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Article

Migrant Remittances and (Under)Development in Mexico

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Abstract ■ This article examines two heuristically defined positions regarding the relationship between international migration and rural economic development in Mexico: the 'structuralist' or 'historical structuralist' position of the 1970s and early 1980s that argued that remittances do not lead to rural economic development; and the 'functionalist' position of the 1990s that argued the opposite. The author critiques systematically the functionalist position, then situates it politically in the context of failed neoliberal economic policies. He argues for the need to study international migration as a total social process, that takes into account the comparative impact of migrant labor on the US and Mexican economies. Despite its subordination of social actors to determining social structures, the structural approach offers a better starting point for a reformulated approach to the social and economic consequences of international migration in the contemporary world.
Keywords ■ economic development ■ globalization ■ Mexico ■ migration ■ remittances

Remittances and rural development

Serious efforts to investigate the development role of migrant remittances in rural Mexican communities did not really begin until the 1980s, on the cusp of what became a two-decade (thus far) economic crisis. Influenced by dependency and world systems approaches, the first case studies to be published manifested skepticism that migration could play a positive role in rural development. Working in different areas of western Mexico's historic migration belt, Josua Reichert, Raymond Wiest and Richard Mines agreed that large influxes of US-generated dollars distorted rather than developed rural economies, exacerbating social conflict, economic differentiation and price inflation, and contributing to a vicious cycle in which migration begot more migration. Their conclusions were not seriously challenged until the mid-1990s, when another group of researchers, among them Douglas Massey, Jorge Durand and Richard Jones, offered a rosier portrait of migration's role in rural Mexican development.

In the interim the negative impact of the Mexican economic crisis drove a steady stream of peasants and workers – swollen now by students,

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school teachers and even middle-class professionals – to seek their economic fortunes in El Norte; once employed and free of the debts they often contracted to pay for the trip, they began to remit dollars back to Mexico. A few numbers convey the speed and magnitude of the migration-remittance process. From less than a billion dollars in 1980, remittances increased to an estimated $2 billion in 1990, then practically doubled to between $3.6 billion and $3.7 billion dollars in 1995 (García, 2000a: 313; Lozano, 1993: 58),[1] ranking Mexico first among remittance-receiving countries in Latin America and fourth in the world after France, India and the Philippines (Castro and Tuirán, 2000: 319). By 1996, when remittances reached $5 billion, an estimated 5.3 percent of Mexican households and 10 percent of households located in communities of less than 2500 people were recipients of remittance income during the year (2000: 320–1). According to Arroyo and Berumen (2000: 344), remittances represent an average of 54 percent of income for 5 percent of Mexican households. For many economically strapped rural communities remittances constitute 75, 80 or even 90 percent of local income.

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The narrowing (disappearance in some cases) of rural employment alternatives probably has something to do with researchers' tendency to take a more positive view of remittances, although in the penultimate section of this article I will suggest that a shift in global politics also played a role. As the Mexican government reduced or eliminated consumer subsidies, refocused credit on capitalist enterprises and privatized state enterprises (Appendini, 2001; Prud'homme, 1995), remittance incomes became one of the few sources of investment capital for hundreds of thousands of rural households. In reassessing their potential, a number of investigators argued that earlier work had grossly underestimated remittances' positive contribution to rural economic development and had unfairly represented international migration as the source of numerous social ills. They re-evaluated the direct productive role of remittances and factored in the indirect or multiplier effects of remittance-based consumer spending. Finally, they disputed 1980s arguments that remittances sharpen local class divisions and conflicts, or that through commercial networks they become concentrated in urban areas, where they enter as another factor increasing wage and employment gaps between city and countryside.

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From my point of view the revisionist perspective on migration and remittance involves another effort to put a happy face on a dismal situation rather than investigate the effects and contradictions of, or resistance to, neoliberal economic policy, which is taking an enormous toll on households and communities in rural Mexico. In developing my critique I provide alternative interpretations of some of the same data used to support the remittance development arguments. I also argue that any consideration of the economic impact of remittances in Mexico requires that we employ a comparative approach that contemplates, as well, the impact of Mexican migrant spending on the US economy. On the whole I believe that the debate around remittances and development has been misconstrued as a result of a narrow focus on economic issues, and that it is more productive to orient case studies of migration in rural areas around the transformations of local and regional social fields and the conflicts surrounding struggles over new forms of hegemony. Beyond sheer economic need – which is internalized in particular cultural-ideological ways – changing values and expectations are also implicated in the deepening and expansion of migrant circuits through which a continuous flow of cheap Mexican labor makes itself available to US capitalists. However, before engaging recent (1990s) work it is important that we review several of the influential case studies of the 1980s, which often took a dependency or neo-Marxist approach to migration and rural development.

Take note

The migration syndrome

Writing in 1981, Josua Reichert observed that, despite much conjecture, 'little is known about the effects of seasonal US migration in Mexico, particularly in rural areas which, due to lack of employment opportunities, chronic land shortages, and low wages, have historically been characterized by high rates of out migration' (1981: 56). In several publications, Reichert (1981, 1982) offered an interpretation of the impact of remitted incomes on 'Guadelupe' (actually Yerbabuena), Michoacán, a poor farming community with a history of US migration that extended back to at least 1911. Reichert divided Guadelupe's population into three groups: 'legal migrants' with valid immigration papers, 'illegal migrants' lacking migratory documentation and 'nonmigrants', who remained in Guadelupe sowing corn or pursuing some other economic activity. Because they could cross the border at will and move freely within the US labor market, legal migrants earned about twice as much money on average in the United States as illegal migrants, who were subject to smugglers' charges, periodic deportation and frequent unemployment (1981: 57–8, 1982: 412–13). Reichert's survey of housing stock and access to consumer goods indicated that legal migrants occupied the highest economic stratum in Guadelupe followed by illegal migrants; with the exception of a few large landowners, nonmigrants tended to be the poorest people in town and 'consider themselves fortunate if they simply break even and are not forced to borrow cash or grain to make it through the year' (1981: 58).

Reichert argued that migrants spent the majority of remittances unproductively on house construction and improvement, vehicles, electronic apparatuses, and weddings and other celebrations. Legal migrants were the principal contributors to community potable water, sewerage and other infrastructural projects, but as the owners of most of the houses fitted with internal plumbing, they benefited disproportionately from many of the projects they helped finance. Legal migrants invested in land, purchased from debt-ridden, nonmigrating peasants, which they rented out or used to pasture a few head of cattle, since intensive cultivation would have interfered with their frequent trips to the United States. As dollars flowed into the community competition for land intensified, driving land prices beyond the means of most nonmigrant farmers. According to Reichert, legal migrants represented 18 percent of households, but they owned 60 percent of the agricultural land (1981: 61–2). Reichert also explained how social tensions developed between economically privileged legal migrants and others too poor to exchange the favors and gifts that had become key means of positioning oneself in the local status hierarchy:

> The majority of non-migrants, along with many illegals, felt incapable of relating to legal migrants as social equals because of their disadvantaged economic status. As a result, many townspeople regarded themselves as members of a subordinate and disadvantaged class, denied access to respectability and fulfilling social roles by their low standard of living. (1982: 420)

In the past, according to Reichert, Guadelupanos explained poverty as the result of fate. However, with the option of migration, most people considered that even the most impoverished residents could improve their lot in life if they exercised the proper initiative and that 'failure to do so was regarded as an individual shortcoming' (1982: 420). With visible rewards of success and moral sanctions for failure, it is not surprising that the town's young people came to view international migration in positive terms. Most youth stated that they planned to emulate their fathers and to become labor migrants to the United States rather than pursuing further education in preparation for work or a career in Mexico (1981: 64).

