but] we still lack many other things and we do not have enough to ensure that my younger siblings can continue with their studies... (interview 27/11/12).}\]

Others however, particularly older participants who had become the sole carers for their grandchildren after their own children emigrated, were more sceptical of the benefits of this separation. As explained by Gerardo for instance, \[\text{[my daughter used to send me money... But I do not get anything anymore. She has not sent anything for over a year... One of my granddaughters is here [with me]. Her mother does not even call her] (interview 01/12/12).}\]

In this context, it is difficult to draw generalisations about those children that are left behind, although one still can problematize the fact that many of those involved have had to sacrifice their family life in order to access a certain level of material wellbeing.

Second, there are another group of children and youth who are growing up in Santa Maria and who are often raised away from their extended family with few practical ties to Piñas. In this context, ‘integration or adaptation to new ways of life and citizenship is [a] source of concern’ (Velasco Ortiz and París Pombo 2014, p. 12). Participants in Santa Maria raised two interrelated concerns: one relates to the educational opportunities and barriers faced by Mixteco youth, and

---

100 Research with Indigenous farmworkers in California has found a pattern among binational families in which children between the ages 0-5 tended to reside in the US, while children aged 6-14 resided in Mexico. As explained by Mines et al. (2010, p. 27), ‘[t]his implies that some people are leaving older children in Mexico with grandparents or relatives, and continuing to have children after coming to California. A small number also send their US-born children to Mexico to be cared for by relatives’. 

---

182
the other relates to some of the social problems present in Santa Maria. In terms of education, it is crucial to reconcile the aspirations and evaluations of participants such as Mateo who emphasised that ‘the greatest benefit of migrating is that my children learned English and that some of them were able to study high school’ (interview, 19/06/12) against the bleak outlook provided by key informants who argued that ‘education does not really change the lives of Mixteco children. For them graduating from high school is a big achievement, attending college is a dream’ (interview with district official in Santa Maria, 12/07/12). In particular, it is important to emphasise that while some Indigenous youth in California are achieving higher levels of schooling compared to their counterparts in communities in Oaxaca (Sawyer et al. 2009), others are falling through the cracks as they remain socially and instructionally marginalized in schools (Barillas-Chon 2010). In this context, it is useful to question the relations and institutions that hinder the ability of Mixteco youth to success academically. Among others, this key informant identified parents’ low levels of education (‘the “average” parent has three years of schooling, Mixteco parents have zero’); their low-socioeconomic status (‘many of them are too poor to continue studying’), and limited institutional funding (‘there are no programs for [migrant] children who are settled in Santa Maria. There used to be some, but many programs closed due to budget shortages’) as fundamental obstacles for Mixteco children in Santa Maria (interview with district official in Santa Maria, 12/07/12).

In terms of social problems present in Santa Maria, the main concern for participants was the presence of cholos (street gangs) (see Figure 23). As explained by Jesús: ‘(t)he sad part of being there [in the US] is that many young people go down the wrong path. Some get involved with the cholos or with drugs’ (interview, 05/12/12). Concerns regarding the presence of cholos (street gangs) extend to the potential of recruitment of Mixteco youth after school as ‘there are 8 active gangs in Santa Maria, 1 of which targets Mixteco youth in particular’ (interview with district official in Santa Maria, 12/07/12). But concerns about cholos (street gangs) extend to the general dangers of gang culture in the streets. Andrés provided a poignant example of this: ‘my wife lost one of her nephews in… November 2011. He was hanging out outside [in the street] when he was shot. He used to dress like a cholo, but he was responsible boy. He was 15 years old [when he died]’ (interview, 01/02/13). In this context, it is important to point out the need to further investigate the relationship between Mixteco children and youth and cholos (street gangs) in rural places like Santa Maria along the way in which Smith (2006) explored the emergence of gangs among migrants from la Mixteca in New York.
My boy stays at school until 5 pm… We do not like him wandering alone on the street, we prefer him to be supervised for longer in school if necessary. The problem is that there are bad influences on the streets – drugs and gangs – and boys can easily fall in with bad company if they are alone (male photographer in Santa Maria, 2013).

The final group of children and youth to be discussed involves those that migrate as labour migrants themselves. There were numerous participants that had emigrated from Piñas as children to work on the agricultural fields of northern Mexico and the US. These were cases where the entire immediate family migrated, and where young children were often taken out of school in order to complete this journey. In this context, one can emphasise that the experiences of many young people involved in emigration stand against ‘a strong theorisation of childhood as a “safe life stage” … [which] is supposed to properly consist of school and play, not work…’ (de Haan and Yaqub 2010, p. 206). Indeed, it was common to find that many women and men in their 30s and their 40s had little or no education at all as a result of this. Some of these participants had literally grown up in and around the agricultural fields:

---

101 Part of this group included those that had been expelled from Piñas due to religious conflicts, where families were forced to relocate to Santiago Juxtlahuaca (Oaxaca), San Quintín (Baja California) and Santa María or San Diego (California) (see Chapter 4 for more on this).
I started working in the fields in the north of Mexico when I was 10 years old... We came to the US for the first time when I was 13 years old [after working the fields in the north of Mexico]. No one would hire me that time because I was too young, but I still worked [without a formal wage]...

