FROM JENSEN, B. & SAWYER, A. (2013) *REGARDING EDUCACIÓN: MEXICAN AMERICAN SCHOOLING, IMMIGRATION AND BINATIONAL IMPROVEMENT,* NEW YORK: TEACHERS COLLEGE PRESS. CHAPTER 9

The Schooling of Youth Impacted by Migration: A Bi-national Case Study

Adam Sawyer

During the international migration boom of the late 20th century and early years of the21st, migration from Mexico to the United States stood out as one of the globe's most intensive population flows. At its height in the 1990s and first part of the 2000s, roughly 500,000 Mexicans migrated each year for either permanent or temporary settlement (Passel & Cohn, 2010). Currently more than 11.7 million Mexican-born people live in the United States, representing nearly a third of the nation's foreign-born population (Passel, 2011).

While the impact of this massive movement of people on the economic, political, social, and cultural life of the United States has received extensive attention from scholars and policymakers, how this migration has reconfigured the same domains in Mexican society has received relatively scant notice. Preliminary scholarship into the cultural, social, economic, and political shifts occurring in Mexico due to this demographic transformation suggests that migration has brought both costs and benefits to the communities from which migrants depart

and the nation as a whole. While outmigration can entail human capital loss, community and family breakdown, and the exacerbation of existing inequalities, it can also bring enhanced social networks, human capital, and income to needy Mexican migrant-sending communities (Cornelius& Sawyer, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2008; Smith, 2006). Though these initial accounts have been extremely helpful in mapping out the implications of outmigration for Mexico's migrant-sending communities, there nevertheless remains much to be learned about the extent and complexities of the changes wrought by migration to the United States.

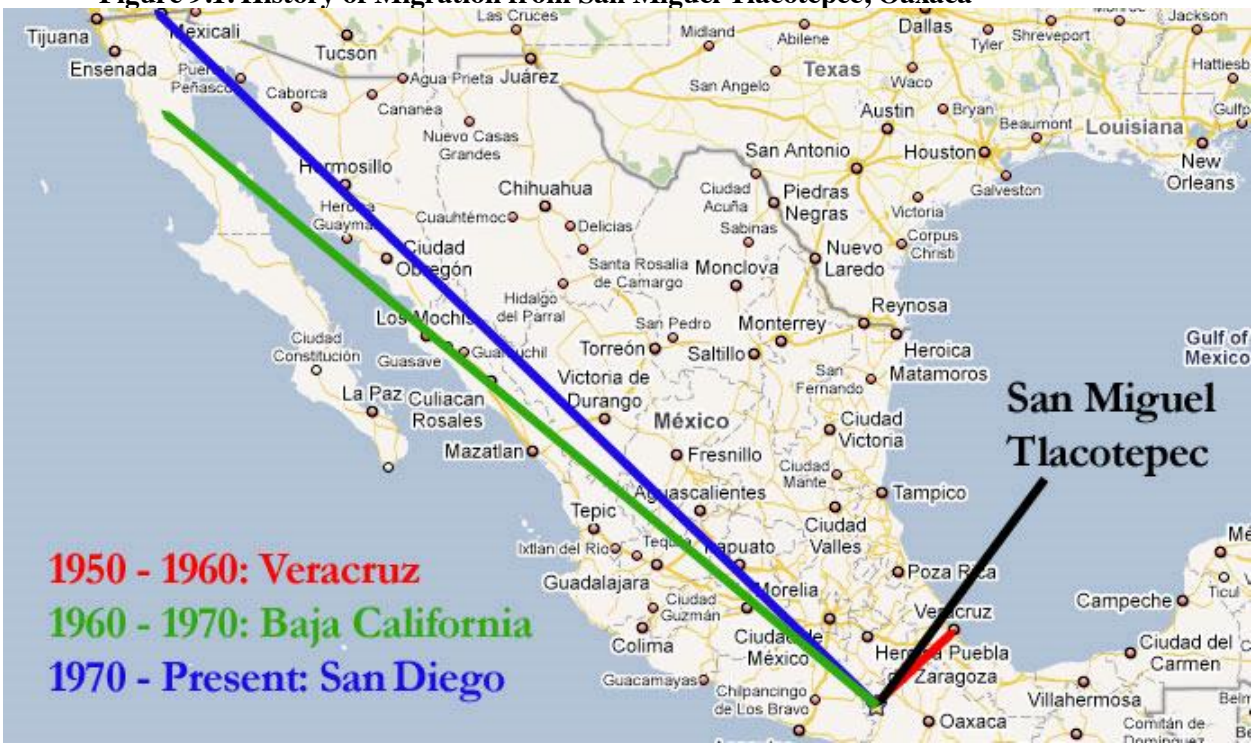
In this chapter I share findings on the effect of financial remittances—the money migrants send back to their communities of origin—on schooling processes and outcomes for those who remain behind in one prominent migrant-sending community in southern Mexico. I have chosen to examine this phenomenon in regard to education due to the prominent role schooling can play in contributing to social equality, the formation of human capital, and the provision of skills necessary for democratic citizenship. Financial remittances provide a useful independent variable with which to study the overall impact of this phenomenon, as they are one of the most concrete and tangible manifestations of outmigration and one that is hypothesized—based upon both direct and indirect evidence—to boost educational opportunity within migrant-sending communities.