Reichert concluded that the majority of Guadelupe's households had become dependent on the income from migration, and trapped, perhaps unknowingly, in a vicious cycle in which only migration provided the means for sustaining the very materially improved lifestyles that the remittances had made possible. Hence Reichert characterized US migration from Guadelupe as a 'syndrome': migrants were like addicts, dependent on dollars, and, in order to obtain them, on US labor migration (1981: 63–4).

Anthropologists working elsewhere in Mexico arrived at similar conclusions (Mines, 1981; Stuart and Kearney, 1981; Wiest, 1984). For instance, Raymond Wiest (1984) showed how national and international migration from Acuizio, another rural Michoacán town, was accompanied by material improvement, migration-based socio-economic divisions, invidious comparison, inflated land prices and declining corporate kin group control over resources. Wiest (1984: 125) stated that multiplier effects from the expenditure of US income went mainly to urban areas that offered the 'modern' goods and services that migrants had come to expect. He characterized local employment in construction and brick and roof tile production as 'temporary, sporadic, and totally dependent upon continuation of migratory labor' (1984: 126), and observed that most people agreed that ‘migration provides the only way to improve one’s standard of living’ (1984: 121):

> All the migrants I interviewed expressed the desire or intention to earn enough to establish themselves in agriculture or a business in Acuizio or nearby Morelia. Yet they return year after year for the relatively high wage of a US job. In this way they are able to afford the increasing costs of a higher standard of living . . . and to enjoy the leisure and prestige of an annual vacation in the home village. (1984: 119)

Without doubt the most exhaustive case study of the economic impact of migration is Richard Mines’s detailed examination of Las Animas, Zacatecas, another farming community located in Mexico’s western migration belt (Mines, 1981). Over a two-year period in the late 1970s Mines gathered information in Las Animas and in four US settler communities in northern and southern California. Mines documented a wide variety of migratory patterns practiced by Amineños, including several forms of shuttle migration, as well as urban and rural settlement in the United States, and he was the first researcher working in Mexico to highlight the crucial role of local and extra-local social networks as sources of migration financing, information about the United States, and housing and job assistance at the US destination. He also documented the movement of some migrants from unskilled agricultural work into semi-skilled work in urban industry or service sectors, and noted how higher pay and urban living was often accompanied over time by the purchase or construction of a house and a tendency towards permanent US settlement (Mines, 1981: 51–3, 87–9, 117–20, 137–46).

While Mines added new insights to our understanding of the process and experience of migration, none of his basic conclusions contradicted those of Reichert or Wiest. In Las Animas, as in Guadelupe and Acuitzio, remittances were generally consumed rather than invested and contributed to social and economic differentiation, inflation in land prices and the concentration of land in the hands of well-off migrants, local labor shortages and an overall ‘decline in village output’ (1981: 157; cf. 130–6). Whereas most middle-aged and older migrants in the United States looked forward to returning home, younger migrants tended to adopt an ‘ “immigrant” outlook’ accompanied by ‘a tendency to become “Chicanoized” in dress, taste in music and entertainment’ (1981: 104). Mines concluded that Las Animas ‘provides a concrete example of a community whose economy has been distorted by migration flows’ (1981: 155), and that international migration should be seen as ‘a double edged sword – it allows Mexicans to achieve higher living standards, but also makes them dependent on continual access to the US for the maintenance of these standards’ (1981: 157). A re-study of Las Animas ten years later by a researcher with a transnational as opposed to structuralist orientation showed that the situation had changed little (Goldring, 1990).

Migradollars and development

During the 1990s some investigators drew more positive conclusions about the developmental potential of remittances. Indeed, beginning in the mid-1980s, the dominant paradigm began to shift from what Jones (1995: 6–10, 12–16, 27) represented as a ‘structuralist position’ (more often called ‘historical structuralist’, see Goldring, 1990: 139) – which saw remittances as fomenting migration dependency, income inequality and social deterioration – to a ‘functionalist position’, in which remittances are invested in agriculture and human capital, and circulate through localities and regions in ways that help reduce both rural–urban and regional income disparities.[2] Categorizing the large number of studies as either structuralist or functionalist elides differences among them that a more nuanced reading would likely reveal. It also creates a pseudo-intellectual justification for assessing migration as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ as regards its development potential – ‘good’ if migration serves as an impulse to development, ‘bad’ if it does not – rather than analyzing it as a complex social process, part of a larger field of cross-national or transnational social relationships. However, Jones does point to a paradigm shift with important consequences for framing the relationship between international labor migration and development. For heuristic purposes, therefore, I adopt his typology.

Those whom Jones locates in the functionalist camp argued that migration promotes development in the following three ways. First, they provide both case study and survey information to the effect that the productive investment of migrant remittances has been underestimated, that is, that the capital used to finance many rural (and some urban) businesses in Mexico derives from monies earned in the United States. Second, they argue that even nonproductive expenditure of remittances (on food, clothing, consumer durables, etc.) generates multiplier effects as US-generated monies circulate through the Mexican economy. Indeed, the overall impact of remittance multiplier effects on job creation and economic growth is probably several times greater than that of direct migrant investments. Third, functionalists argue that because most migrants come from poor, rural areas and from marginalized social and economic sectors therein, remittances reduce class, regional, and rural–urban income disparities, in this way contributing to more balanced economic growth. In the next three sections I will examine each of these positions and some of the studies on which they have been based. I then attempt to place the ‘structuralist’–‘functionalist’ shift in the context of global economic and political transformations, and conclude with a brief discussion of the contribution of labor migration to the formation of a new international proletariat.

The productive investment of remittances

Some investigators acknowledge that only a small percentage of remittances are invested productively, but maintain that the percentage reaches significant levels at specific times and places. For instance, Durand (1994: 185–238) provides case study data indicating that remittances played an important role in developing San Francisco del Rincón, located in the Jalisco Highlands (Altos de Jalisco), into a dynamic center of small to mid-size clothing, shoe and furniture manufacture.[3] Similarly, Richard Jones (1995: 119–25) argues that residents of Jerez, central Zacatecas, used money saved while working in southern California peach orchards to establish the base for what became a vibrant peach industry in that Mexican municipality. Another group of US migrants financed grape and broccoli production in nearby Luis Moya. In these cases, and others as well (Durand, 1994: ch. 6), successful migrants invested US savings so as to transform themselves from proletarians or semi-proletarians in Mexico and migrant wage laborers in the United States into independent petty producers or petty capitalist farmers and manufacturers. Indeed, most authors of empirical case studies of migration generally mention one or more stories of successful migrants, who parlayed money earned in the United States into a successful business in the home community.

The issue, however, is less whether such cases exist – for they certainly do – but as to their frequency and the duration of their success. Durand himself has stated that the development potential of remittances depends on the local economic opportunity structure, which in the case of large areas of rural Mexico is extremely limited (Durand, 1994). Probably closer to the norm than the cases recorded by Durand in Jalisco and Jones in Zacatecas would be the resource-poor, indigenous community of Xoyatla, located in the Valley of Izucar de Matamoros, Puebla, whose residents began to migrate to the United States in the late 1970s. Apart from consumption and ceremonial expenditures, early US migrants purchased transport vehicles (*combis*) and established small stores (*tiendas*). However, within 15 years the local market demand for consumer and transport services had been saturated; by agreement among the owners, each truck or van limited operations to a few days each week, and each new house-front store that opened tended to be accompanied by the closure of another (Binford, 1998).

