

PRODUCTIVE REORIENTATION OF MIGRANTS: THE CASE OF SANTIAGO MATATLÁN, OAXACA

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Abstract

Migration studies have commonly focused on regional emigration or depopulation and the subsequent “financial recovery” implied by remittances. However, rural migration is usually practiced in a “circular” manner, with the main feature being a constant transmission of knowledge, skills, technology and human and economic resources. Seen this way rather than as a mere practice of economic survival, migration can be a tool through which cultural elements that allow for innovation in traditional production processes are updated. Thus and on occasion, migrant return can lead to productive and socio-cultural changes that trigger local communal development. This paper examines four cases of Oaxacan migrant mezcal producers and their experiences, especially in regards to the use of new technologies geared toward mezcal production and commercialization.

Keywords: migration, indigenous peasants, brain circulation, traditional production systems, indigenous peasants, innovation in production processes.

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INTRODUCTION

During the past three decades, global migration has increased significantly, from 99.3 million people in 1980 to 214 million people in 2010. This last figure comprises 3% of the world population (United Nations Statistics Division, 2010).¹¹ The figures on Mexican migration to the United States show, in and of themselves, the breadth of this phenomenon: from 1980 to 2009, the Mexican-born population residing in the United States increased nearly six-fold, from 2.1 to 11.5 million documented and undocumented migrants (Conapo, 2009). Migration does not only involve the mobilization of people, but also of economic resources, knowledge and skills. In this context, Mexico made 21.1 billion dollars in 2009 (15.74% less than in 2008 due to the economic crisis in the United States); that same year, it ranked as the third remittance receiver in the world, comprising 5.4% of these, just below India and China.

The influence of remittances in the Mexican gross domestic product (GDP) has been increasing. In 2008 they accounted for nearly 3% of GDP, which meant more than 8.8% of exports, more than 55% of oil exports, 135% of foreign direct investment (FDI), and 189% of international traveler revenues. They are the first source of currency in the country (Reyes, 2010). In the states of Michoacán, Zacatecas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Hidalgo (entities with a high level of rural population), remittances represented more than 10% of the state GDP.

Trough the exchange of economic, cultural and productive values, rural migration has strengthened community dynamics and adjusted toward the economic dynamics of the market. On the other hand, the participation of Mexican emigrants in productive farming, considered traditional among rural migrants, has decreased markedly (12% participation in the primary sector in the 1990s vis-à-vis 4.9% in 2008; Conapo, 2009) and moved toward other more specialized fields, such as the construction and services sectors. This situation reflects a change in culture and productive vision among rural Mexican migrants, who are learning new trades and the handling of advanced machinery and

1. According to this data, the world population rose to 6.5 billion people in 2005.

technology. Through their work experiences they adopt new productive values, become more sensitive to the effects of globalization across marketing, information and communication channels, and acquire knowledge of a new language and, with it, new cultural symbolisms.

This paper seeks, on the one hand, to contribute elements that foster new theoretical-methodological reflections on the phenomenon of migration and, on the other, provide information that allows us to apprehend the implications of migration as a catalyst in the change of productive performance among Mexican rural migrants. This is a case study of four migrant experiences.

HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND MIGRATION?

When asked, who are the ones who leave?, Mercedes Arce (2003) answers that the people who emigrate are generally more enterprising and have attributes that, if supported by public policies legitimately aimed at improving their conditions and capacities, could become useful tools for the development of both societies. According to this and regardless of their socioeconomic and educational level, those who decide to emigrate already possess characteristics suitable to development.

The process of emigration has led to different kinds of analysis; we are particularly interested in so-called “brain drain.” This theory analyzes the flow of highly qualified personnel toward a country that offers better or greater opportunities for development and growth, both economically and professionally. It is not, however, the only theoretical approach to the phenomenon of migration. Baldwin (cited by Casey, Mahroom, Ducatel and Barré, 2001) discusses “brain overflow”; Allan Findlay (quoted by Casey et al., 2001), “brain return,” “brain exchange” and, among other possibilities, “brain circulation.” Such diversity of terms seems to be causing more confusion than solutions, since while some speak of drain and losses others speak of circulations and profits (Teferra, 2005).