Using data from the University of California, San Diego's Mexican Migration Field Research and Training Project (MMFRP), which was obtained from the same migrant-sending community of San Miguel Tlacotepec, Oaxaca, my work builds on previous studies by presenting qualitative case studies of four remittance-receiving youth enrolled in the town's sole upper secondary school during the 2007-08 school year. The portraits of these students and their families provide a detailed illustration of how the background attribute of maternal education level—found to be

the most powerful mediator of a remittance effect on educational outcomes—shapes the schooling pathways of these remittance-receiving youth. Through these examples, I discuss how other factors such as "social remittances" from absent family members, school-based processes, gender, and social constructions of migration also figure into the schooling lives of these students.

MIGRATION AND SCHOOLING IN SAN MIGUEL TLACOTEPEC: A COMMUNITY ON THE MOVE

Figure 9.1. History of Migration from San Miguel Tlacotepec, Oaxaca



The case studies I illustrate in this chapter are drawn from the prominent southern Mexican migrant-sending community of San Miguel Tlacotepec, Oaxaca. (For a more extensive discussion of the migratory and educational context of San Miguel Tlacotepec, see Cabrera et.

al, 2009; Cornelius & Sawyer, , 2008; Sawyer, 2010b.) Tucked away within the mountainous and rugged landscape of southern Mexico's Mixteca Baja, this rural indigenous municipality of 1,696 people is classified by the Mexican government as a "highly intensive" migrant-sending community (Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO), 2007). Tlacotepec, as its residents call it, has very few economic opportunities for its citizens and now loses most of its working-age population to migration. According to government statistics, nearly 1,100 Tlacotepenses departed for the United States between 1995 and 2004, most settling in or around the community of Vista, California, near San Diego.

Similar to communities described in other accounts (see Cornelius, Fitzgerald & Lewin-Fischer, 2007;; Levitt, 2001; Smith, 2006), migrants from San Miguel Tlacotepec living in the United States retain strong transnational ties to their home community. One of the most tangible manifestations of this relationship is the large amounts of money migrants send back to Tlacotepec. In 2008, 72% of the town's U.S.-based migrants reported sending financial remittances to family members in Tlacotepec, with an average of $350 U.S. dollars per month. Meanwhile, 47% of the town's current residents—and 81% of those with migrant family members—said they received money from the United States (Cornelius, Fitzgerald, Díaz, & Borger, 2009). As a result of this exchange, San Miguel Tlacotepec's economy is increasingly dependent upon remittances sent from the United States.

Persisting Barriers to Educational Opportunity

Situated in one of the poorest areas of one of Mexico's most impoverished states, educational indicators in San Miguel Tlacotepec are, unsurprisingly, low in comparison to state and national averages (see Table 9.1).

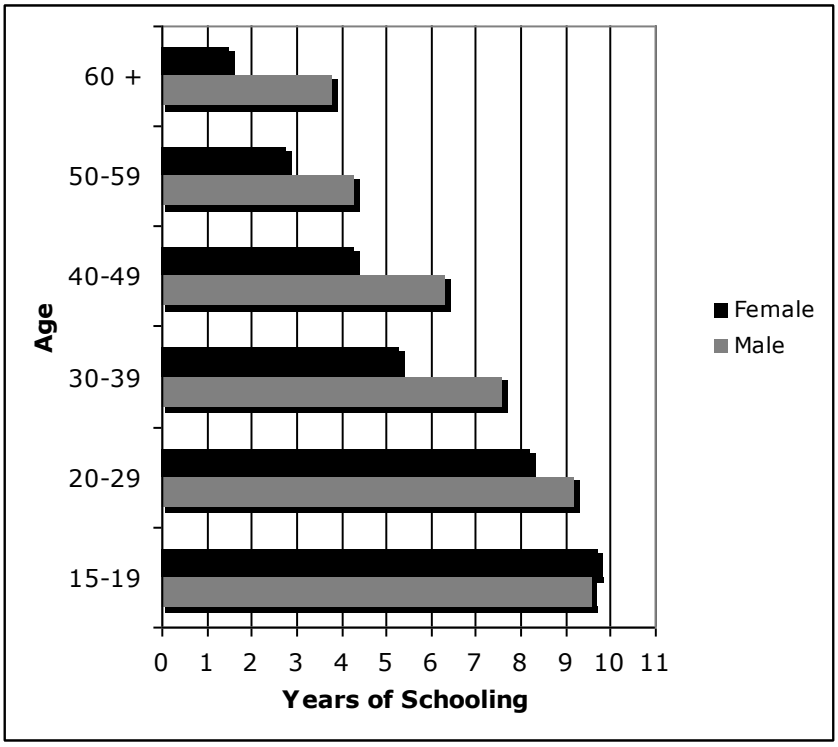
Table 9.1. Selected Educational Indicators, Population 15 Years and Older, 2005