We came back [to Santa Maria] again in 1995. I was 15 at the time, so I was given work for the entire season – from February to September (interview with Marian, 06/02/13)

Tellingly, this participant later reflected on how this had impacted her later life: ‘I have not been able to learn much. Work and more work only. Only work, no time to study... I would like so much to study though. To learn to read and write, to learn English. That way I could help my children [more]’ (interview with Marian, 06/02/13). While the emigration of young boys and girls to work on agricultural fields in northern Mexico and the US is no longer common from Piñas, many other Mixteco children from Oaxaca (and nearby Guerrero) continue to travel to work around the agricultural fields of Mexico under abysmal conditions and with little if any access to educational opportunities (Tlachinollan 2005; 2011).

Nonetheless, recent generations of youth from Piñas continue to migrate for work. This is particularly the case for high-school age boys for whom migration represents one, if not the ‘only route to individual and family success’ (Paris Pombo 2010, p. 155). Paris Pombo (2010, p. 150) in her analysis of Mixteco and Triqui youth in Oaxaca describes migrating north as ‘... a threshold that sooner or later they will have to cross [while for many] attending middle or secondary school is not really a stage in their training, but merely a moment in time between the community and the migratory adventure’. In this context, it is not surprising to find that many young people in villages like Piñas see emigration as a more reliable or desirable option to access better opportunities. As shown in Figure 24, many local students associated ‘migration’ with ganar (to gain or win), obtener (to obtain or procure) y conocer (to know or learn). In line with this, there were two reports among participants about young sons (aged 18 or younger) who had recently left Piñas to join their fathers or older siblings in the US. One of these was Carmen’s son, ‘... be wanted to continue studying but he could not do it because we did not have the money... He is on his way to Washington now to join his father and his brothers. We’ll see if he can get there’ (interview, 17/11/12). In this context, it is important to emphasise the ongoing significance of emigration for young people in villages like Piñas as locals continue to be faced with significant formal and informal barriers when accessing educational opportunities (Dreby and Stutz 2012; Sawyer et al. 2009), and as returns on education remain low due to the lack of access to nearby labour markets and the persistence of discrimination against Mixtecos by mestizos and urban Oaxacans (Cohen et al. 2009).
An activity was conducted [in the local middle school]. Students were asked to sum up in one word what ‘migration’ meant for them. Institutions and teachers are constantly working to raise awareness among students about the impact of migration not only in the community but throughout the country (male photographer in Piñas, 2012).

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter engaged with the social dimension of processes social transformation and migration through an emphasis on forms of misrecognition that affect participants due to their ethnicity, migration status, gender and age. This is the final piece of a broader analysis that emphasises the inter-relation between forms of economic maldistribution, political misrepresentation and social misrecognition. This chapter’s focus on forms of social misrecognition brings attention to the importance of relationships and institutions that create ‘classes of devalued persons’ (Fraser 1998, p. 26). Whether this is related to entrenched discriminatory views of Indigenous people as unproductive and poor or of ‘irregular’ migrants as criminal or dangerous, the outcomes of these institutionalised patterns of disrespect and disesteem are inequalities that negatively affect peoples’ wellbeing by denying them an equal and full standing in social life.

This chapter emphasised the role of state policies – particularly social policies such as Oportunidades in the case of Mexico – in perpetuating the lack of inclusion of certain individuals and groups. Social policies like Oportunidades – which seek to ‘discipline’ certain populations through a system of reward and punishment – are central to the daily lives of countless people.
not only in so-called countries of ‘origin’ like Mexico, but also in countries of “destination” like the US where welfare reform (in conjunction with a legacy of economic deregulation and political disenfranchisement) has rendered certain people of colour, working class women and immigrants increasingly vulnerable and excluded. This analysis draw attention to the increasing emphasis given by patterns of interpretation and evaluation to the neoliberal ideal of ‘hard-work’, ‘self-reliance’ and ‘individual responsibility’ which obscures and sustains the existence of ingrained inequalities. In the case of female participants in Piñas, this atomistic and materialistic emphasis neglects the existence of institutionalised discrimination against Indigenous people and the challenging economic reality of growing inequality, unemployment and declining rural livelihoods. But this neoliberal ideal also reinforces gendered social relations of reproduction within households due to its conditionality on normative notions of good motherhood, while it stops short of challenging the gendered economic structure of society by failing to recognise the actual work of Indigenous women and their calls to be included into secure paid-employment.