Even the success cases in Zacatecas manifest limits. For instance, the net migration rate in the peach-producing municipality of Jerez *increased* from –24.5 to –35.7 per thousand between 1990 and 1995, and the area remains a leading statewide source of migrants to the United States (Padilla, 2000: 364). More generally, the state's ranching sector stagnated over the last decade, mining output grew but consolidation and technification contributed to a net reduction in mining employment, industry is limited to a few dozen *maquiladoras*, and subsistence agriculture is in a serious crisis as a consequence of declining state assistance and rising foreign competition (Delgado, 1999; García, 2000b). Only a small percentage of the 9100 new entrants into the labor market obtain work in the state (Delgado and Rodríguez, 2000: 375). Rodríguez (1999: 125) notes that during much of the 20th century, seasonal migration of male household heads to the United States combined with the small-scale cultivation of subsistence and cash crops to enable most Zacatecan households to survive most of the year in Mexico. This is being replaced by a 'new migratory pattern' characterized by a broader spectrum of participants (sons and daughters, unmarried youth and, recently, married persons who migrate with their entire families) more inclined toward permanent US residence. On the basis of a nine-community survey, Rodríguez (1999: 134) concluded that only 3 percent of remittances were directed toward some type of investment, 'which in the majority of cases does not go beyond the sphere of the family'. It is difficult to imagine a Mexican state with a *worse* climate for small scale investors: a moribund economy, low educational levels, a poorly developed transportation network and a sparse population distributed among hundreds of small, rural communities.

As an alternative to the case study approach, Massey and Parrado (1998) analyzed 'ethnosurvey' data gathered from 5653 households in 30 communities in western Mexico during the winter months of 1982–3 and 1987–92. A new business was formed in about 2 percent of the person-years under study (1998: 9); on average, US earnings initially capitalized 21 percent of the businesses listed in the sample (1998: 12). Multiple regression analysis indicated that the likelihood of investing remittances remained low during the first years of migration – during which migrants paid travel costs and met basic needs for food, clothing and housing construction – but increased thereafter (also see Jones, 1995: 74–6). The authors developed a profile of those migrants and migrant communities in which business formation was most likely: young, well-educated household heads who possessed occupational skills, were home-owners married to well-educated spouses, and lived in communities characterized by high levels of self-employment, wages and industrial development (Massey and Parrado, 1998: 11).[4] About half the businesses (49 percent) were in the retail sector, and most were small and generated little employment. The authors explain that:

> . . . [this] has little to do with the process of migration itself [but] it is because entrepreneurs in their circumstances (personal, household, community and national) tend to form small establishments, irrespective of whether they have been to the United States or sent money home. It reflects the opportunities open to them rather than any dependency-promoting effect of international migration per se. (1998: 18; see Massey et al., 1987: 231)[5]

Massey and Parrado align themselves with 'a number of other researchers . . . who view international migration as a key source of productive capital and a dynamic force promoting entrepreneurial activity, business formation, and economic growth not only in Mexico, but around the world' (1998: 19). However, one commentator on the article pointed out that the 'dynamic force' represented by migration-generated incomes has not attenuated migration:

> [T]he same Mexican communities that sent young men to the United States in the 1940s are sending young men to the United States in the 1990s, despite remittance-inspired business formation; some evidence, in fact, suggests that emigration pressure has increased rather than decreased in these communities. (Martin, 1998: 29)

Discussion of remittances and development is marred by competing conceptions of 'investment'. A narrowly economic conception restricts investment to the purchase of means of production, raw materials and labor power, regardless of whether these are put to work producing use values (consumed by the domestic group) or commodities (goods exchanged on the market). Monies used to purchase land, commercial transport vehicles, tools, seed, fertilizer, etc. qualify as investment. Such investments seldom represent more than 10 percent of total remittances. Other investigators either group education, housing and health care with consumption expenditures or place them in one or more categories apart (Castro and Tuirán, 2000: 328–9; Delgado and Rodríguez, 2000: 378). Jones (1995: 74–6) employed a threefold division of 'consumption', 'mixed consumption/investment' and 'investment'. He found that in central Zacatecas migrants directed almost 25 percent of remittances to the 'mixed' category, consisting of maintenance/improvement of human capital, home purchase/construction and community projects. This doubled the percentage dedicated to investments. Conway and Cohen (1998: 33) included under the investment rubric all funds used to finance 'productive strategies', defined so broadly that they excluded only food and clothing purchases.

The terminological confusion makes clear the need to distinguish between investment with the potential to yield some benefit – whether social, economic or even psychological – and a narrower conception of 'productive investment' limited to purchase of means of production, raw materials and labor power with the object of producing either use values (food or clothing for domestic consumption) or commodities. An obvious difficulty concerns the reassignment of consumption goods, such as a home or personal vehicle, to a productive use (workshop, store or taxi) at some point in time subsequent to its purchase. On the other hand, a productive asset such as a workshop, storefront or vehicle may be appropriated at a later point in time for purely personal use (a living area, personal transportation) if it fails to generate utility. Only repeated surveys of the same households or long-term ethnographic study will make it possible to specify such modifications in use. In the absence of such studies a conservative approach to 'investment' would seem advisable.[6]

The multiplier effects of remittances

A second approach to remittances and development focuses on the indirect effects of remittances as they circulate through local, regional and national economies. Here the immediate destination of remittances – invested or consumed – matters less than the multiplier effects they generate as a result of the increased demand (demand in excess of that which would exist in their absence) that results from their circulation. Durand et al. (1996) estimated that, in 1990, migrant households invested productively only $84 million (4.2 percent) of the approximately $2 billion in remittances that, according to them, entered Mexico. $84 million is a considerable sum of money; used to purchase irrigation pumps, sewing machines, cattle, carpentry tools and other items, it could significantly raise the productive output of thousands of households and small businesses. However, the figure pales when set against the $1916 million used to meet household consumption, through which 'migrants and their families increase the demand for goods and services produced in Mexico, which causes Mexican entrepreneurs to increase their investments in plants, equipment, and labor in order to meet the additional demand' (1996: 427).

According to the authors, the purchase of food or clothing with dollars earned in the United States – presuming that the goods were produced in Mexico – translates into increased demand, met through the productive consumption of additional raw materials, machinery and labor power. When workers involved in the production of these goods then spend *their* salaries, the multiplier effects increase and with them the contribution of remittances to economic growth: 'In the end, the indirect effects of migradollars may equal or exceed their direct effects' (1996: 425). Even seemingly frivolous expenditures on beer, fireworks, candles, music, decorations, etc., widely consumed in personal and collective ritual, will have multiplier effects to the extent that the products are produced in Mexico with Mexican raw materials and labor power, which, according to the authors, they usually are. On the basis of this logic, Durand et al. argue as follows:

> By focusing narrowly on the large share of migradollars spent on consumption . . . prior research has grossly undervalued the role of US earnings in promoting economic development within Mexico. By ignoring the varied and substantial multiplier effects of consumer spending, investigators have failed to appreciate how migradollars contribute to growth indirectly as they work their way through national, regional and local economies. As a result of these deficiencies, the prevailing picture of Mexico–US labor migration is far too pessimistic. (1996: 425)

The authors use formulas developed by Adelman and Taylor (1992) to estimate the indirect or multiplier effects of remittances. At the beginning of the 1990s, every remitted dollar generated an additional $2.90 of gross domestic product and increased national production by $3.20. Durand et al. conclude that in 1990, the $2 billion in remittances – well below

Lozano's (1993) estimate of $3.15 billion – generated an additional $6.5 billion in economic activity, equal to 10 percent of the value of manufactured goods and 3 percent of gross domestic production.

The authors extended their study to the local level by examining multiplier effects in three western Mexican communities. They arrived at the same conclusions: indirect effects of remittances on income are several times greater than direct effects. In the three communities – La Yerbabuena, Chavinda and Ario, all located in Michoacán – multiplier effects accounted for between 51 and 93 percent of local income. For example, the $499,000 returned by migrants to La Yerbabuena, population 2240, translated into an average of $222 per capita. However, adding in the $887,000 that resulted from multiplier effects raised the total 'remittance effect' to $1.234 billion or $551 per capita. As I mentioned above, La Yerbabuena is the community discussed by Reichert under the pseudonym 'Guadelupe'.