Indicator	Mexico	Mexico City	Oaxaca	San Miguel Tlacotepec
Literacy rate	90.5	97.0	80.6	68.2
Percent attended school	91.6	97.0	93.6	87.0
Percent incomplete primary	14.3	6.5	20.6	57.0
Average years of schooling attained	8.1	10.5	6.4	6.7

Sources: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), CONAPO.

There have been signs of progress in the town, however, and young Tlacotepenses are increasingly completing their compulsory schooling (grades 1-9), when it once was quite rare to do so (see Figure 9.1). In addition to its public preschool (pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten), two primary schools (grades 1–6), and lower secondary school(grades 7–9), the town recently saw the opening of an upper secondary school (grades 10–12), which has raised hopes that educational attainment in the municipality will continue to increase (Sawyer, Keyes, Velásquez, Lima, & Bautista, 2009).

Figure 9.1. Schooling Attainment by Age and Gender in San Miguel Tlacotepec



Source: Mexican Migration Field Research and Training Project 2007-2008 Survey

Transition to post-compulsory schooling can be financially prohibitive for many Tlacotepec youth. While no tuition is charged at the basic education levels (primary and lower secondary school) and the costs of books and supplies are at least partially met through government programs, attending upper secondary school is much more expensive. In addition to tuition expenses (though merit-based scholarships are available), families must fully meet the costs of books and other materials and supplies (Sawyer & Keyes, 2008).

As formal credit markets are mostly unavailable in rural Mexico, cash-strapped Tlacotepense families possess few alternatives for meeting the costs of unsubsidized schooling. Some participate in the shadowy world of private education loans, entities reputed to open and close their operations at a moment's notice, sometimes with the hard-earned deposits of families attempting to save for educational expenses (Sawyer & Keyes, 2008). For migrant families, on the other hand, remittances have become an increasingly viable option, and 33% of remittance receivers reported using this income toward educational expenses, the third most common use of this resource behind food and shelter (Sawyer et al., 2009).

Transnational Communities and Remittances

In Mexico, where maintenance of transnational communities is facilitated by geographic proximity and circular migration patterns, remittances represent a significant contribution to the national economy. This financial source, which reached $24.7 billion in 2008, is the third most numerous source of foreign trade—trailing only tourism and petroleum—and represents a full 3% of the nation's GDP (Banco Nacional de México (Banamex), 2008) . Studies on the impact of remittances in Mexico are in their infancy and have yielded mixed results. Remittances seem to be beneficial in their ability to finance household expenses, business creation, public works projects, and the costs of schooling (Orozco, 2009; Ratha, 2003). On the other hand, they also appear in some cases to increase existing inequalities and come with the cost of family separations and human capital loss (Dreby, 2010; Global Exchange, 2008; Menjivar and Abrego, 2009:).

It is important to note that remittances are not just financial in nature. Migrant-sending communities—such as those in Mexico—are also transformed by social interactions non-

migrants have have with departed migrants through visits (either in the sending or receiving community), phone calls, letters, emails, blogs, and other media (Levitt & Lamda-Nieves, 2010). This phenomenon, known as "social remittances," has received limited scrutiny from scholars, but has been speculated to have cultural, political, and scholastic implications (Levitt, 2001; Levitt & Lamda-Nieves, 2010). For example, it is believed that as sending community residents interact with migrants—who themselves are transformed by their new environments—their ideas regarding such matters as gender roles, democracy, and schooling can be altered (Levitt, 2001; Levitt & Lamda-Nieves, 2010).

Remittances and Educational Opportunity

As pointed out earlier, in rural Mexico, finances can pose a significant barrier to students persisting in school, especially at the higher grade levels (Reimers, 2002; Santibañez, Vernez, & Razquin, 2005). Within San Miguel Tlacotepec, for example, only 17% of the population has completed upper secondary school, while a mere 7.5% has attended college. For these reasons, it has been hypothesized that financial remittances can help remittance-receiving households spend more on the schooling of their dependents, which in turn can increase the opportunity they have to progress through the educational system and complete their schooling (Hanson, 2002; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Sawyer, 2010b).