Finally, this chapter emphasised the way in which processes of social transformation and migration are mediated by, and have differentiated impacts across, social relations. One can draw from an analysis of the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco women and youth to emphasise that existing forms of maldistribution, misrepresentation and misrecognition affect them in significant ways due to their gender and age. For instance, and as argued by Preibisch and Encalada Grez (2013, p. 799), migrant women employed in agricultural industries ‘remain subject to punitive labour-immigration regimes within the global North, to repressive gender systems embedded in both arenas of their transnational lives, and to the structural realities of the contemporary global political economy’. In this context, their lives are situated in a complex intersection of stratification, where social relations of gender, but also of ethnicity, class or migration status lead to specific patterns of inclusion or exclusion. But the same could be said about Mixteco children and youth. In particular, the experiences of children that are left behind in Piñas, those that are born and growing up in Santa Maria, and those that migrate for work at a young age, illustrate the existence of various inequalities – such as informal and formal barriers to education, their sacrifice of family life or the lack of stable job opportunities – that hinder their ability to participate fully and equally in social life in Mexico and the US.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

This thesis investigated the relationship between migration and social transformation in the context of increasingly universal relationships of power and inequality in the neoliberal era. It drew from the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco participants in Piñas (Oaxaca) and Santa Maria (California) to demonstrate that important insights can be gained by situating migration in a more general understanding of change that engages with issues of economic distribution, political representation and social recognition. This thesis thus drew attention to how specific economic, political and social relations and institutions support and hinder the mobility and wellbeing of Mixteco participants as Indigenous people in Mexico and as ‘irregular’ migrants in the US. In doing so, this analysis highlighted the socially differentiated and spatially patterned processes of neoliberal social transformation in which current migration flows are embedded. Similarly, it emphasised the complex ways in which economic, political and social asymmetries and deprivations complement and interact with each other both within and across borders.

Fundamentally, this thesis agreed with Castles’ (2010; 2015) argument that migration cannot be separated from economic, political and social changes taking place at the local, national and transnational levels in the neoliberal era. It drew from Polanyi’s (2001 [1944]) work to conceptualise the way in which the current expansion of the market economy (and associated processes of commodification) have brought profound changes in Mexico and the US in which contemporary forms of Indigenous migration are embedded. But this thesis went a step further by making use of a broad capabilities-based approach (Fraser 1998; 2005; Sen 1999) to gain a more nuanced understanding of key deprivations and asymmetries affecting the mobility and wellbeing of Mixteco participants as Indigenous people in Mexico and ‘irregular’ migrants in the US. Empirically, a mixed-methods, multi-scalar, approach was used to gain insights into these complex issues, with primary research conducted in Mexico and the US in 2012-2013. This involved a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant and site observation, and participatory photography in the local areas of Piñas and Santa Maria; semi-structured interviews with key informants across Oaxaca and California; and analysis using academic and non-academic secondary research material. While the main findings were explained in detail at the end of the empirical chapters, namely chapters four to seven, this chapter discusses the significance of these findings in relation to one another and their broader implications. It also considers the limitation of the thesis and proposes areas for future research.
8.1 The Differentiated Impact of Economic, Political and Social Changes

This study demonstrated that important economic, political and social changes have taken place over the last few decades in Mexico and the US, and how they have been experienced by Mixtecos at the local level. In this context, there has been a transition from internal to international, and temporary to permanent, migration. Significantly, these changes have had a differentiated impact across multiple geographical and social scales that reveal important inequalities shaping the nature of current flows. In economic terms, the growth of industrial agriculture in California and the north-west of Mexico is significant as it has occurred in conjunction with the erosion of small scale agriculture and associated local economies (see Chapter 4). One must acknowledge the role of existing economic, labour and social policies in creating this disparity. For instance, the growth of high-value exportable commercial crops in California and the north-west of Mexico has been driven by large amounts of private and public funding, the use of new agricultural technologies (mechanisation, irrigation, fertilisers, hybrid seeds, etc.) and associated managerial skills that have not been made available to small producers in the south of Mexico (Fox and Haight 2010). Parallel to this, a key aspect of social transformation processes in rural Mexico has been the re-categorisation of many small producers as ‘unproductive’ or ‘poor’ (thus reducing them to being targets for welfare instead of agricultural support) (see Chapter 7). In this context, many of those who depended on small-scale agriculture in places like Oaxaca have concurrently become the source of cheap and flexible labour for the production of labour-intensive crops in the north-west of Mexico and California. This is illustrative of the socially differentiated and spatially patterned nature of processes of neoliberal social transformation.