Now, rural migration is hardly associated with “highly knowledgeable” migration. The fact is, however, that this practice involves not only the closed and continuous flow of “high knowledge,” but also of economic resources, symbolism, skills and technologies, flows that equip

migrants with tools for innovation and development in traditional communities. Rural migration becomes circular as involved social networks shape this exchange flow and give it continuity.

For Casey et al. (2001), the term “brain circulation” is a positive form of mobility that involves scientists, researchers and other highly qualified professionals who move in and out of different geographic regions and who, therefore, spread knowledge. Taking this notion as a departure point, we can look at the three main features of rural migration that classify it as “brain circulation”:

- a) at no time is the departure of migrants seen as a drain or loss, since migration networks transmit the knowledge, skills and resources that the migrants generate, turning the departure into a continuous return;
- b) the term “brain” can be extended, in accordance with Giannocolo’s perspective (as quoted by Fazal, 2007), to describe the mobility of people with skills, knowledge and attributes suitable for development, so that rural migration is conceived as part of the factors that trigger the development of regions, not only through cheap labor (which is largely due to migrants’ undocumented nature), but also through its entrepreneurial and innovative capacity which, combined with the appropriate infrastructure, becomes a productive strategy for both regions;
- c) the continuous transmission of acquired and generated knowledge and resources also circulates earnings produced in the migration process, significantly decreasing its costs and encouraging a “win-win” environment for both countries. In this sense, the continuous flow of knowledge and resources generated by rural migrants is the main tool for development in their communities.

The “chain migration” approach explains the migration process as a fluid and circular phenomenon with feedback, and shows the importance of social networks for the perpetuation of migration. The first migrants

are responsible for generating the knowledge and opportunities that will benefit those who follow them and so on, to form a complex structure of social, cultural, economic and political relations (MacDonald, 1992).

Iredale (2005) suggested that the approach of “chain migration” occurs in three phases: 1) “brain drain,” which occurs primarily in developing countries; 2) the settlement of the first migrants and the creation of conditions for a new “brain drain,” as well as for the “return of the brain drain” on a very low scale; and 3) continuous migration, which increases the circulation of migrants and resources. This means that it is not until the third phase that the “circulation” of capital, knowledge and skills, among other resources, develops.

During the past two decades there has been a change in perspective regarding the effects of “brain circulation,” since it has been observed that the emigration of highly skilled individuals with knowledge and skills suitable for development can also have positive economic and social effects for countries of origin (Saxenian, 2002). Thus, sending countries can benefit from remittances as well as “feedback effects” such as the transfer of technology and investment by people trained outside the country, and an indirect stimulation of the education sector. Recent studies show that, after having acquired additional and specific knowledge abroad, migrants who return can contribute significantly to the development of the sending country and succeed there (Breinbauer, 2007).

In this sense, migration to more favorable environments increases global innovation; profits can flow again into the developing country through migrant networks and the return of migrants to their communities. Upon their arrival, returning migrants can implement what they have learned as well as transmit new ideas, attitudes, skills and knowledge that result in innovation within their traditional production systems (Saxenian, 2005). This way, migrants become a source of socio-cultural and productive innovation, turning into the central actors of communal change and development.