Very few studies have directly studied the relationship between financial remittances and educational opportunity in Mexico. There are, however, several nationally representative and multisite studies that have gotten at the question indirectly by comparing students from migrant families to those from non-migrant households along a range of educational indicators related to educational aspirations and attainment. The findings from these studies have been somewhat

murky, as some have found apparent scholastic benefits for migrant household members (Hanson, 2002; Hanson & Woodruff, 2003; Kandel & Kao, 2001); others have unveiled negative findings (Kandell & Massey, 2001; McKenzie & Rapoport, 2006; Miranda, 2007), while still others have found both positive and negative associations (Kandel & Kao, 2001). These studies, however, shed little light on the impact of remittances in this equation and the underlying mechanisms behind these relationships.

I (Sawyer, 2010b) directly explored the relationship between remittances and educational opportunity within San Miguel Tlacotepec. In my studies, remittance-receiving households were compared to non-remittance receivers in terms of family educational spending, parent and student aspirations, total educational attainment, and completion of the lower secondary and upper secondary school cycles. While remittance income was not found to effect household educational spending, youth educational attainment, likelihood of lower secondary completion for youth, or upper secondary enrollment, it was found to be related to higher levels of schooling aspirations for youth and parents with relatively low levels of maternal education and to greater likelihood of upper secondary completion for those with *higher* maternal education levels (Sawyer, 2010a). In sum, while these findings provide evidence that remittances *can* help students in migrant-sending communities with their educations, they also suggest that their ability to do so depends upon more than just receiving money.

Other Impacts of Migration: Parent-Child Separations, the "Culture of Migration," and Gender Differences

Aside from maternal education levels, there are other individual, household, and contextual factors that may affect the schooling pathways of remittance-receiving students in migrant-

sending communities. For one, the receipt of remittances almost always necessitates the separation of children and youth from at least one parent. Such separations have been found in some studies to impact the mental well-being of children and youth, which that can hinder schooling motivation and engagement (Dreby, 2010; Menjivar & Abrego, 2009; Sawyer et al., 2009).

Similarly, in such contexts where outmigration becomes a community norm—especially for young men—schooling in the higher grade levels may be interrupted or terminated in favor of international migration (Cornelius, 1990; Fitzgerald, 2008 Kandell & Massey, 2001; Sawyer, 2010a). As participation in this "culture of migration" is dominated by males during the school-age years, it has been hypothesized that females might benefit more from remittances in the higher grade levels such as upper secondary than males, given the greater likelihood females have to still be enrolled in school (Kandell & Massey, 2001; Sawyer, 2010a). In fact, the receipt of remittances in and of itself signals the presence of a kin network in the United States, which can increase the prospects that would-be adolescent migrants (typically males) have of realizing these intentions to migrate (Kandell & Massey, 2001). Despite anecdotal evidence to support a gender-specific effect in terms of remittances and educational persistence, empirical evidence in this regard is still inconclusive.

COLLECTION OF DATA

Data for my study were collected as part of a binational "ethno-survey" designed and carried out by the 2007-08 Mexican Migration Field Research and Training Project, a partnership between the University of California, San Diego's Center for Comparative Immigration Studies and the *Instituto de Investigaciones Sociológicas* at the *Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca*

(For more information, see http://www.polisci.ucsd.edu/cornelius/). Part of a bi-national team of 30 researchers, I spent 2 weeks in San Miguel Tlacotepec, Oaxaca, in December 2007, where I participated in the administration of a 158-item survey to all residents aged 15 to 65 in the community. We also conducted 49 semi-structured interviews with school administrators, teachers, parents, and students and collected extensive observational field notes based upon time spent in households, community gathering places, and all five of San Miguel Tlacotepec's schools, as well as those attended by Tlacotepenses in San Diego County in the United States. In the semi-structured interviews, all respondents were asked to describe their perceptions of migration's impact on schooling in the community; teachers and administrators were specifically asked for vignettes about particular students impacted in one way or another by migration; parents were asked to describe aspirations for their children, and how decisions about allocation of resources for education were made; and students were prompted to describe the role of schooling in their lives, their perception of the educational opportunities available to them, their intentions regarding international migration, and their aspirations for future attainment.

Positionality and Validity

Our binational (United States and Mexico) research team was composed of expert academic faculty and both graduate and undergraduate students, most with previous experience conducting research on the nexus of migration and social development. The U.S. researchers (myself included) were mainly middle-class Anglophone (though all competent second language speakers of Spanish) U.S. nationals of both White (non-Hispanic) and Latino/a heritage. Hence, despite there being some linguistic and cultural commonalities between us and our research participants, there were also considerable barriers between us and they that were likely

exacerbated by the great disparity between us in terms of formal education levels and social class.