Similarly, in political terms, while the economies of both countries have become increasingly interconnected, the mobility of many – particularly of the ‘low-skilled’ and ‘poor’ – has become progressively restricted. As noted by Carling (2002, p. 5) over a decade ago, ‘one of the most striking aspects of today’s migration order … is the degree of conflict over mobility and the frustration about immobility among people in many traditional countries of emigration’. Immobility has gained a complex meaning in the context of this case study as Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants grapple with increasing temporal uncertainties. Not only are people in communities like Piñas becoming more immobile due the increasing costs and dangers of crossing the Mexico-US border, but many deportees along the border and many established migrants in Santa Maria are also being affected by policies and programs aimed at increasing the deportability of ‘irregular’ migrants. Significantly, as argued in Chapter 6, the vulnerabilities
associated with this immobility are further compounded by political concerns over the uncertainty of waiting and rushing which define the employment of Indigenous ‘irregular’ migrants in the agricultural fields of California. In this way, current laws and policies that seek to restrict the mobility and increase the ‘deportability’ of ‘low-skilled’ or ‘poor’ migrants also function to regulate the labour of many of these migrants.

Finally, in social terms, there is an increasing salience of an ideological and institutional emphasis on ‘hard-work’, ‘self-reliance’ and ‘individual responsibility’ that is redefining the community of value in the neoliberal era. This ideological focus individualises the responsibility for existing asymmetries and deprivations. This increasing salience is associated with the weakening of traditional systems of customary law and catholic religiosity that accompanied the expansion of the market economy in villages like Piñas and the growth of Pentecostalism in traditionally catholic rural Mexico (see Chapter 4). More recently, this emphasis has been institutionalised through social programs that seek to ‘discipline’ the ‘poor’ (see Chapter 7). Indigenous people are affected in Mexico through programs such as Oportunidades, with its stress on individual responsibility and conditionality, while ‘irregular’ migrants in the US are also affected as many recent restrictive provisions of social programs directly aim to deny them access to services and entitlements. Significantly, and as explored in Chapter 7, this ideology re-emphasises the nuclear family (in particular women as mothers) as those responsible for tackling current asymmetries and deprivations. Accordingly, a key component of dominant social policy programs is the way in which they regulate Indigenous women’s reproduction and labour, while failing to address ingrained inequalities that reinforce their lack of inclusion in social life. In this context, the creation of new social hierarchies is reinforcing existing, and creating new, forms of social subordination.

8.2 The Analytical Salience of Distribution, Representation and Recognition

Amid this complex reality, this thesis finds that a focus on economic distribution, political representation and social recognition captures many of the actual challenges and opportunities faced by Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants in the context of the expansion of the market economy and persistent inequalities within and across borders. This captures some of the relations and institutions that influences positively, or negatively, their wellbeing and mobility. Empirically, this thesis demonstrated that Mixteco participants are affected by forms of maldistribution which are rooted in the devaluation of Indigenous land and labour in Oaxaca (regardless of the ongoing contributions of small-scale agriculture and local governance systems
of authority and reciprocity), in parallel with the commodification of ‘irregular’ migrants as a source of cheap and flexible labour in the industrial agricultural fields of California and north-west Mexico. As argued in Chapter 5, this leads to material inequalities, exploitation and economic dependence in places like Piñas and Santa Maria. Similarly, forms of misrepresentation are reflected in the lack of political inclusion of Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants in the nation-state. Whether through informal or formal barriers (such as the legislation of weakened versions of Indigenous autonomy or the failure to implement avenues for regularisation), this hinders their ability to partake effectively in public processes of contestation and decision-making with significant impacts on many aspects of their everyday lives, such as their employment and their mobility. Finally, forms of misrecognition exclude Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants from social life through patterns of disrespect and disesteem that respectively degrade them as poor or unproductive, or as ‘illegal’ and ‘criminal’. As argued in Chapter 7, this is institutionalised through various means (such as social and migration policies) that lead to their social subordination. Importantly, these patterns of disrespect and disesteem are being reconfigured in the neoliberal era, such that the community of value, which delineates who is included fully and equally in social life from those who are not, is increasingly defined by ‘failure’ from inside and by ‘exclusion’ from outside, to use Anderson and Hughes’ (2015b) terms.

This analysis of the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco participants thus accentuated the existence of deprivations and asymmetries related to the expansion of the market economy (such as the increasing commodification of labour), but also those related to pre-existing hierarchies, exclusions, and forms of domination (such as the historical legacy of discrimination against Indigenous people) that remain central to current processes of social transformation. In this context, it is important to highlight that contemporary forms of maldistribution, misrepresentation and misrecognition such as those analysed in this thesis cannot be understood in isolation from each other. Crucially, and as pointed out by Fraser (2005, p. 79), ‘the three dimensions stand in relations of mutual entwinement and reciprocal influence’. From this perspective, the wellbeing and mobility of Mixtecos will continue to be restricted unless the economic structure, the procedural and boundary-setting aspects of the political, and the social hierarchies in Mexico and the US, are transformed.