Durand et al. present a strong argument for the multiplier effects of remittances in the Mexican economy. But they do not deem it important to compare such multiplier effects with the analogous ones produced by migrant investment and spending in the United States. Presumably, this is because they view *development* as a local, regional and/or national, as opposed to comparative international, phenomenon, and *migration* as a social process that escapes purely economic determination (Massey et al., 1994). Migrant economic activity in the United States is relevant to development in Mexico *only* insofar as the structural position of Mexican migrants in the US economy affects their ability to generate remittances (see Goldring, 1990, and Mines, 1981 for examples). The social process or network perspective on migration, first proposed by Mines (1981) but taken up and elaborated by Massey et al. (1987) a few years later, is a major contribution to our understanding of Mexican migration. However, the social process theory involves a series of concepts that mediate without eliminating or replacing the primacy of economic factors. Those factors remain crucial, as evidenced by the rapid extension of migration to previously unincorporated regions of the center and center-south of Mexico following the 1980s economic crisis. International migration from selected rural communities in Puebla state increased from a base of zero to incorporate between 30 and 50 percent of the adult population over a short span of 15 to 20 years (Binford, 1998). Information about changes in the opportunity/cost structure of the US economy – relative to that in Mexico – travels almost instantaneously from US sites of reception to Mexican sites of expulsion (e.g. Pries, 1999; Smith, 1997). On this basis I think it useful to discuss briefly the potential direct and indirect impacts of monies spent by migrants in the United States, or those that are returned to the United States from Mexico in the form of profits of transnational firms or as payment for US-produced goods or goods that contain value added in the United States. Mexican labor benefits the US economy in at least three ways:

1. Migrants living and working in the United States purchase food, housing, clothing and health and recreational services produced in that country. Arroyo and Berumen (2000: 344) estimate that of every dollar earned by Mexican migrants in the United States, 71.7 cents remains in the host country and 28.3 cents is remitted to Mexico.[7] This means that seven migrant dollars are spent on food, shelter, travel, recreation, etc., generating the same kinds of multiplier effects in the US economy as do the $3 repatriated to Mexico. Some repatriated dollars even 'leak' back to the United States when Mexican recipients purchase US imports or goods that contain value added in the United States. The Mexican import bill is rising for many basic subsistence goods, such as rice, wheat and milk powder. Between 1990 and 1995 imports as a percentage of consumption increased from 37.0 to 56.4 percent for rice and 8.7 to 31.3 percent for wheat (Fritscher, 1999: 241; see Schwentesias and Gómez, 2000). Corn and bean imports remain low at present, but they, too, will likely rise when the government eliminates Procampo farm subsidies in 2009.[8]

2. US banks and electronic wire services and other enterprises capture a portion of remittances through the transaction and other costs that migrants pay to use them. Much money remitted by migrants from the United States never reaches Mexico, or touches ground on Mexican soil only briefly because it goes to enrich US-based electronic wire services such as Western Union. Between 1994 and 1996 electronic transfers increased their share of remittance movements from 43.7 to 52.6 percent (while the share transferred by telegram fell from 25.5 to 16.7 percent).[9] High transaction fees charged migrant senders along with abysmally low rates of exchange forced upon recipients in Mexico allowed Western Union's Money Gram and other enterprises to rake off 15–20 percent or more of the gross amount. Complaints led to a US investigation of some of the companies involved as well as the development of a series of cheaper alternatives by Mexican state and federal governments and the United States Postal Service (García, 2000a; Kumetz, 1999; Levander, 1999).[10] Recently Western Union, Orlandi Value and Money Gram reached an out-of-court settlement in which they agreed to return $375 million to former clients for having exchanged remitted dollars at discriminatorily unfavorable rates (Cason et al., 2002).

3. Capitalist employers realize higher rates of surplus value as a consequence of the low average wages paid to Mexican migrant workers, and these swell the profits of capitalist enterprises employing them. Migrant workers are employed in a variety of productive (commercial farms, restaurants, factories, the building trades) and unproductive (grocery stores, fruit stands, lawn care firms) enterprises (Canales, 2000). In the former cases they surrender surplus value to capitalist employers; in the latter low wages often reduce the surplus value distributed away from commodity-producing firms as the cost of doing business. Surplus value that is converted into money (liquid form of value), placed in circulation, and

invested in the purchase of additional means of production and labor power generates multiplier effects. Since surplus value is invisible in the commodity form, and unacknowledged by neoclassical economists and neoclassically oriented social scientists who ascribe to a subjective theory of value and a market-based theory of price determination, it does not figure in calculations of migrant contributions to the US economy. Many US-based employers pay Mexican workers, especially undocumented ones, less than the social minimum for the particular job, leading to high rates of surplus value extraction.[11]

The impact of migrant activity on *comparative* economic development awaits more detailed (and sophisticated) analysis. I have attempted to provide a starting point from which we might investigate the hypothesis that significant portions of the value (necessary and surplus) created by Mexican (and by extension, non-Mexican) migrants working in the United States is channeled into US-based economic activity – strengthening capitalist enterprises there. It follows, then, that migrant labor makes a small, but no less real contribution to widening the economic gap between Mexico and the United States. That economic gap remains an important spur to present and future migration. As noted by Jorge Durand (1998: 72): '[T]he North remains a feasible and profitable alternative for young people, men and women, who are unable to find work in Mexico, or who, as they say: "to do the same thing here or there, better the United States, where one at least earns in dollars".'

motivos sociales

Remittances and inequality

Lastly, some recent investigators dispute earlier claims that international labor migration necessarily leads to increasing economic and social differentiation by widening the gap between a migrant elite with access to dollars and nonmigrants without such access. According to Jones (1998: 14), any consideration of the relationship between migration and income inequality must take account of migration stage and geographic scale. With respect to migration stage, Jones argued for a U-shaped curve, whereby communities with very low or very high levels of migration (measured at the community level by the percentage of households with active migrants or the total years of household migratory experience) exhibit growing local income inequality, whereas communities in the 'middle stages' of migration display declining inequality. Jones reasoned that the 'early adopters' (Innovation Stage), as he called them, of migration tend to come predominantly from middle economic sectors with the resources to finance the migrant's trip to the United States, and that migrant incomes would enable them to improve their economic position relative to that of nonmigrants. However, in the middle stage (Early Adopter Stage) migration spreads downward to poorer people, who take advantage of the growing social networks discussed by Massey et al. (1994) to enter the migrant stream, resulting in a greater dispersion of remittances and decline in income

a veces no es que vivan en situaciones precarias sino que ven la oportunidad de ganar aun más dejando menos oportunidad a quien si lo ocupa inequality relative to the Innovation Stage. Finally, as networks mature and the majority of households are drawn in (Late Adopter Stage), income inequality rises again as migrant households, now representing a significant proportion of all local households, benefit relative to a reduced group of nonadopters (Jones, 1998: 14). Jones concludes that earlier debates between structuralists who maintained that migration generated greater inequality and functionalists who argued the opposite position derived from the fact that investigators were basing their conclusions on the results of studies conducted in communities at different migration stages: structuralists examined communities at early or late stages, functionalists those at middle stages (Jones, 1995: 84).