While these factors have inevitably impacted the lens by which I have approached and described the present research, we also took several steps in both data collection and analysis to address the ways that these linguistic and cultural barriers might pose a threat to the validity (Maxwell, 2005) of our research. For one, on two occasions our complete team (from both universities) met to discuss survey items and critically reflect upon the meaning of each question and the adequacy of its wording. During these binational summits, our Mexican colleagues (all of whom had extensive research experience in San Miguel Tlacotepec) provided critical advice on the wording and appropriateness of various survey and protocol items and tips on culturally relevant ways to establish rapport and trust (Seidman, 1998). Additionally, once in San Miguel Tlacotepec, our team met for an hour each day to discuss issues with the survey, interview and observation protocols and other dilemmas in the field and adjustments were made as necessary to our data collection instruments and strategies.

VOICES FROM TLACOTEPEC:
THE COMPLEX INTERPLAY OF REMITTANCES AND SCHOOLING

Here I present case studies of four students from San Miguel Tlacotepec's high school to illustrate the complex and double-edged nature of remittances and their impact on educational processes. The cases of Mercedes Gómez, Héctor Padilla, Isabella Galindo, and Carlos Villareal demonstrate first and foremost—in line with previous work in this area—the central role of remittance-recipient mothers in mediating the schooling of their children.

These case studies also reveal the importance of the departed migrant parent in the schooling pathways of youth from remittance-receiving households, a factor not observed in previous quantitative studies. The communication that these youth have—or do not have—with their migrant parent has important implications for their persistence and success inschool.

Mercedes and Isabella: Support for School at Home and from "El Norte"

Mercedes Gómez. A 16-year-old 10th-grader at Tlacotepec's high school, Mercedes lives in a colorful and well-maintained adobe dwelling in the relatively affluent downtown of San Miguel Tlacotepec with her mother, Ana, and three younger siblings. Their finely carved wooden furniture, tiled floors, and large color television all suggest the trappings of a comfortable middle-class life. Mercedes's father, Pedro, has lived and worked in Northern California as a construction worker for over 10 years and according to Ana sends money to the family every month, and calls at least once a week. Mercedes and her three brothers and sisters (ages 13, 10, and 8) are still in school, and according to Ana Gómez, this is made possible by the remittance income received from her husband:

> He works, sends money, and from that I have what I need for the week and for supplies to complete the school assignments we do on the weekends.

This statement suggests two important ingredients, seen throughout the interviews, for remittances to make a difference in the schooling of the young who remain behind. For one, the Gomez family has enough income left after meeting basic costs of subsistence to use the roughly 385 USD per month of remittance income toward meeting the costs of education. As seen in our surveys, families typically ranked education as a secondary use of remittances after food, shelter, and clothing. Thus, the fact that Ana Gómez is able to use remittances toward educational

expenses is suggestive of a relative economic comfort even aside from the remittance income. Second, Ana is obviously committed to her children's schooling and perhaps most importantly—thanks to her relatively high 8th-grade education—is able to help them with their schoolwork:

> I visit their schools and talk to their teachers as much as I can. Every night we work on the homework together. They are not to watch television until all of their assignments are finished. On the weekends, I try to take them different places so that they can learn outside of school and we read books together.

Given this high level of support, it is not surprising that all of Ana's children appear to be doing well in school, and teachers at the high school all concur that Mercedes is at the top of the 10th-grade class and is seen as being college-bound. In a visit to the high school, I talk to Mercedes about her schooling, and she professes to greatly enjoy school and discusses her aspirations of going to college and becoming a doctor or astronaut someday. I ask about her father in California, and what they talk about. Mercedes tells me that she speaks to her father weekly and he frequently inquires into her schoolwork. According to Mercedes: "He tells me to work hard at school, so 'you don't have to migrate like me.'" The frequency and nature of Mercedes' interaction with her father illustrates another important element of how remittances interact with schooling. Not only does PedroGómez support Mercedes' schooling through the sending of financial remittances, but he also provides the "social remittance" of reinforcing the message transmitted by Ana at home as to the importance of schooling—a notion likely informed in part by this experience as a low-wage migrant laborer in the United States. As such, he gives caution that life in the United States is no easy answer and recommends the alternative path of getting a good education back in San Miguel Tlacotepec.

While the remittance income PedroGómez sends from the United States, alongside his continued involvement in the education of his children, appears instrumental to the academic success of his daughter Mercedes, his absence is not without a severe trade-off. As his wife, Ana, puts it:

> Living here alone as a mother with my kids, it's hard, but one does whatever possible to help the kids move forward. My husband can't be here because he has to go work, to earn money so that the kids have, not even a good life, but a decent life. Because if he were here, we would all be happy because we'd be together, but we'd be in a bad situation economically.

Thus Ana's words demonstrate the painful bargain faced by families in San Miguel Tlacotepec. In order to attain such aspirations as providing post-compulsory schooling for their children, many must send family members to the United States to provide added income through the sending of remittances. The departure of a family member, however, comes with the painful side effect of being separated from a loved one, which sometimes hinders academic engagement.