Conceptually, this thesis also illustrated the analytical salience of this broad capabilities-based approach for the advancement of a more comprehensive, human-centred and inclusive research agenda. This can arguably better inform theoretical and analytical approaches to the study of
international migration in the neoliberal era. First, this focus on economic distribution, political representation and social recognition allows one to incorporate often-neglected or seemingly disparate issues into a more comprehensive analysis of societal change and migration in a specific spatial and temporal context. As argued throughout, this shifts attention away from the economic benefits of migration in places of ‘origin’, towards the economic, political and social relations and institutions that influence – for better or for worse – the fabric of societies of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’ and the mobility and immobility of people between them. Second, this focus on distribution, representation and recognition supports the development of human-centred research. This focus of analysis is broad and cohesive enough to allow for the reflective incorporation of the actual histories, experiences and agency of those that are being affected by neoliberal processes of social transformation (including contemporary forms of migration). In particular, specific concerns over maldistribution, misrepresentation and misrecognition – which have the potential to capture important deprivations and asymmetries and their effect on mobility and wellbeing in other contexts – can be articulated by following an initial two-step process that draws from academic debates specific to other contexts in addition to the lived experiences of individuals or groups in question. Third, this broad capabilities-based approach can guide more inclusive research precisely because of its focus on existing inequalities and deprivations. Forms of maldistribution, misrepresentation and misrecognition do not affect all people equally (indeed, the wellbeing and mobility of the lucky few may not be undermined, and may in fact be bolstered, by them). Yet, in most cases, people will experience economic, political and social inequalities and deprivations to different degrees and in different combinations. In this context, this broad capabilities-based approach is particularly useful in capturing important concerns regarding the wellbeing and mobility of those individuals and groups who are not fully included in both countries of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’, namely those at the lower end of the national and international hierarchy of rights and freedoms (Castles 2005).

8.3 The Additive and Intersectional Nature of Inequalities Within and Across Borders

A key insight to emerge from the findings of this thesis was the complex relationship between economic, political and social inequalities that combine and reinforce each other within and across borders. This draws attention to some of the continuities and breaks that exist between patterns of stratification. This is significant for a number of reasons. First, while this analysis focused on the presence of economic, political and social asymmetries and deprivations linked to participants’ status as Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants, one must acknowledge that people face vulnerabilities that echo the intersection not only of their ethnicity and migration
status, but also of their gender, class, religion, sexuality and so forth. Indeed, one can gain a better understanding of contemporary forms of inequality by taking into account the ways in which these reflect the combined and overlapping effects of racial discrimination, xenophobia, misogyny, class oppression, zealotry, homophobia and more. For instance, while the intersectionality of ethnicity and migration status was a key focus of thesis, Chapter 7 looked in detail at the ways in which these combined with gendered social relations of reproduction and the gendered economic structure of society. Among other insights, this revealed that while Mixteco women have migrated and worked outside of the domestic sphere, their mobility has been restricted in several ways; by social norms that prescribed that they should travel with a male relative, by the real risk of suffering sexual violence during the crossing, or by the gender selectivity of previous migration policies. Similarly, their employment has been restricted by gender norms that ascribe maternal and domestic responsibilities exclusively to women, by the real risk of sexual harassment and ill treatment in the fields, or by the gendered structure of labour markets that creates a clash between their dual role as wageworkers and mothers. As this example demonstrates, one can gain a fuller understanding of the wellbeing and mobility of participants, and other individuals and groups, by investigating the weight of these intersections and their interaction with broader processes of neoliberal social transformation.