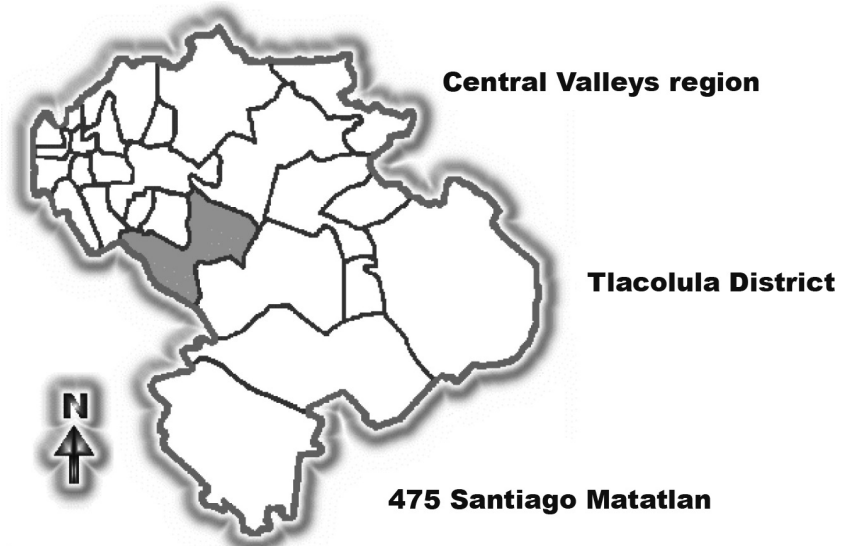
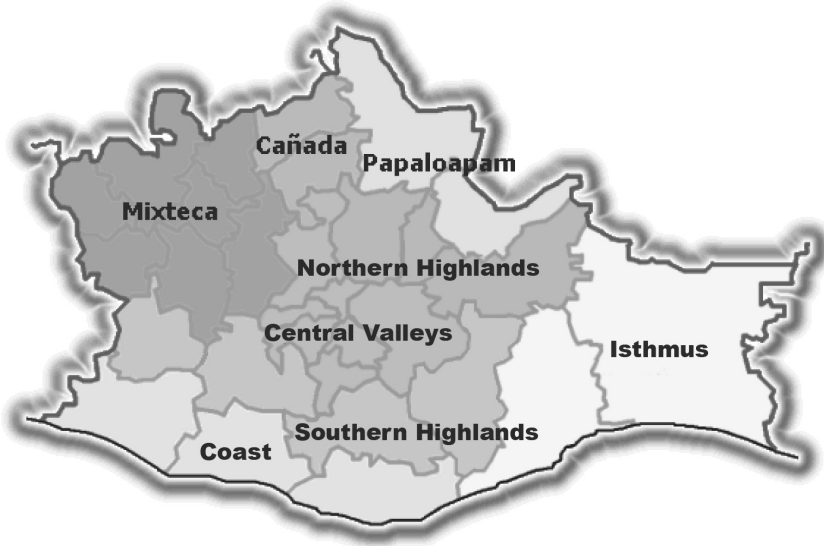
SANTIAGO MATATLÁN, OAXACA: A MIGRANT COMMUNITY

In some Mexican rural areas, migration (as a social phenomenon) is part of the local identity and is integrated into community practices that guide its socio-cultural development. In Oaxaca, the rural population accounts for some 52% of the total (Conapo, 2008), and migration has established itself as a socio-cultural practice that has favored, in some cases, the strengthening of traditional production systems. This is the case, for example, of mezcal in Santiago Matatlán. Currently and in Los Angeles, California, alone, there are 22 Oaxacan migrant organizations; this speaks of the strong bond between migrants and their communities of origin.

Matatlán is an indigenous name meaning “along or between nets”; it is comprised of the words *matlatl*, “net,” and *tlán*, “next to, or between.” The municipality belongs to the Tlacolula district, which was founded in 1575 and is located in the region of the Central Valleys. It has approximately 9,198 inhabitants; 53% are women and 47% are men (INEGI, 2005). Ethnically speaking it is predominantly Zapotec, and the marginalization and migration rates are “very high” and “high,” respectively. This is reflected in the projections made by the National Population Council (Conapo, 2005), which show that, by 2030, only 5,684 of the 9,198 inhabitants estimated for 2005 will be left.

Political organization is based on usages and customs inherited from the colonial era, though some changes have been made within this structure, as in the use of stand-ins for civic-religious duties. This means that a family member or friend can perform the civic duties corresponding to a migrant in his or her name. This way, traditional continuity is not lost and migrants continue to participate, even if indirectly, in communal obligations, because they shoulder the costs. This practice is well seen by the community and also benefits the migrant’s relatives.

Maps:
geographical location of Santiago Matatlán, Oaxaca.