Isabella Galindo. On my 1st day at the town high school, I ask the principal to introduce me to his top students. One of the four students he brings me is a bright eyed, bubbly, and articulate 11th-grader named Isabella Galindo. As I get to know her, Isabella speaks glowingly of her classes at the high school and how much she likes her teachers. Her eyes light up further when discussing her future plans:

A.S.: What do you want to be when you grow up?

Isabella: A doctor. I am between two—doctor and studying international relations.

A.S.: So, you want to go to college?

Isabella: Yes, in Acapulco. There they have the major I want to study, International Relations. It is important to continue studying, studying, to be at the vanguard of all the frequent changes that are happening in the world.

A.S. Will you and your family be able to pay for college?

Isabella: Yes, we've saved. I'm going to have to apply, ask for medical records, after I have to go to a (test preparation) course, and then take a test to see if I can get in.

From her words, it is clear not only that Isabella has high aspirations for her schooling, but also a great deal of information at her disposal to help make attending college a reality. Probing more into her background, I learn that Isabella is the youngest of four children and lives in one of the communities outlying the county seat in San Miguel Tlacotepec. She lives there with two older sisters and her mother, while her older brother and father are working together in the southern California farming town of Temecula. At home, similar to Mercedes, she receives a great deal of support from her mother, who completed 7th-grade, a relatively high level for women of her age in the community. Speaking of her mother, Teresa, Isabella says: "Each weekend we sit down together and review the work the teachers give me that I have to turn in." On top of this concrete help with schoolwork received from her mother, Isabella receives encouragement from her two older sisters, who were unable to continue studying past lower secondary school and are confined to low-wage domestic labor in the neighboring city of Juxtlahucaca: "My sisters, they tell me, 'Study, work real hard, because we didn't have the same opportunity to study as you, make the most of it, do something rewarding with your life. Work very hard!'" Isabella also tells me about two college-going cousins who have served as role models for her, and presumably serve as at least a partial source of her knowledge of college

admissions: “I have a [female] cousin who is studying Administration in Oaxaca City. I have another [male] cousin who is studying at the university in Oaxaca City.”

Speaking of her migrant father, Julián, Isabella informs me that he is a documented worker, and as such receives higher wages (as compared to an undocumented worker). According to Isabella, he sends $400 per month of this income back to his family in the form of remittances. Similar to Mercedes, Isabella speaks to her father frequently, and given his legalized status, he is able to visit his family once or twice a year. Julián Galindo, similar to PedroGómez, reinforces the support provided to Isabella’s studies at home by her mother and sisters not only with his U.S. dollars, but also his words. According to Isabella: “He tells me, ‘I send money so that you can buy books and the things you need so that you can keep studying.’” The importance of school is also bolstered by her older brother, Davíd, who is now working in the United States and wishes that he had stuck with his schooling in Mexico: “He [Davíd] sometimes tells me, ‘Work hard, take advantage now, I was stupid to not take advantage of when my parents supported me, but now I regret it.’”

In sum, both Mercedes Gómez and Isabella Padilla are thriving in school not only thanks to the remittance income their families receive from the United States, but in the way having this financial source interacts with other aspects of their backgrounds. Both young women have relatively well-educated mothers who support their schooling through the allocation of financial resources, encouragement, and assistance with school assignments. Mercedes and Isabella also both enjoy regular communication with their U.S.-based fathers, who socially remit a school positive message to the girls.

Carlos and Héctor: Money is Not Enough

Not all remittance-receiving youth in San Miguel Tlacotepec possess the background advantages enjoyed by Mercedes and Isabella. In the ensuing cases of Carlos Villareal and Héctor Padilla, I demonstrate how simply having this financial resource available to support schooling is not enough to ensure schooling success and persistence.

Carlos Villareal. During the final days of our field work in San Miguel Tlacotepec, we were invited by a concerned Civics teacher at the high school to give a talk to his 11th-grade class on the perils of migration and the reality of life working in the United States for Mexican migrants. The teacher, Raúl, a 33-year-old originally from the state capital of Oaxaca City, had become alarmed by the large number of boys at the school who dropped out over the course of their studies to migrate. He had taken on what he described as a "losing battle" to keep these kids at school and wanted to take advantage of the presence of so many U.S. researchers in town to provide firsthand information that might dissuade youth at the school from seeing their future solely as migrants to the United States.

I spoke to Raúl to gain a better sense of what he perceived to be the dynamics that led so many of the young men to want to leave San Miguel Tlacotepec for the United States. Beyond the obvious limitations of the local economy, Raúl felt that the adolescent boys were drawn to an image of U.S. life that exemplified a romanticized ideal of masculinity:

> They are seduced by the images of the United States—the cars, the big houses, the blondes in bikinis. This is what they see from the movies and the exaggerations spun by those that come back [returned migrants][. . .] They think that they will go work in the North, then come back here with the nicest shoes and clothes and lots of money and be big shots.