Jones provides evidence for his position by comparing income inequality among four central Zacatecan communities at different migration stages, determined by the 'incidence', 'quantity' and 'antiquity' of migration.[12] None of the communities were in the Innovator Stage. Two fell into the Early Adopter Stage, which Jones divided into Early Adopter Stage, Phases I and II, and the other two into the Late Adopter Stage, again separated into Phases I and II. The results accorded with his prediction, *viz.*, income inequality decreased from Early Adopter Phase I to Early Adopter Phase II, then increased in Late Adopter Phase I and increased further in Late Adopter Phase II. An obvious weakness with this procedure, reluctantly acknowledged by Jones (1998: 22 fn 1) in a footnote, is the reliance on synchronic data to test claims about diachronic process. Even granting Jones's 'test' the benefit of doubt, it seems obvious that *if* migration increases and *if* migrants succeed in remitting dollars into a depressed rural economy, growing income inequality will eventually result – unless, of course, households from all economic strata are participating equally in the process (that is, participating in proportion to their presence in the community or region) and having comparable success. A socially and demographically diverse population, particularly under rural capitalism, virtually ensures that some households will have no potential migrants because they are composed exclusively of aged, infirm and childless couples and that, other circumstances taken as equal, migrant households will vary greatly in terms of the number of potential migrants as a function of demographic outcomes that are influenced but not determined by local socio-economic status (e.g. many or fewer children).

Likewise, Jones's (1995: 84, 97, 1998: 21–2) assertion that migration reduces regional and rural–urban income inequalities would be expected to hold as long as rural sending regions continue to receive a disproportionate amount of remittances and benefit from their investment/expenditure relative to urban populations, to which are channeled some of the multiplier effects.[13] However, continuing redistribution of population from rural to urban areas (toward mid-sized regional cities and the border areas) combined with a severe urban employment crisis casts doubt on the future dominance of rural areas as sources of US-bound migrants (see Corona, 1993: 758; for case studies of US-bound migration from urban Mexico see Cortés, 1997; Hernández León, 1997).

Putting aside for the moment local, regional and rural–urban income disparities, how might remittances impact on social class within Mexico? Durand et al. (1996) state that one of the advantages of remittances, compared to other forms of income generation, is that 'migradollars flow directly to the people who need them the most, without being filtered through intervening social and economic structures' (1996: 441). If we consider electronic wire services, telegraph offices and the mail system – along with police, judicial authorities and criminal gangs who often prey on migrants returning to Mexico – as part of 'social and economic structures', then the statement misrepresents many migrants' experiences. However, the authors' intended point seems to be that remittances are less subject than other forms of income to the lengthy chain of agrarian bureaucrats, rural bosses (*caciques*), merchant intermediaries and others who simultaneously enable and undermine the reproduction of peasants and rural workers. In their consideration of the multiplier effects of remittances, then, the authors sought to summarize, through Table 1, the sources of remittances and beneficiaries of indirect effects derived from them for 1990 (1996: 434).

The first horizontal line in Table 1 represents the value of remittances sent by various groups of migrants in 1990. The indirect effects on the incomes of each of six groups, two of which remit no money, are ranged below. As discussed earlier, $2 billion of remittances added an estimated $5.8 billion to the gross national product, of which $3.8 billion was accounted for by the multiplier effects of the expenditure of the original $2 billion. Every remitting group of persons received some indirect benefits, as indicated by the fact that the total effect of remittances exceeded the amount remitted. For instance, landless rural workers remitted an estimated $554 million but received a total (direct plus indirect) benefit of $682 million. Indirect effects varied significantly from one social category to another. Whereas the multiplier effect on some groups' income exceeded the average of $2.92 per dollar remitted, others received considerably less benefit. In order to draw out these relationships I have taken the liberty of recomposing the table, using the same data provided by Durand et al.

Table 2 reorganizes the information in order to facilitate comparison of direct and indirect benefits for each of the social categories listed in Table 1. Together landless rural workers and unskilled urban workers generated more than 60 percent of total remittances (1220 million of 2000 million), but realized less than 10 percent of indirect effects (354 million of 3837 million). As a result, each remitted dollar increased income only $1.23 and $1.33, respectively. Small peasants made out better than anyone else according to these data, and skilled urban workers approached the average. But the principal beneficiaries were agro-businesses and,

Table 1 Direct and Indirect Benefits Obtained by Various Groups of Mexicans in 1990 (all figures in millions of dollars)

	Group Sending Remittances				
	Landless rural workers	*Small peasants*	*Unskilled urban workers*	*Skilled urban workers*	*Totals*
Millions of dollars remitted:	554	62	666	718	2000
Total effects on the incomes of:					
Landless rural workers	592	1	51	38	682
Small peasants	88	73	99	66	326
Unskilled urban workers	71	7	741	73	892
Skilled urban workers	370	39	390	1105	1904
Agro-business	56	6	63	50	175
Capitalists	582	61	616	600	1859
TOTAL	1759	187	1960	1932	5838

Source: Durand et al., 1996, Table 2, p. 434

Table 2 Calculation of Direct and Indirect Benefits Obtained by Various Groups of Mexicans in 1990 (all figures in millions of dollars)

	Remittances (A)	*Total Effects on income (Direct + Indirect Effects) (B)*	*Indirect effects on income (B-A)*	*Effects per dollar remitted (B/A)*
Landless rural workers	554	682	128	1.23
Small peasants	62	326	264	5.25
Unskilled urban workers	666	892	226	1.33
Skilled urban workers	718	1904	1186	2.65
Agro-businesses	0	174	174	—
Capitalists	0	1859	1859	—
TOTAL	2000	5837	3837	2.92

Source: Calculated from Durand et al., 1996, Table 2, p. 434

especially, capitalists. (Why agro-businesses are considered separately from capitalists is not clear; at the least they should have been labeled ‘capitalist agro-businesses’.) Capitalists do not migrate and thus contribute no remittances, yet their control of means of production and of wage labor made it possible for them to appropriate 53 percent of the value of remittance multipliers. This may not have caused additional concentration of income and wealth above and beyond that which preceded it, but it did little to reduce income concentration either. But to expect a different result in a dependent capitalist economy would be utopian in the extreme.

Jones (1995: 118–19) provided an additional estimate of local income multipliers for various types of expenditure in 22 towns of central Zacatecas. Using multiple regression analysis he concluded that 100 pesos of remittances increased local income an additional 8 pesos beyond the original amount, compared to 1 peso for 100 pesos spent in private business and 32 pesos for every 100 pesos invested in local, commercial agriculture. Even though most remittances tended to be spent in the community where the receiving household resided (56 percent) or within the municipality (84 percent) (1995: 80–1), the low multiplier effects of remittances indicate that the vast majority of products purchased locally with remittance incomes were produced elsewhere and transported to the sale site. When merchants pay suppliers for goods bought from them with remittances, potential multiplier effects are transferred to urban areas, which concentrate wholesale commerce and industrial production. *Pace* the figures provided by Durand et al. (1996), the *principal* beneficiaries of remittance multipliers are the capitalist owners of commercial, manufacturing and agro-business concerns.[14]

Migration, development and politics

Any effort to estimate the size of remittances and their impact on a household, community or national economy, requires the investigator to argue from theoretically informed positions as to what counts as a remittance, how to categorize social actors (migrants and nonmigrants) and how to distinguish remittance as consumption from remittance as investment. In the last two decades, theoretical starting points have been influenced by the way that writers position themselves with respect to rural (and urban) social economies. Early 1980s critiques of the development potential of Mexico–US migration, manifest in the works of Reichert (1981, 1982), Wiest (1984), Stuart and Kearney (1981), Mines (1981) and others, coincided with a period of revolutionary upheaval in Latin America (Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, etc.) and the adherence on the part of many anthropologists and rural sociologists, especially in Latin America, to dependency, Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches that highlighted the costs and contradictions of social and economic relationships under capitalism. Indeed, several writers pursuing the structural approach to migration and development were influenced directly by dependency and/or world system approaches (Mines, 1981: 44; Wiest, 1984: 112–13).[15] A more positive attitude towards the developmental potential of remittances, which we have followed Jones in calling the 'functional' approach, developed in the wake of a continent-wide debt crisis, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the USSR, the failure of Latin American revolutionary movements to topple civilian-military governments (El Salvador, Guatemala), the rollback of the Nicaraguan Revolution, and the widespread implementation of structural adjustment and neoliberal policies forced on Latin America by the United States government, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Green, 1995; Guillén, 1997). In the context of these events and the growing intellectual hegemony of neoliberalism (Sader and Gentili, 1998), some social scientists (and many former revolutionaries) accepted the inevitability of capitalism and sought out a few bright spots in an otherwise depressing situation. The belief that the positive effects of international migration and remittances outweigh the negative ones is one such bright spot. Hence one gets the following defense of migration by Richard Jones (1998: 9):

> International remittances have not succeeded in reducing the worldwide income gap, despite the fact that they have remained high on a per capita basis. . . . Nor have remittance transfers fomented economic transformation and development in backward regions. The relevant question, however, is whether the families of these regions are better off with migration and migrant remittances than without them.