Source: INAFED 2008.

The economic importance of mezcal production in Santiago Matatlán is illustrated by the fact that this town provides over 90% of the state's mezcal production, besides possessing approximately 70% of the state's traditional mezcal factories and 80% of the commercial brands. Similarly, if we take into account that manufacturing activity in Oaxaca in 2009 amounted to just 1.6% of production, the traditional industry of mezcal increases in importance, not only because of the profits (over 4 million dollars in 2008), but also because of the breadth of the geographical area it involves: seven political districts with 131 municipalities (23% of total state), 603 localities, and more than 490,745 inhabitants (Sánchez, 2005).

CASE STUDIES: RURAL MIGRATION AND PRODUCTIVE REORIENTATION

This paper presents four cases of mezcal producers. The information was gathered through in-depth interviews during fieldwork for a doctoral dissertation on "The indigenous peasant and economic market dynamics: implications of local mezcal production knowledge in terms of sustainable development." Below are the characteristics and immigration experience of the producers.

Producer A: 34 years old.

At least three generations of his family have been mezcal producers; he is the youngest (male) sibling and emigrated when he was 13. He followed his older brother and three cousins; the costs of transportation and border crossing were affordable to him and his family. He traveled by plane and truck; his crossing point was Tijuana and his destination the home of an aunt in Santa Monica, California. He failed his first crossing attempt and was deported. He had to remain in Tijuana for at least a fortnight before he tried again; the second time he was successful. This is the experience of the border crossing in his words:

-Q: And where did you cross?

-A: Around there in Tijuana, what they call Tecate. They did get us

on the first attempt. It feels bad alright, like you're a dog... We had almost escaped but a helicopter turned up and they flooded us with colored lights; I remember we could no longer see where to run. The lights were like...

-Q: Flares?

-A: Yeah, like lasers, and we got all confused.

-Q: And who did you go with?

-R: There were four of us; my brother, and three cousins. And so we got caught on our first attempt, were sent to jail and then to Tijuana again, until 15 days later we completed our trip, but it was easier before [...].

Producer A, personal interview

March 20, 2009

Santiago Matatlán, Oaxaca

For the crossing, they hired a *pollero* recommended by family members; the cost was \$500 USD. His stay in the United States lasted only seven months during which, commanded by his aunt, he attended high school and eventually worked in his uncle's restaurant. At that point, he did not have any plans or economic goals:

-Q: How long were you there?

-A: Not very long, I just went like on tour; I was a kid, wasn't thinking about money, not thinking about the future, or anything [...].

Producer A

This is important given that, lacking an economic plan or a development goal, migration did not significantly impact his economic views; he was not able to develop labor and economic skills that could later be applied to traditional mezcal production. Continuing with his story, he says that once he was ready to return to Santiago Matatlán, he asked his aunt to help him with the networks and paperwork needed for his return to the community. His aunt insisted he should stay in the United States and work again, but he chose to return home. It should be noted

that the family with which he and his brother lived in Santa Monica were immediate relatives on his mother's side. His uncle is one of the main mezcal producers in Santiago Matatlán, and continuously travels to Oaxaca to oversee production; he is also an active member of the various organizations of Oaxacan migrants in California, such as the Oaxacan Federation of Communities and Indigenous Organizations in California (Focoica), of which he has been president, as well as the network known as Paisanos Unidos de Matatlán.

Upon returning to Oaxaca, Producer A finished junior high while working in his father's mezcal factory, something he continued to do until he was 19 and got married. For eight years he worked for several mezcal producers, both in his community and the municipality of Tlacolula de Matamoros, where they promised good salaries and better working conditions, even though this did not happen. For these reasons as well as economic need, he decided to start his own factory and mezcal brand. For this, he borrowed the necessary equipment from relatives (his uncle and aunt in California) while he saved money to buy his own working as a day laborer.