Second, this emphasis on existing forms of maldistribution, misrepresentation and misrecognition that echo the intersection of vulnerabilities associated with ethnicity, migration status and so forth, indicates that both societies of ‘origin’ (Mexico) and ‘destination’ (the US) are stratified by these and other factors. As demonstrated with regards to the histories, experiences and agency of Mixteco participants, this results in complex ‘dynamics of exclusion/inclusion and power relations’ which influence the wellbeing and mobility of individuals and groups in powerful ways (Piper 2008b, p. 1). To give an example explored throughout this thesis, Indigenous people in Mexico are often marginalised in public spheres or are subjected to cultural attitudes that demean them; they experience discrimination when accessing housing, employment, or health care; and they also experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment and poverty, and are overrepresented in low-paying or menial work. But as argued throughout, many ‘irregular’ migrants in the US are also very familiar with some of these experiences. This highlights the need to investigate the relations and institutions that create and sustain asymmetries and deprivations at both places of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’ to gain a more complete understanding of the relationship between migration and social transformation in the context of widespread relationships of power and inequality.
Third, economic, political and social inequalities not only combine and reinforce each other within places of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’, but also across them. As argued in Chapter 7, it is not a coincidence that the mobility of Mixtecos, and others classified as ‘poor’ and ‘low-skilled’, is being increasingly restricted in the neoliberal era. To the contrary, one could point out that it is those that are already affected by material inequalities, exploitation and economic dependence, informal and formal barriers to political representation, and norms of cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect, that are most affected by the ongoing ‘hierarchisation of the right to migrate’ (Castles 2005, p. 219). This demonstrates the way in which national hierarchies of rights and freedoms complement and interact with international hierarchies in complex ways that lead to various forms of exclusion (Anderson 2015; Castles 2005). Indeed, the recognition of this complementary interaction resonates with Bauman’s (1998, pp. 9, 74) sharp critique of the role of mobility as a ‘powerful and most coveted stratifying factor’ in the current era, whereby ‘the riches are [increasingly] global, [while] the misery is local’. Thus, while national categories still have an influence on mobility (after all, one can travel with ease across Europe and North America with an Australian passport, as compared to a Mexican one), this also points out the significance of national hierarchies such as ethnicity and class in restricting one’s ability to migrate under favourable conditions (ultimately, under current conditions, it is also the educated and well-off mestizo Mexican who is likely to become a citizen of another country rather than her Indigenous counterpart).

The findings of this thesis thus show the importance of investigating the relationship between contemporary forms of migration and existing inequalities. As argued recently by Lee et al. (2014, pp. 26-27) migration is not only ‘a response to geographical inequalities in opportunities and security’, but ‘migration flows are also characterised by internal inequalities, for instance, in terms of skills and legal status’ while ‘the stark contrasts of global inequalities become a matter of personal and family relationships between migrants and the people in the communities they left behind’. As demonstrated throughout, one can begin to understand the relationship between specific forms of migration and existing inequalities by drawing from the work of Buroway (2015), Castles and Davidson (2000), and Anderson and Hughes (2015b). This is an issue that deserves significant further investigation.
8.4 Existing Expressions of Agency and Plausible Avenues of Solidarity

In the face of these prevailing inequalities, it could be easy to lose sight of the agency of Mixtecos in places like Piñas and Santa Maria. Yet, and as noted in Chapter 5, it is important to remember that structure is not a unified set of constraints, and that people's agency, however limited, is expressed in different forms in particular times and spaces. This thesis in particular emphasised the agency of Mixtecos in Oaxaca and California vis-à-vis the ongoing corrosive effects of commodification upon their communities and the predating exclusions and forms of domination within them. In this context, participants' sheer histories and continued acts of migration, in spite of the costs and dangers that have followed the increasing 'securitisation' of the Mexico-US border, can be seen as an expression of their agency in response to growing inequality, unemployment and declining rural livelihoods across Mexico. Their migration can also be seen as a refusal to abide by US laws and policies that seek to restrict their mobility and deportability as 'poor' and 'low-skilled' migrants. At the same time, the resilience of small-scale agriculture, in spite of its abandonment by the Mexican government, can also be seen as an expression of participants' agency in response to the unequal impacts of the expansion of the market economy and the increasing commodification of land and labour. Furthermore, the ongoing salience of local systems of authority and reciprocity, along with the development of pan-ethnic Indigenous organisations, can be seen as forms of resistance against their lack of political inclusion as Indigenous people and 'irregular' migrants across Mexico and the US. Likewise, the organisational development of initiatives to foster female leadership, and the individual actions of Mixteco women to gain independence through employment, education (and access to transport), can be seen as examples of the agency of Mixtecos in challenging pre-existing exclusions and forms of domination based on sexism and patriarchy.

In this context, it is important to emphasise plausible avenues to build solidarity to respond to, adapt to or challenge existing forms of maldistribution, misrepresentation and misrepresentation. This is already exemplified by the development of pan-ethnic Indigenous consciousness and political activism (Nagengast and Kearney 1990), which was described throughout this thesis, whereby Mixteco migrants from different villages and other Indigenous migrants have become organised in order to tackle diverse economic, political and social issues that affect them at the transnational level. But given increasingly widespread relationships of power and inequality, new forms of solidarity can also be built between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people and between migrants and non-migrants. As argued in Chapter 7, it is important to draw attention to some of the commonalities shared between different populations that face different and similar
forms of exclusion in the neoliberal era. Indeed, Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants are not the only ones to be faced by new and ongoing economic, political and social asymmetries and deprivations associated with the expansion of the market economy in combination with pre-existing inequalities. For instance, as noted in Chapter 5, one can single out the formal and informal barriers faced by more and more individuals and groups in precarious forms of employment to gaining access to important aspects of social protection that have been traditionally associated with the decommodification of labour (Standing 2011). Similarly, and as argued in Chapter 6, one can point to the continuing salience of formal and informal barriers to political participation that continue to exclude ethnic minorities, migrants and others from the ideal of political equality under liberal notions of citizenship (Castles and Davidson 2000). Finally, as explored in Chapter 7, one can draw attention to new forms of social subordination based on the neoliberal ideological and institutional emphasis on ‘hard-work’, ‘self-reliance’ and ‘individual responsibility’ that leads to the exclusion of Indigenous people, the ‘disabled’, the ‘welfare dependent’ and others from social life (Anderson 2015).