To give me a sense of the power this social force held over these adolescent boys, Raúl took me to the playground at the end of the school day to observe a group of 10th- and 11th-grade males. He quickly pointed out a young man with hip, slicked-back hair and a confident strut as the ringleader:

> Carlos is the leader of the pack, whenever he talks the others listen—wherever he goes the others follow. His father is working in the United States and sends him money. One time he came back here and bought him that hot-rod *vochito* (Mexican term for a VW bug), and ever since then all the other boys want to be just like him.

Watching this group of boys over the course of the lunchtime break, it seemed that Raúl's assessment was spot-on. Seeing the youth circle together, Carlos was without doubt the center of attention. As he spoke, the others seemed to hang on his every word. When he moved, the others followed. From his confident body language and the compliant actions of the others, it was clear that Carlos was used to leading, and the others were similarly accustomed to following.

According to Raúl, Carlos—equipped with his souped-up *vochito*—had become a single-handed purveyor of the *culture of migration*—the social norm by which migration becomes an expected rite of passage—at the school and, as such, representative of everything he sought to fight against as a teacher in this migrant-sending community:

> The sad thing is that aside from the money and exaggerated view of life in the North, he gets nothing else from his father. So the money comes, the gifts come, but he receives no guidance. His mother tries at home, but she never studied so cannot do very much. Really, all he aspires to is to be like his father and work in the United States and it will be easier because his dad is already there. In the meantime, he barely tries in school and his grades are low.

On my last day at the high school, I was able to catch up with Carlos. I chatted with him about his home life and schooling aspirations:

A.S. Do you receive money from the United States?

C.V.: Yeah, man, my dad lives there and makes big bucks. He sends me money, so I can buy things like my cool *vochito.*

A.S.: Do you use this money for school expenses?

C.V.: I don't know, man. Maybe my mom does, but me, I use that money to do fun things after school.

A.S.: What do you usually do after school?

C.V.: I mostly like to drive around in my *vochito* with my *homies.* Sometimes we stop at the kiosk (community center) and play video games. You know, fun things.

A.S.: I know that you are given a lot of homework at the high school, when do you find time to do it if you are doing so many fun things after school?

C.V.: The homework doesn't matter so much to me. My mother sometimes scolds me, and tells me to do my work, but I usually just throw it away.

A.S. Why do you throw your homework away?

C.V. Because school here doesn't matter. I'm going to go to the North. There my dad has lots of work and drives a truck. There's no work here in Tlacotepec, to be a man you have to go to California.

Héctor Padilla. The Padilla family lives on the northern periphery of San Miguel Tlacotepec near the entrance for the state highway. Here they have carved out a very modest homestead within the remains of a long-closed pool hall and discothèque. Entry into their dwelling can only be managed by physical contortion through a narrowly torn opening in a

chain-link fence surrounding the condemned property. Once inside, one can see that despite the modesty of its surroundings, the home is nevertheless equipped with proper concrete floors, electricity, a functioning gas stove, and a television.

Héctor Padilla, a 17-year-old 10th-grader at the high school, lives in this house with his mother, Esthér, and his three siblings: a 16-year-old boy, a 12-year-old girl, and a 7-year-old boy. Héctor and his oldest brother both attend the local high school, while the two youngest attend the middle school and elementary school. Esthér, a morose 42-year old woman whose glazed looks and sunken posture are suggestive of depression, tells me that her husband, Pablo, left for the United States 8 years ago with promises of returning to San Miguel Tlacotepec with the money to build the family a nice new house. Apparently this dream never manifested itself, as she tells me:

> At first he sent money and called every week, but little by little he started calling less and only sometimes sending money… Eventually, the calls and money stopped all together and I haven't heard even a word from him for two years. . . . He always was a drunk and womanizer, so I guess that's what became of him in the North.

Despite no longer receiving financial help from her husband, Esthér tells me that she receives frequent remittances from two sisters living in California totaling about 300 USD per month, which allows her to buy food and clothing for her family and to send her two oldest sons, Héctor and Tómas, to the high school. When asked about how Héctor and Tómas are doing as students, Esthér describes them as being only mediocre students because "they are both very lazy. Luckily the younger one [Tómas] has the [music] band, but the older one [Héctor] is trouble." Ésther's assessment—at least in terms of the educational trajectories of her sons—is somewhat confirmed by her sons and their teachers at the high school. The high school Civics teacher describes both

boys as doing the minimum to get by in class and suspects that they do not receive much help at home, and notes that Esthér only completed 2nd grade in her own education. He also describes Tómas as having the semblance of a future through his music, but senses that Héctor is a migration dropout risk.