Producer A spoke of having watched the success of other mezcal producers who, like him, did not have any additional economic resources but were able to save enough money through emigration, as well as acquire new knowledge and perspectives regarding mezcal production. With time, producer A has made the quality of his mezcal known. This has given him the opportunity to negotiate contracts for future purchase, ensuring the continuity of his production and, above all, economic stability for his family. He recently promoted his traditional mezcal production to German gastronomy students, who also documented his production process on film. He is currently arranging his brand name.

Producer B: 52 years old.

His family has been involved in the production of mezcal and the cultivation of maguey for more than three generations. He worked in the fields from an early age, helping his father with the planting of maguey and the herding of goats. He later went to the city looking for a higher income and other types of work. In his own words:

-Q: What encouraged you to make your own brand?

-A: If I told you my life... I started selling newspapers, popsicles in the evenings; around then I polished shoes at the Mitla cinema. I studied grade school in the school for adults, that's where I managed to finish my grade school; that helped me quite a lot. I grew up and lived in a ranch, and at 9 I already wanted to see what came after that [...].

Producer B, personal interview

April 4, 2009

Santiago Matatlán, Oaxaca

As he grew up, Producer B had the opportunity to work as a teacher in the adult school, but this work did not wholly please him and he declined the offer. He knew he was born for mezcal production, but he still left his father's mezcal business and, along with some friends and members of the community, went to work up "North" (the United States) when he was 18 years old. They traveled by train and truck, used the *pollero* most of the community employed for the crossing, and arrived in California. They found work on a ranch near San Diego thanks to already established Matatlán migrants. In his words:

-I had the opportunity of working as a teacher, but I didn't like it and I said: "now, what am I going to do?" Because I felt that I had a touch for this thing—mezcal—but I wanted to see more, keep looking. So I got it in my head to go work in the North, and there I learned; in fact, I realized why they are so productive and why they can be... Of course there is no similarity between Matatlán and the United States... We should at least try to change a little bit and I was lucky I got along well with my employer; it was like I had another family there, and had the opportunity of becoming legal, but I came back when the papers were being processed.

-Q: And why did you come back?

-A: What happened is that I was there when my dad died, and everything went haywire; so yes, I left everything and came back. According to me I was going to return in a week, and I never did [...].

Producer B

Producer B remained nearly five years in the United States, learned the language and how to use agro-industrial machinery, since the ranch where he worked produced apples that were packaged for sale. He started working as a laborer; because he quickly learned the language and had leadership skills, the owner of the ranch sheltered him and offered him the job of foreman. After a year and a half he was the head of all the laborers and controlled apple production; in the meantime, he learned about the mechanized process. Given his abilities to deal with staff and his understanding of quality standards, the owner of the ranch sought to legalize his U.S. residence. During his stay in the United States, Producer B sent \$100 USD to his family every two months, sometimes increasing the amount to 300 or 500 USD. Occasionally, he was able to send money for communal activities and built his personal savings. Back in Matatlán, and realizing his return to the United States would now be more difficult, he sought a way of making money since his savings were running out. He puts it this way:

-A: Money goes like water... What am I going to do? And I thought that I had to invest the little I had saved in something or else I'd end up penniless before I realized. The first thing I did was plant maguey in the fields my dad had left me, and that was what helped me.

-Q: You already knew how to plant maguey?

-A: Yes, well, that was my dad's work, it wasn't a novelty for me because I used to help him as child, and so I started slowly. I started working in rented mezcal factories, and for a time I delivered mezcal to the large companies in Matatlán and Tlacolula, to almost all those who bottled it. But the issue is staying apart, having your own factory. And so I was planting maguey in all my lands; this is what helped me, because there were moments where I no longer had to buy maguey to produce mezcal, I had my own. There I came up with the idea of making my own brand, but let's say I did this as a game more than anything else, just to see what would happen. I talked to other mezcal producers who sold retail and figured out how we could come together to form a single brand. And now, God be thanked, it's coming out. Suddenly we get small mezcal orders; small, but we get them. We are working 365 days a year; others work seasonally. Right now what we are also doing is storing [...].