Against this background, it is ever more important to build creative analyses that highlight the shared experiences or commonalities between those that are being excluded in the current era. Without losing sight of the particularities of each group (for instance, one may be more affected by forms of economic inequality than political or social forms), it is important to emphasise these shared experiences to build solidarity and understanding among those who have been impacted – to varying degrees and scales – by the expansion of the market economy and associated processes of commodification, and by the perpetuation of pre-existing injustices within and between communities. Whether one has access to quality employment, healthcare, and education, whether one is able to live free from violence and discrimination, and whether one is able to enjoy a family life, are growing concerns in the neoliberal era. Arguably, these concerns relate to more and more social groups – not just Indigenous people and ‘irregular’ migrants – who are being confronted by diverse economic, political and social inequalities. By revealing these commonalities, attention can be drawn to the need to transform the economic structure, the procedural and boundary-setting aspects of the political, and the social hierarchies of societies to redress current forms of maldistribution, misrepresentation and misrecognition. Similarly, an emphasis on these commonalities can also be an important political tool for stemming the tide of reactionary politics that is actively threatening the wellbeing and mobility of many such as those in Piñas and Santa Maria.
8.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study had two main limitations. First, critics could question whether this case study is ‘abstract enough to go beyond empirical generalisation’ (Arango 2004, p. 32) and to have any explanatory power beyond its specific context. After all, ‘perhaps the greatest difficulty of studying migration lies in its extreme diversity, in terms of forms, types, processes, actors, motivations, socioeconomic and cultural contexts, and so on’ (Arango 2004, p. 33). However, this thesis did not seek to provide a one-size-fits-all explanation of Mexican migration or a complete assessment of the relationship between migration and processes of neoliberal social transformation. On the contrary, it relied on a deep and comprehensive understanding of the histories, experiences and agency of participants as Indigenous people and as ‘irregular’ migrants to illustrate the explanatory power that a conceptual framework that re-embeds migration into a broader understanding of societal change (including forms of maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation) can bring to a specific time and context.

Nevertheless, given that the experiences of participants are not entirely unique (Mixtecos are neither the only Indigenous or ethnic minority in the world, nor are they the only group to engage in ‘irregular’ migration), the conceptual arguments and the theoretical and methodological principles developed in this thesis can ‘migrate’ to other contexts. As argued in Chapter 2, this can be seen as a contribution to the advancement of interdisciplinary ‘middle-range’ conceptual frameworks to analyse ‘specific types of migration that share some important common characteristics’ (Castles 2010, p. 1574). They may in fact prove particularly insightful for individuals or groups who have been mobile, or remained immobile, under increasingly precarious conditions in the current neoliberal era. In this context, future research could compare the histories, experiences and agency of Mixtecos to other groups in Mexico and the US to gain a better understanding of existing forms of maldistribution, misrepresentation and misrecognition, as well as to identify possible avenues for building solidarity. Similarly, future research could explore the relationship between migration and social transformation in contexts beyond Mexico and the US to further investigate the role of specific relations and institutions in sustaining or transforming comparable forms of inequality.

Second, it is possible to problematise the grouping of participants according to their ethnicity or their migration status. The emphasis on ethnicity can obscure ‘the diversity of migrants’ relationships to their place of settlement and to other localities around the world’ (Glick-Schiller et al. 2006, p. 613). Similarly, an emphasis on migration status can overlook that their ‘irregular’
status affects them ‘in profound, even life-threatening ways, but there are also many contexts in which it is simply irrelevant’ (Coutin 2000, p. 41). In fact, the participants in this thesis belong to many different social groups and their ethnicity or migration status may be extraneous to many of their day-to-day activities. While it is important to acknowledge this limitation, it does not diminish the significance of their ethnicity and migration status for analytical purposes because in practice most of them are ‘excluded … no matter where they reside’ precisely because they are Indigenous in Mexico and they are ‘irregular’ in the US (Rivera Salgado 2014, p. 32). In other words, this focus on analysis is able to capture many (but not all) of the economic, political and social inequalities that affect them in the current era. A second area of future research could thus be to investigate the histories, experiences and agency of Mixtecos and other Indigenous groups by focusing more fully on other aspects of their lives (for instance the role of gender, youth or religion) to gain a more complete understanding of the relationship between migration, social transformation and existing inequalities. These are issues that are being explored by others (O’Connor 2016; Stephen 2005), but which require further attention.