In my discussions with Héctor, the teacher's assessment is corroborated. He tells me that he has no real desire to finish high school and instead hopes to migrate to the United States to work as soon as he can: "I hope to go to the United States . . . I don't want to stay because there aren't any jobs." I probe further into Héctor's desire to go to the United States, and ask him what he plans to do there when he arrives. He tells me that he intends to find his father, so that he can work with him. Remembering what Esthér has told me about the father's estrangement from the family, I ask Héctor if his father is aware of his plans. Pausing for a moment, and looking slightly askance, he tells me: "No, not yet, but when I get there he will want me to work with him." I ask Héctor to tell me more about his long-range plans. Once again, he pauses for a moment before responding:

> What I will do is work for a while in the United States until I learn English well. Then I will come back here and teach English. That is a problem we have here. We don't speak English well and our English teachers are no good. I will come back here and fix that.

Throughout the remainder of my conversations with Héctor, his strong aspiration to migrate alongside unformed ideas of how he would make this a reality continued to present themselves. As we discussed such themes as his schooling, life in San Miguel Tlacotepec, perceived life in the United States, and soccer, he would stop me every once in a while to gather the type of information he knew that I was well equipped to provide. For example, he asked: "When you go through the border, what do you have to show to *la migra* (border agents)? If you work without

papers, do you have to give fake ones to the boss?" Along with a clear determination to fulfill his dream was an accompanying, though heartbreakingly unfounded, belief that his father would be there to guide him in his new life in the United States.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

These four case studies both corroborate and expand upon previous findings on this topic. In line with previous work, I find that remittances, while potentially helpful for schooling performance and attainment, are alone not enough to boost educational outcomes. As in Sawyer (2010b), I find that the role of a youth's remittance-receiving mother is indispensable in mediating these outcomes. The ability of mothers to aid their children with school-related tasks—usually as a result of relatively high educational attainment in their own right—appears to make the difference in ensuring schooling success and the promise of future levels of schooling.

This study also illustrates factors not seen in previous work. Most prominently, these four case studies demonstrate the importance of social remittances, the values transmitted both explicitly and implicitly by absent migrant family members. Whereas for Mercedes and Isabella, the values transmitted are encouragement of schooling persistence and success, Carlos and Héctor—both through direct and indirect channels—are provided romanticized ideals of migrant life that trump efforts to engage these youth in school by their mothers and school personnel.

In considering the cases of Mercedes, Isabella, Carlos, and Héctor, it is important to note the possibility that gender-based dynamics may also be at work in regard to their schooling pathways. As such, the findings from previous work on the relationship between outmigration and schooling support the notion that girls tend to stay in school longer than boys in migrant-sending communities, especially compared to boys with migrant family members (Kandell &

Massey, 2002; McKenzie & Rapoport, 2006; Miranda, 2007). As we also know, it is the case in San Miguel Tlacotepec that females—while migrating in ever-higher numbers—tend to outmigrate at an older age (usually after 18) than males, who begin to migrate in large numbers at age 15, the traditional start of upper secondary school.

It is also important to consider how school-related factors figure into the schooling trajectories of these students. In terms of student support, I found no evidence of after-school programs, study halls, parent-education efforts, or any other initiative targeted for struggling students like Héctor or Carlos who lacked parental support at home (Field Notes, December 16, 2007). In terms of the migration phenomenon, the school and national curriculum do little to attend to the matter in relevant ways for students. Teachers confessed that the issue was rarely if ever discussed during class time, and where textbooks touched upon the topic, it was discussed in general and global terms with no mention of the intensive migration flows out of Mexico to the United States (Field Notes, December 16, 2007).

Conclusion

Migration to the United States has become a necessary way of life for individuals and families throughout Mexico. While outmigration of family members can entail painful separations for those who remain behind, they can also benefit materially and sometimes scholastically from the money family members send back from *el Norte*. As this chapter has shown, however, remittances—even when applied to educational expenses—don't necessarily guarantee enhanced performance or persistence in school. In fact, in cases where youth receive little academic support at home or from their absent migrant parent, remittances can reinforce widely held

perceptions for youth that migration can provide a glamorous improvement to one's living conditions and a preferable alternative to schooling attainment in Mexico.

For schooling to be an attractive and viable alternative to migration for the youth of Mexico's migrant-sending communities, efforts must be made within Mexico to provide academic support to struggling students and their families, nonromanticized and relevant depictions of migration must surface more prominently in the curriculum, and access to higher education must be expanded. Furthermore, given the potential role of U.S.-based migrants in supporting the schooling persistence of their Mexico-based children, U.S. actors should consider steps that can be taken through immigration and education policy as well as strategic binational programmatic initiatives with Mexico to help support migrant parents to continue supporting the education of their children remaining in Mexico. Without such steps, youth in communities such as San Miguel Tlacotepec will be denied a true choice to remain in school and, ultimately, the right to stay home.

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