Dennis Conway and Jeffrey Cohen (1998: 41) offer a similar, weak endorsement of migration:

> Migration is problematic, but a necessary evil, perhaps. The 'stay-at-homes' in Santa Ana [Santa Ana del Valle, located in the Oaxaca Valley] are still vulnerable, the separated households are positively and negatively affected, and the remittances are not fundamentally revitalizing the local economy. However, the nonmonetary returns to remittances appear considerable for the many Santañero households incorporated into the Mexico–US circuits of migration and circulation.[16]

Both statements presume generalized and prolonged economic crisis, marked by an absence of local employment alternatives and, for residents of rural areas, a relative shutdown of the urban safety valve. This condition of limited economic options translates into a reduction of the opportunity cost of international migration.[17] Migration to the United States is 'positive', therefore (rather than 'negative', as argued by 1980s structuralists), because active migrant households (and even the community as a whole) are better off economically than they would have been had they not migrated. This is, of course, a modest claim compared to the stronger one, expressed by some functionalists, that migration *detonates* or *promotes* rural development.

I prefer to think of migration as contributing to economic development, at least at the local level, when the direct and indirect effects of migrant remittances help to structure local economic activity in such a way that the incidence of future international migration declines. That is, remittance investments – or the indirect effects of their expenditure – provide the basis for humane work conditions and a level of remuneration sufficient to sustain a dignified lifestyle. Many individual households and a majority of the households in a few resource-rich rural communities have used remittance monies to develop themselves economically, at least for a time. However, the overwhelming number (of households and communities) have not, and an increasing number have become caught up in the 'migrant syndrome' (Reichert), whereby international migration provokes more migration by providing the basis for an improved standard of living that can only be maintained via a constant flow of remittances.

It may well be that there currently exist few options to US migration for hundreds of thousands of Mexicans; but researchers are under no obligation to treat as a virtue that which many participants regard as an economic necessity. One could argue – and the argument would not be entirely incorrect – that more recent theorists have restored agency to rural Mexican subjects, whose migration decisions tended to be viewed as structurally determined by leftist-oriented anthropologists writing in the 1970s and early 1980s. However, by focusing so heavily on agency and backgrounding structure, many contemporary researchers come dangerously close to glorifying household economic strategy-making that is more structurally constrained now than at any point in recent memory. Furthermore, by placing such heavy emphasis on agency, which has its liberal democratic side ('We are all agents; we can all choose'), they often ignore or downplay the high social and psychological costs of international migration, particularly for undocumented migrants, their Mexican households and their communities. Robbery, rape, murder and accidental death on the border and elsewhere, loneliness, hyper-exploitation, drug and alcohol addiction, AIDS, violent crime, traffic accidents, racial and ethnic discrimination, and migrants' frequent abandonment of spouse, children and community in Mexico are documented hazards of migration, especially undocumented migration (see Castañeda, 2000; Cornelius, 2001; Eschbach et al., 1999; Fagetti, 2000; Malkin, 1999; Marroni, 2000; Pérez, 2001; Rivermar, 2000; Smith, 2001). Nonmigrants suffer such tragic events as well, and while they are not inevitable accompaniments to international migration, they follow frequently enough from the systematic racial and ethnic discrimination, cultural alienation, economic marginality and political criminalization experienced by Mexican migrants in the United States as to constitute an acknowledged risk of 'immigrant life on the margins' (Mahler, 1995) or, in the words of another author, 'the hidden faces of migration' (Pérez, 2001: 10).[18] When they occur, they have economic consequences for abandoned, widowed and orphaned family members, who must struggle to stay afloat without the financial assistance of one or more deceased, infirm, incapacitated or disappeared parents, children or spouses (Castañeda, 2000; Fagetti, 2000; Marroni, 2000; Rivermar, 2000). It should be clear that the economic consequences of migration *cannot* be treated in isolation from the social consequences.

Remittances and globalization

It could be argued that my critique of recent migration and development literature is misconceived because it remains predicated on nation states and national economies as fundamental units of analysis during a period when globalized markets, enterprises and even workplaces[19] have made those states and economies irrelevant. What does it matter, one might argue, whether migrant earnings are spent in the United States or remitted to Mexico, when many migrants creatively employ modern technology (telephone, jet planes, camcorders, ATMs and even the Internet) to construct and maintain 'dense social fields' (Goldring, 1996a: 69) over great geographical distances (see Pries, 1999; Smith, 1998 for discussion)?[20]

My response is that even in this 'globalized' world, not all social and geographical spaces are either equal or equally accessible to everyone. David Harvey (1989) noted how with the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation capital scours the globe, seeking out spaces with natural or social characteristics (skilled labor force, cheap raw materials, fertile soils, etc.) that can be adapted to the needs of short-term profit taking. By investing in some areas and disinvesting in others, capital reconfigures social and economic space, rendering economically redundant some populations while incorporating others in new ways, seeking to adapt to its needs the social and cultural configurations it encounters. It is the manufactured economic redundancy – a virtual war upon the poor – of growing sectors of the rural (and urban) Mexican population that explains why the legalization of more than 2 million undocumented Mexicans following the Simpson-Rodino Act in 1986 was *not* followed by a decline in undocumented migration.[21] On the contrary, during the 1990s international migration spread like wildfire through Mexico's center and south, drawing in residents of innumerable communities in Puebla, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Veracruz and elsewhere with limited prior participation in US migration (e.g. Binford, 1998; Conway, n.d.; Pérez, 2000, 2001). Inspired (and aided) by the actions of Rodinos, more migrants began to relocate their immediate (and sometimes extended) families to US settler communities, mostly in urban areas. When the US site of production doubles as the reproduction site, the gush of remittances often diminishes to a trickle, dribbled back to sending communities to finance the construction of a retirement home that might eventually be occupied fulltime if and when the US settler migrant realizes his/her dream of returning permanently to Mexico (Espinosa, 1998; Goldring, 1996b).[22] Several researchers have noted the inverse relationship between length of time in the United

States and likelihood and frequency that migrants remit monies, as well as the amount of remittances returned to Mexico when they do so (Lozano, 1997; Massey et al., 1987).

