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Why Mexicans Migrate: A Glimpse at the Causes and Effects of Rural Mexican Migration in the Community of Yogana as well as Current Movements Towards Local Development

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WHY MEXICANS MIGRATE:
A Glimpse at the Causes and Effects of Rural Mexican Migration in the Community of Yogana as well as Current Movements towards Local Development

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ABSTRACT

English Version

Migration is a current matter confronting both U.S. and Mexican society. For Americans, the topic signifies an ever-increasing entry of Mexican migrants to U.S. factory and agricultural hotspots. In comparison, for millions of Mexican citizens, migration marks an intricate aspect of daily life with a story embedded not only in the present day but in the histories and futures of individuals, families and communities as well. An on-going cycle of poverty explains the principle motivation behind the growing number of migrating citizens from Mexico. Social and environmental injustices associated with free-trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have led to an unfortunate decrease in overall wellbeing in Mexican communities especially those in rural areas. Employment is scarce, hunger is common, and completion of basic education, rare. In response, many turn to migration as a solution to economic necessity. In my investigations in the community of Yogana, I was able to capture some of the realities behind the causes and effects of Mexican migration. Likewise, through the organization Lubizha and its work in Yogana, I learned of promising alternatives being sought at the individual, family, and community levels that may potentially aid in strengthening municipal development, in turn, decreasing migration rates among citizens.

Versión Español

Un tema reciente que les enfrentan a las sociedades de los Estados Unidos y de México es la migración. Para los estadunidenses, el tema significa la entrada cada vez mayor de los migrantes mexicanos a las regiones populares en los Estados Unidos de agricultura y de fábricas. En comparación, para millones de ciudadanos mexicanos, la migración marca un aspecto intrincado de la vida cotidiana, con un cuento incrustado no sólo de la actualidad
sino también en las historias y los futuros de individuos, familias y comunidades. Un ciclo continuado de pobreza explica la motivación principal atrás el número creciente de ciudadanos migrando de México. Las injusticias medio ambientales y sociales asociadas con acuerdos del libre comercio como Tratado del Libre Comercio de América del Norte (TLCAN) han resultado en la reducción desafortunada de bienestar de las comunidades mexicanas – especialmente en las que son rurales. El empleo está escaso, el hambre es común y la terminación de educación básica, rara. En respuesta, varias personas han centrado la atención en la migración como una solución a la necesidad económica. Por mis investigaciones en la comunidad de Yogana, podía capturar algunas de las realidades atrás de las causas y los efectos de la migración mexicana. Asimismo, aprendí de alternativas prometedoras que van siendo buscadas en los niveles del individuo, de la familia y de la comunidad que tal vez ayuden en reforzar el desarrollo comunitario, como consecuencia, disminuyendo los índices migratorios entre ciudadanos.
INTRODUCTION

Whether in the United States or south of the Rio Grande, in Mexico, the word migration draws a number of deep thoughts, feelings, and opinions. For U.S. citizens, this phenomenon undoubtedly signifies the continued annual influx of dark-skinned foreigners to American soil. In contrast, for Mexican citizens, migration means the loss of hundreds of thousands of inhabitants and the return of tens of millions of dollars per annum; but even more, it reflects the often times fatal risks and continued number of deaths associated with the passage to “the other side.” Still, aside from the numbers and statistics, Mexican migration has a story, a history – one that many U.S. citizens have failed to see, understand, or accept.

Almost three years ago now, I spent a summer working in a book factory with a predominantly Mexican migrant workforce. Using the less-than-ideal Spanish that I had acquired during my years of high school, I spent my days packing boxes with a group of women from Guadalajara, listening to their stories of the stunning Mexican terrain and of the hardships they faced in leaving their children behind in search of work. It was during this summer - both inside and outside of the factory – that I began to recognize a number of recurring issues between migrants and U.S. citizens. A most obvious subject is that of racism visible in overly common jokes and uttered phrases to a near hatred of migrants as a whole. But perhaps most detrimental are the continued cultural and language barriers between these two parties. This lack of communication with migrants is both a cause and effect of a current deficit of genuine understanding among U.S. citizens concerning the realities behind the process of migration.