Producer B

Upon returning, then, he sought to invest his money in an activity he already knew since childhood. Applying the knowledge, skills and practices developed in the United States, he was able to find a place among traditional producers and save to build a factory with modernized equipment; this allowed him to produce mezcal that met the market's quality standards. He also thought of organizing isolated producers and establishing a rural production society with more than 30 members, of which he is the president and legal and commercial representative. He currently has a registered mezcal brand and the national and international organic product certification. He has also started exporting his mezcal to Guatemala and Canada. Producer B actively participates in the commercial and quality decision-making process within the state and national mezcal industry, and attends various national and international fairs to promote his product. In addition, his knowledge of English has opened many commercial doors.

Producer C: 33 years old.

His family has been producing maguey and mezcal for two generations. When he was 22, he emigrated with a few friends. On his way to the border he made a brief stop in Ciudad Netzahualcóyotl, in Mexico State, where he lived with family members for a period of six months and worked in informal commerce to save money and pay the *pollero*. Once in Tecate, he had to wait 15 days to cross because the border patrol had begun a new monitoring scheme and the *pollero* charged \$100 USD more, for a total of \$750 USD. A total of twelve people crossed; five were Oaxacan (3 from Matatlán and 2 Mixtecs), and the rest came from other states of the Republic. He arrived at the home of some friends, and they already had a job ready for him.

He had worked in the fields and mezcal production in Oaxaca, but in Los Angeles he switched to construction. For four years he worked in the construction company of a U.S.-born Mexican. When there were no contracts he worked in the service industry, painting houses, fixing gardens, and even in a local bakery. He sent monthly remittances to his family for their daily expenditure. He escaped an immigration raid, but

two of his friends did not. This made him think of what he expected to get out of his stay in the United States. A colleague invited him to Chicago, where there was another large community of Oaxacans, but Producer C preferred to stay in Los Angeles.

Thus, after four years of working in construction and having saved enough money to pay for his return and invest the rest in something, he returned to Matatlán wanting to be with his family and work on his own thing. Already in Matatlán, he stopped plating maguey and producing mezcal, considering it a very slow and badly paid job. He purchased a truck to engage in the cultivation and commercialization of maize, beans and squash, since in this case production took less time and product mobility was increased, resulting in more work and money. When asked why he did not seek work in construction companies located in the state capital, he pointed out that there was almost no work and that, moreover, the pay was miserly, the sessions long and the equipment very bad. He preferred to work at his own pace with his own team in the field. Additionally, he already knew how to sell his product. On the other hand, when asked why he did not take up mezcal production again, he answered:

-A: Now I work in the field, I plant by Zapata ranch, in Mitla.

-Q: And where do you sell?

-A: Here in town; I also sell corn and green grass in Tlacolula.

-Q: And why did you not consider returning to mezcal production?

-A: Well, in truth, because mezcal has fallen a lot lately; the sales were just not good, one could not get the product sold. In addition, it is a hefty investment; even if you have money saved, how do you do this? Everything got hard for me, so I closed the factory and I devoted myself to the field.

-Q: And you did not think of renting your equipment?

-A: Well, in fact, my other brother has the equipment right now; he also has a factory, and he took the equipment; in fact, he's told me that whenever I want I can go make mezcal [...].

Producer C, personal interview
April 16, 2009
Santiago Matatlán, Oaxaca

Currently, this producer continues working in the field and as a day laborer for other producers; he also supports family and friends in the production of mezcal with work and equipment. He is thinking of buying a tractor. He has almost finished building his own house, because two years after he came back from Los Angeles he got married and now has a four-year-old child.

Producer D: 39 years old.

His family has worked on maguey and mezcal production for three generations. He emigrated when he was 17 years old, crossing via Tijuana. He left because, in 1988, many matatecos were leaving the country and an acquaintance who had emigrated told him of the opportunity of living in the United States. He felt encouraged and left with other members of the community. They arrived in Los Angeles and Oaxacan residents over there helped them find a place to live in; they rented an apartment between six of them. He attended the meetings of the Oaxacan migrants' associations and learned about the experiences of his countrymen.