Finally, this study could benefit from revision in the future in the form of a longitudinal analysis. Indeed, previous scholars that traced the origins and growth of Mixteco migration into the north-west of Mexico and California (see among others Kearney 1995; Nagengast and Kearney 1990) have laid the foundations for the type of analysis that embeds migration in the context of ongoing processes of social transformation. Against this background, a future revision of this case study could investigate emerging opportunities and challenges for Mixtecos across Oaxaca and California, as well as the formation of new relations and institutions that affect their wellbeing and mobility. In particular, the salience of recent developments, such as the increasing alignment of migration and security concerns, opens the possibility for new forms of economic maldistribution, political misrepresentation and social misrecognition, but also for new expressions of agency and avenues of solidarity that require investigation.

8.6 Closing Remarks

Significant changes have taken place between the start of this thesis and its conclusion. One could say that the emphasis on the migration-development nexus that guided this thesis is being increasingly replaced by one of migration-security. Not only are new forms of violence threatening the livelihoods of many people in countries of ‘origin’ such as Mexico, but there is also a stronger and widespread emphasis in primary countries of ‘destination’, such as the US, to ‘securitise’ borders and restrict the mobility of ‘dangerous’ migrants. In Mexico in particular, the
ongoing war on drugs continues to affect many in rural and urban areas. While this is an issue that did not emerge in the primary research in Piñas, it is important to situate this growth of violence as a crucial aspect of broader processes of social transformation and as one that is deeply embedded in existing economic, political and social inequalities (Arias Cubas 2015). In this context, the growth of violence in Mexico (particularly in nearby Guerrero, where many Mixtecos also live), and across the Mexico-US border, requires much further attention given its impact on the wellbeing and mobility of many in the country and across the region.

Across the border in the US, the recent presidential election also raises fundamental challenges for Mixteco migrants due to the vigour of an anti-migrant, anti-Mexican rhetoric. While these are distressing developments, one could argue that they are not truly radical or reactionary given the long history of relations and institutions that have effectively imposed forms of economic maldistribution, political misrepresentation, and social misrecognition upon ‘poor’ or ‘low-skilled’ migrants from countries such as Mexico. Arguably, the current administration’s moves to ‘build a wall’ and ‘deport them all’ can be seen as a louder continuation of previous initiatives to ‘securitise’ the border and increase the deportability of ‘irregular’ migrants, as discussed in detail in this thesis. As countless participants testified, there is already a ‘wall’ of sorts dividing Mexico and the US; fences and barriers have been built since the Clinton administration. Similarly, Mexican migrants and other ‘irregular’ migrants have been criminalised and deported for decades. As reflected in the findings of this thesis, ‘irregular’ migrants in the US were already facing a hostile situation under the Obama administration, which supported the deportations of the ‘criminals, gang bangers, people who are hurting the community’ to use Obama’s words (even when the majority of those deported from inside the US had committed only minor infractions, primarily traffic violations, or had no criminal record at all) (Thompson and Cohen 2014).

Yet, the continuity of this emphasis to ‘securitise’ the border and increase the deportability of ‘irregular’ migrants is nonetheless worrying. Primarily this demonstrates a decontextualised and politicised understanding of migration that obscures the deep historical economic, political and social links between Mexico and the US that have only been reinforced in the neoliberal era as the economies of both countries have become increasingly integrated. This decontextualised and politicised understanding is unfortunately gaining salience across the world as migrants are portrayed as an economic, political and social threat to countries of ‘destination’ and where their removal is pointed to as a solution to various disparate troubles. In this context, it is likely that
increasing numbers of migrants will be affected by more maldistribution, misrepresentation and misrecognition in the years to come unless political alternatives and solidarities that include ‘irregular’ migrants and others that are excluded in the current era are built and strengthened.
9 Bibliography


Arias Cubas, M. (2016) "'The Roots are Here, but the Work is There" - Economic Opportunities and Challenges for Indigenous Migrant Farmworkers in Mexico and the US', *Symposium on Transnational People-Movement and Social Rights*, Sydney: University of Sydney. 12-13 December.


Bibliography


Google Maps (2017a) *Piñas (Oaxaca) and Santa Maria (California)*. Available at: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1u1wMska3o5vpm2seXooBlmx8bW4&usp=sharing (Accessed: 01 March 2017).
Google Maps (2017b) San Quintín (Baja California), Culiacan (Sinaloa) and Hermosillo (Sonora). Available at: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1pOukbkSa5lA9mernSkgkv5YP0NMc&usp=sharing (Accessed: 01 March 2017).


Bibliography


215


Bibliography


Bibliography


Tlachinollan (2011) *Migrantes Somos y en el Camino Andamos*. Tlapa: Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan, A.C.