Restructured US capitalism needs new generations of undocumented migrants to occupy slots at the bottom of the economic food chain as subcontracted labor power to agricultural, construction, textile and office-cleaning firms (Durand, 1998: 66–8) or, alternatively, as service providers (domestics, nannies, gardeners, car wash attendants, grocery workers, flower vendors) who 'enable' – the term is from David Reiff (1991) – the comfortable lifestyles of economically accommodated classes (see Smith, 1997: 74–6 and Binford, 1998 on New York; Wright and Ellis, 2000 on Los Angeles; Goldring, 1990, and Conway, n.d., for California sites of specific rural communities in Zacatecas, Michoacán and Oaxaca, and Cornelius, 1998, for California more generally).[23] As Wilson (2000: 205–6) points out, recent anti-immigrant legislation (Proposition 187 in California, the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, the 1996 Welfare Act) deprives noncitizens of many previously available rights and benefits, and raises the economic, social and psychological costs of US residence to undocumented and documented migrants alike (see Fragomen, 1996, 1997). The legislation would seem to have the goal of 'prodding' migrants to 'remit' unproductive members from the United States back to Mexico; it also categorizes noncitizens as second-class human beings and sanctions conditions through which migrants are maintained as an unfree and hence super-exploitable labor force, lodged in the lower portions of ethnically-segmented labor markets (Gledhill, 1998).[24] In sum, globalized capital and markets both homogenize and differentiate: Third World economic crisis and market-driven commodity fetishism mobilize an international labor force of growing dimensions – the seed, perhaps, of a new international proletariat – which is incorporated into ethnic and racial slots that foment political and ideological division between and among migrants and nonmigrants.[25] It seems to me that it is this process – the practices through which it is pursued; the suffering it engenders; the economic, social and political contradictions to which it gives rise; and the resistances and accommodations to it – that social scientists interested in migration and (under)development should be documenting on both sides of the Mexico–US border. Need I add that such study, different as it may be, has more in common with the 1980s dependency-influenced work of Reichert, Wiest and Mines than with the functionalist-oriented writings of Jones, Durand et al. and Conway of the 1990s?

Notes

The article benefited from the close, critical commentary of Marcus Taylor and one anonymous referee.

1 For 1980 I use a figure between Lozano's 'low' and 'intermediate' estimates (664 million and 1,264 million, respectively).

2 Other writers employ different terms, but with approximately the same meanings. Wiest (1984) speaks of 'dependency' and 'modernization' approaches, while Conway (n.d.: 4–5) refers to 'dependency' and 'development'. Conway proposes what he calls an alternative 'transnational' approach that 'breaks down the contradictions of dependency and development and defines the outcomes of migration and remittance use as rooted in a series of dependencies that emphasize production *and* consumption, class *and* ethnicity, the individual *and* the community while transcending localities and national boundaries' (n.d.: 5, his emphasis). I would argue, though, that he shares more in common with Massey, Durand, Parrado and Jones (characterized here as functionalist) than with transnationalists such as Goldring, Smith, Pries, and Kearney.

3 For a detailed discussion of the history of San Francisco see Arias (1992). Interestingly, Arias does not pay nearly as much attention to remittance incomes as sources of investment capital as does Durand.

4 In a recent article Mooney (2001: 23) presents a statistical analysis of material drawn from the Mexican Migration Project substantiating that 'social ties are an important predictor of which migrants will invest their earnings'. In other words, people with denser social networks are more likely, statistically speaking, to invest than those with shallow networks. The comparative orientation of the study allows the author to elide the fact that no migrant group – even those with the densest social ties – has a very high probability of investing. Such studies also imply that once investor characteristics are known, action programs might extend them to disadvantaged groups, whose propensity to invest would then increase *regardless of local, regional and national economic contexts*. The exercise is consistent with the World Bank's emphasis on the development of human capital, even as it approves neoliberal open market policies that ensure the destruction of the same.

5 Martin (1998: 30) notes that the authors failed to take into account business failures: 'Most small businesses fail; what is important for development is not just starting a business, but maintaining it.'

6 Marx had the following to say about capital: 'We know that the means of production and subsistence, while they remain the property of the immediate producer, are not capital. They become capital, only under circumstances in which they serve at the same time as means of exploitation and subjection of the wage labourer' (1967: 767). Petty commodity units may also invest, accumulating unpaid labor through a process of endofamilial accumulation, which enables some of them, at particular times and places, to evolve into petty capitalist production units, defined as those in which 50 percent or more of the value is produced with wage labor (Cook and Binford, 1991: ch. 4). Remittance *investment* should be restricted to three situations: capitalist (including petty capitalist) investment, combining means of production and wage labor for the production of surplus value; petty commodity investment, whose potential accumulation of surplus labor through the employment of unpaid household or domestic labor power is tied to household size and demographic composition, as well as branch of production; subsistence investment on the part of households combining means of production with household labor to produce goods (e.g. food) processed and consumed by the household to underwrite its reproduction. One could also argue, I believe, that expenditures in the education of the following generation are investment if and when the

recipients command salaries that compensate for the costs of their training. I am following here Marx's argument that capital repays complex labor – whose entry into the labor market is deferred by its skills' acquisition – for the dead labor embodied in it during training. But just as most small businesses fail, so most educated rural (and urban) youth are unable to convert the dead labor frozen in their living bodies into higher wages because of, among other factors, rising average educational standards, which constantly drive up the social definition of what constitutes simple labor. As formal sector jobs dry up, a secondary school diploma no longer carries the same cachet that it did, say, 30 years ago. Hence both rural and urban households must 'invest' ever more resources into their children's education solely in order to ensure that they obtain the social minimum. Surveys of US-bound migrants show significant differences in average educational levels between older (primary school) and younger (secondary school) generations, but it is not clear whether the increase is a result of migrant investment in children's education or merely a consequence of rising national educational levels (see Durand et al., 2001: 10; Marcelli and Cornelius, 2001: 115–17). It seems to me that in order to valorize the migrant capital invested in the formation of new human capital, researchers would have to show either that the children of migrants are less likely to migrate than their parents and/or that better-educated migrants obtain more skilled and higher-paying US jobs than their less educated countrymen. I suspect that the 'human capital' strategy works best among migrant households that have located permanently in the United States, as opposed to those that maintain a base (and most of the domestic unit) in Mexico. Of course, the debate about human capital tends to avoid addressing the Mexican 'brain drain' of highly qualified personnel to the United States (cf. Alarcón and Iñiguez, 1999), a drain that stimulated the formation in 1984 of the National Investigator System, which offers salary subsidies to discourage the northward flight of creative and educated artists, writers, researchers and university faculty. Bahamondes (2001) presents a critical assessment of the concept of 'social capital' and suggests that in analyses of rural areas it should be replaced by concepts drawn from anthropology and rural sociology: reciprocity, social action, power, primordial loyalties.

7 'Permanent' migrants remit a much lower percentage of income (21 percent) than do 'temporary' migrants (68 percent), although it is not clear how the authors define these terms (Arroyo and Berumen, 2000: 344). Massey et al. (1987: 275) state that agricultural workers remitted 39.4 percent of their income to Mexico and workers in nonagricultural jobs remitted 20.9 percent. However the former also saved 28.8 percent and the latter 20.4 percent, meaning that the total returns, between monies remitted and those brought back in cash or commodity form were 68.2 and 41.3 percent, respectively. Most of these migrants, originating from four Mexican communities, would probably qualify as 'temporary' or 'shuttle' migrants, who return annually to Mexico for several months or more.

8 An unknown but growing amount of migrant earnings (as well as the earnings of nonmigrant Latinos) are spent on products imported from Mexico: tortilla flour (Maseca), beer (Corona), bakery products (Bimbo). Some Mexican transnational companies have established a system whereby Mexican-produced goods paid for in the United States are delivered directly to families south of the border (Santamaría, 2002). Research into the size and growth rate of the market for Latino products is in its infancy.

9 The means employed by migrants to return money to Mexico varies from one

region to another. To take one example, the state of Zacatecas is broken into hundreds of small, rural communities with scant access to bank or money transfer services, for which reason as much as 75 percent of remitted funds are delivered through the mails (postal money orders) or directly by family and friends, according to one study (Alarcón and Iñiguez, 1999: 195–9).