One of the emigrants he met helped him get a job, and so he worked as a dishwasher at a restaurant for approximately two years. At the same time, he unsuccessfully tried to attend high school, and enrolled in an English course that put him in contact with more immigrants. He remembers two of his peers better than any others, one Chinese and the other Japanese. The three of them engaged in a sort of competition to see who mastered the language first. The restaurant job was quite strenuous; he worked under a very demanding French chef who wouldn't let them eat, sit, or go to the bathroom during working hours. In his own words:

I had an awful time at the restaurant, because there was this French chef who wouldn't let you eat, sit down or go to the bathroom... but hey, I think that, to a certain point, this was ok and I approached it in a positive way. Because this way I also learned, I became disciplined, and learned to work when one has to work [...].

Producer D, personal interview
July 15, 2009
Santiago Matatlán, Oaxaca

When asked what he had learned during his migration process, producer D replied:

I think it expanded my vision, because when you're in your place you often don't know what's happening, but when you go outside, when you leave, you get a little more vision; you think differently, you're more open, more communicative with people. I learned English, I learned many things; I liked my language more, I appreciated my house, my family, my identity, because I feel that the United States has no culture, no roots. Here we know where we come from and where we are going, there they don't [...].

Producer D

During his stay in Los Angeles he changed jobs twice but always stayed in the services area, until he became ill. Having no one to treat him, he decided to return to Santiago Matatlán. After more than three years, he returned to his community to recover physically. Although he had firmly considered returning to the United States to get back to his work, friends and school, once he recovered he began to reintegrate into the dynamics of the community: in the daily work of the *palenque*, working in the homes of other people, and as a vocalist in a musical group.

He married until he was 24 years old and finally decided to devote himself completely to mezcal production and sale. He thought that mezcal activity could provide greater economic stability as well as communal status. He rented a shop from his godmother and began to sell his mezcal. When asked about his job choices in the United States, he said:

When I arrived in the United States I didn't want to work in the field because, you know, you've been going to the fields since you were a boy and one gets tired; I used to shepherd before. This is why I chose an easier job, because working in the fields is harder work; but I am not one of those who go and grab the crowbar, I am one of those who think, what can I do, or sell; I want to do things [...].

Producer D

In 1997 he registered his own mezcal brand and bought some land to install a factory. He has certified his product so he can have full access to the market and is looking to diversify by developing mezcal “creams.” Also, since he used a computer and managed Internet sales in the U.S. restaurant, he sought to create a website to publicize his product around the world. He currently promotes his mezcal in national and international fairs and actively participates in the commercial and quality standard decisions of the mezcal industry; he has had managerial positions in the Oaxacan Board of Mezcal.

CONCLUSIONS

When the term migration is mentioned, people commonly associate it with the mobilization of people as well as economic resources. However, they rarely consider the transmission of knowledge, experiences, skills, technologies and, above all, the changes that take place at the level of representation, symbolism and identity. It is therefore paramount that underdeveloped countries like Mexico (where emigrants are mostly rural) study the effects of migration on the social, cultural and productive structure of rural communities, which could become catalysts of regional development based on innovation and the upgrading of traditional production systems. This way, migration could become a source not only of economic resources for the community, but also a tool that generates a change in the economic rationality of rural villagers.

Productive inclusion policies should be established for returning migrants and productive projects should be developed jointly with them. This way they can exploit and take advantage of all the knowledge, skills and techniques developed during their migration process while, on the one hand, strengthening the economic structure of their community and, on the other, developing as agents of change. In this sense, our research confirmed that producers who migrated share some personality traits: they are extroverted, enterprising individuals, take on risks and challenges, like competitiveness and continuous work, are willing to learn new things, and seek innovation.

In the four case studies, the whole migration process (emigration, return and reintegration) was characterized by the continuous transmis-

sion of knowledge and resources through social networks established by other migrants as well as family, which facilitated migratory success. In this sense, the “circular” migration practiced by the majority of rural residents in Mexico in some cases encourages the reorientation of traditional productive thinking towards the modern and the global market. The important thing is that, when exposed to totally different socio-cultural, technological and economic conditions, the traditional producer develops (in some cases) new mental patterns that lead to a reinterpretation of communal reality and a search for new development alternatives. This should be vital for the nation-state: engaging the largest possible number of returning migrants and assisting them in their productive integration, since that process can yield positive results for local development.

On a case by case basis, we can see that the migration experience of Producer A did not greatly influence him toward a socio-cultural and productive change regarding market-oriented dynamics. It would seem that the brevity of his stay in the United States, his young age and lack of a goal-oriented migration increased his resistance to change and strengthened, on the other hand, the influence of the productive tradition. That said, his emigration period made him aware of the importance of education, and the value of his cultural and productive identity. It also allowed him to enter external social networks that he subsequently used to develop his productive activities, even if in a traditional way. Currently, his production is gradually shifting toward a business approach based on the fulfillment of quality standards and formal entry into the Mexican Council for the Regulation of the Quality of Mezcal.

In the same way, he strengthened his productive identity, taking advantage of the tradition and making it an added value of his product (currently, he promotes a variety of mezcal that is considered typical in the region of Santiago Matatlán: chicken breast mezcal). He promotes this productive activity among his children, integrating them into the production dynamics: from the planting and care of the maguey, to the distillation and bottling of mezcal. He also considers education to be key to the social and economic development of his children. It should be noted that 2010 was a very hard year for this producer: his youngest son (8 years old) died in a party accident and this sapped his desire to con-

tinue their productive activity, because his son collaborated with him every day after school. Nevertheless, he participated in the mezcal fair held in Santiago Matatlán and has signed a contract with an intermediary who promotes his product in restaurants and bars of Oaxaca City.

In the case of Producer B, migration completely determined his sociocultural structure, leading to important changes in his productive activity—especially having learned and developed leadership, productive organization and marketing skills, which deeply sensitized him toward the use of technology and modern machinery in the production of mezcal. Moreover, his knowledge of another language has allowed him to expand his business strategies. His new productive vision and leadership allowed him to gather more than 30 producers and form a single company, which he controls. Thus, his migration experience became a tool for community development in Matatlán, in addition to turning him into an agent of change who strengthens the sustainability of mezcal production.

The experience of Producer C entails new elements regarding the reorientation of productive activity: before emigrating, his main activity was the production of mezcal but, upon returning, he turned to the production and marketing of corn, beans and squash for the local and regional markets. This change in productive activity could be explained because, during his stay in the United States, he worked in jobs that put him in contact with better salaries; most likely, he got used to a more dynamic productive activity, where work and wages had a shorter cycle than that of traditional mezcal production. This shows that not all migration experiences exclusively strengthen productive communal traditions but might, in some cases, weaken them (decreasing the number of producers) while creating or strengthening new productive practices that involve a greater economic dynamism and benefit the community. It should be noted that Producer C is planning improvements to his equipment and tools to expand his participation in the primary product market.

Migration changed Producer D's socio-cultural and labor approaches, for he proved to himself he could work in activities outside the field and do so well. Learning English allowed him to improve his job position and acquire new knowledge and skills in staff management, customer service, work discipline and compliance, as well as the effectiveness of

diversifying the product and marketing channels. Upon returning, he worked in productive activities other than mezcal production, but when he required greater economic stability he went back to mezcal, since that was the family activity. There he was able to implement and take advantage of what he had learned. His leadership, entrepreneurial attitude and modern approach to this activity facilitated his entrance and differentiation in local production, turning him into a key player and agent of change in Oaxacan mezcal production.

We can therefore say that migration, as a social phenomenon, is an inexhaustible source for the transmission of economic, human and technological resources and, above all, provides rural migrants (and not only them) with the elements needed to foster a socio-cultural and productive change. In some cases, it can develop agents of change who update socio-cultural structures and inject dynamism, innovation and modernity into the traditional productive structures, gradually bringing them into a market dynamics that generates more profits. However, it is essential that this new knowledge and skills, along with the change in vision, be linked to real opportunities for productive community development. Only this way will a strategy of sustainable community development be created from migration.

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