10 It is unclear how transaction fees and the loss of monies through exchange rates are taken into account in the estimation of remittances. Logically, US-based studies of transfers to recipients in Mexico would overestimate remittances actually received; measurements of monies received at the destination would underestimate the amount transmitted from the United States. A recently published itemized breakdown of the costs charged by various services to transfer $300 from the New York area to Mexico indicated overall fees (including exchange rate differences) on the order of 4–6 percent (*Síntesis*, 2001: 8). The percentage is much lower than that mentioned elsewhere and probably reflects enterprise response to lawsuits and growing competition from government-sponsored alternatives. Cason et al. (2002) state that Money Gram lowered its commission on the transfer of $300 from an average of $60 (20 percent) between 1987 and 1999 to a current $20 (6.7 percent).

11 My discussion of productive and unproductive labor draws on Savran and Tonak (1999). My thanks to Marcus Taylor for providing me with this reference.

12 Jones (1998: 16) defined the three criteria used to indicate migration stage as follows: ‘incidence’ – the percentage of families who have ever sent a member to work in the United States; ‘quantity’ – the percentage of families with five years or more of migration experience; ‘antiquity’ – the percentage of migrant families whose first migrant went to work in the United States prior to 1976. Jones conducted the interviews for this study in 1988.

13 According to the 1996 Encuesta Nacional de Ingresos y Gastos de los Hogares (National Household Income and Expenditure Survey), 54.29 percent of remittance-receiving households were located in localities with populations equal to or greater than 2500, the official lower limit differentiating urban from rural areas. The figure is highly arbitrary, and it is certain that a different definition of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ based on population density, the availability of certain types of services, etc. would reveal that a significantly higher proportion than the remaining 45.71 percent of remittances go to rural dwellers.

14 In his study of Villanueva, Zacatecas, Jones (1992) showed that 67 percent of remittances were spent within the community (36 percent) or the municipal head town (31 percent). Only a third were spent in cities, generally in the purchase of vehicles and payment for medical and educational services (1992: 507). However, more important than the site of purchase is the site of production of the good or service. Buying a can of Coca-Cola in the community contributes to local commerce, but it probably has more indirect effects on the factory and, possibly, the producers of the raw materials (glass, sugar, etc.) incorporated into the soft drink. Jones displays such unbounded enthusiasm for migration’s beneficial effects that all households in rural and marginalized areas of Mexico – and that includes most of the national territory – would be advised to send the maximum number of members to work in El Norte. Interestingly, the well-known actor Edward James Olmos made just this suggestion to the press during a publicity trip to Mexico City in 1999.

15 I would argue that even where the influence was not direct, the political mobilization and academic radicalism of the 1970s and early 1980s contributed to an intellectual climate often critical of the status quo.

16 A more recent statement comes from Runsten (2001), who works in the North American Integration and Development Center at UCLA. Runsten and his Center colleagues are optimistic that, with technical aid and timely doses of financial assistance, the hundreds of migrant Home Town Associations in the United States can detonate development in their Mexican communities of origin. He opines that many migrants remain in the United States because their home communities 'are not seen as places to make money [but] become seen as places for vacations, for fiestas, perhaps for retirement'. However:

> . . . many HTA members possess exactly the things that were lacking in the village and caused them to migrate: knowledge of world markets, business skills, capital. Why can't they become actors in Mexico? Mexico is now joined at the hip to the US economy through NAFTA. There is tremendous economic opportunity in Mexico, and though many migrant villages are literally in the middle of nowhere, many are relatively close to large-scale economic activity in Mexico. (2001: 4–5)

17 Corona's (1993) figures indicate that since 1980 the gap between interstate and international migration has significantly narrowed. For the ten-year periods between 1950 and 1990, the decennial rates of increase in interstate migration were as follows: 56.0 percent, 35.0 percent, 60.8 percent, 27.7 percent. For the same periods international migration grew 27.7 percent, 36.8 percent, 179.0 percent, 102.2 percent. Between 1950 and 1970, international migrants represented between 12.7 percent and 10.3 percent of interstate migrants. In 1980 the proportion increased to 18.2 percent and in 1990 to 28.8 percent (calculated from Table 1 in Corona, 1993: 752). Increasingly, Mexican migrants choose the United States over an internal destination. Note that Corona does not take into account either rural–rural or rural–urban intrastate migration.

18 On discrimination against Mexicans living in the United States, see Wilson (2000), Johnson (2000) and Sánchez (1997).

19 An example of globalized workplaces would be the data entry personnel in Ireland or various Caribbean countries who process insurance and health forms from raw material transmitted from the United States by satellite.

20 Ankie Hoogvelt (2001: 65) defines globalization as 'a new social architecture of cross-border human interactions [which] breaks down the old international division of labour and the associated hierarchy of rich and poor countries. In this process, the integrity of the national territorial state as a more or less coherent political economy is eroded, and the functions of the state become reorganized to adjust domestic economic and social policies to fit the exigencies of the global market and global capitalist accumulation.' Globalization might be thought of as one result of the flexibilization strategy pursued by international capital in its efforts to overcome the rigidities of Fordist accumulation strategies (Harvey, 1989). Against the more generalized structural or architectural figure of globalization, transnationalization takes the nation state as its point of reference, and analyzes the manner in which social, political, cultural and/or economic relationships breach the borders of two or more nation state entities. Transnationalization is pursued by international business, but as Michael Kearney (1991) points out, subaltern groups (Mixtec migrants living in Oaxaca, Baja California, southern California, Oregon and elsewhere) respond with their own transnational projects.

21 For perhaps the first, full-fledged ethnographic work on the costs of this war, albeit treating Bolivia and not Mexico, see Lesley Gill's *Teetering on the Rim:*

Global Restructuring, Daily Life, and the Armed Retreat of the Bolivian State (2000). For Mexico see Estrada, 'El limite de los recursos: el efecto de la crisis de 1995 en familias de sectores populares urbanos' (1999) and other articles in the same volume.

22 Of course, the vast majority of Mexicans will never work in the United States, and most of those who do are shuttle, as opposed to settler, migrants. Recent studies suggest that a growing number of Mexican-based households incorporate migration as part of a diversified, economic reproduction strategy (e.g. Conway, n.d.; Goldring, 1990; Wiggins et al., 1999). In an interesting contrast between Las Animas, Zacatecas and Goméz Ferias, Michoacán, Luin Goldring (1990) illustrates how migratory patterns are party shaped by housing and employment opportunities at US destination sites.

23 Canales's overview of the insertion of Mexican migrants into the US economy does not distinguish between documented and undocumented migrants. He does show, however, that in 1998 Mexican workers were concentrated in the clothing industry, food industry, personal services and domestic work, construction, agriculture and the bar and restaurant industry (2000: 25).

24 Undocumented labor is unfree because workers' formally illegal status impedes free movement about the labor market and thus prevents the sale of labor power on the best available terms (see the discussion of free and unfree labor in Satzewich, 1991). The 35,000 all male participants in the United States H2A Program, referred to by Jorge Durand as 'the new braceros' (Durand, 1998: 60), compose another group of unfree workers. They enter the United States legally with visas and labor contracts which supposedly extend to them a series of guarantees unavailable to undocumented workers, but have no choice of employer and little or no say in hours or working conditions. Several recent exposés reveal the cruel and inhuman treatment suffered by many of these workers (Smith-Nonini 2000, 2002; Yeoman 2001). A much smaller program (around 12,000 participants in 2002) sends temporary agricultural workers to Canada for six weeks to eight months annually (Binford, 2002).

25 The pages of the *Latin American Research Review* were the site for a debate over the profile of Mexico–United States immigrants between Durand et al. (2001), on the one hand, and Marcelli and Cornelius (2001), on the other.

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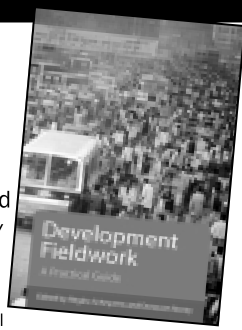

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