For these main reasons – that of ignorance and racism among my fellow U.S. citizens – I chose to focus my study on migration and more specifically on the causes and
effects of the process at the individual, family and community levels. In gathering and presenting my data, I have aimed to provide a clearer picture - albeit with time, transportation, and money constraints – of some of the realities behind the continuing process of migration. But most importantly, I hope that in examining my report, many will find better understanding, respect and sympathy for our current Latin American migrant populations.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In gathering and processing my data, I utilized an investigative approach presented by anthropologist Jeffrey H. Cohen which he refers to as a “culture of migration.” This outlook argues that:

> migration is pervasive – it occurs throughout the region [of Oaxaca] and has a historical presence that dates to the first half of the twentieth century. Second, the decision to migrate is one that people make as part of their everyday experiences. Third and finally, the decision to migrate is accepted by most Oaxacans as one path toward economic well-being...In other words, migration in Oaxaca is “deeply ingrained into the repertoire of people’s behavior, and values associated with migration become part of the community’s values.” (5-6)

Cohen’s viewpoint aided me in approaching my investigations with two main ideas in mind: first, that migration would be an integral component of the make-up of both my community and subjects of study, and secondly, that although an ever-present option, migration would not be the ultimate decision of all subjects in response to economic disparity.

**METHODOLOGY**

The data presented in this study was gathered using a variety of sources. For three weekends of my ISP period I stayed in the community of Yogana, a small municipality two hours outside of Oaxaca City in a region of the state known as *Valles Centrales*. During
my time in Yogana, I stayed in two different homes – those of Guadalupe García Martinez and Jacinta García Cortes. The formal observations that I conducted include workshops and events hosted by Lubizha, an organization that has worked in Yogana for several years and seeks “to support families with family members that have migrated or continue to migrate” (Morales, 19 Oct. 2010). These workshops included: an on-going greenhouse project, a women’s support group, and a beauty school course for youth. In addition to these formal observations, I also conducted a number of informal observations throughout my time spent in the community.

The information utilized in my final product comes from the aforementioned observations in addition to a number of interviews conducted with women, youth and coordinators from each workshop, as well as Guadalupe’s son who has migrated to and since returned from the United States. I also received a substantial amount of information and advice on the structure of my project from my ISP advisor, Antonio Morales, and one of two of my academic directors at SIT, Sara Méndez.

I found the number and variety of sources that I used in my investigation to be a real strength in my study. Likewise, my previous and ongoing interest in the topic of migration acted as a genuine motivating factor. Prior to this assignment, I had taken several classes on both the history of Mexico and current issues facing the country including migration and the effects of globalization. This background knowledge in addition to my desire to educate others on the realities of migration – as mentioned in my introduction – were definite strong points in my research and analysis.

Nonetheless, as I would imagine with all field research, my overall study does have certain weaknesses. Three weekends of on-site research obviously did not provide a truly
sufficient time frame for capturing all of the information that I would have ideally liked to gather. For instance, I only had the opportunity to interview three women from the community. Preferably, I would have liked to have spoken with 5-10 more; however, restrictions such as work hours of the women and my inability to navigate the town alone at night prevented this from occurring.

It is also important to note the potential effects that my position as an outsider (moreover a white, American, girl) had on the responses of my subjects in the interviews that I conducted. “You need to understand that you had a very limited time to generate absolute confidence,” my advisor Antonio explained to me (29 Nov. 2010). With this in mind, I recognized that while I received seemingly genuine responses from my subjects, several more profound or personal thoughts and opinions may have been withheld due to the interviewees’ lack of comfort with or trust in my presence. In an attempt to counteract these reasonable effects, I worked to acclimate myself as much as possible with members of the community and the families with which I lived. I washed dishes, helped clean in the home, and spent time with community youth whenever possible, not to mention one evening, I helped prepare a traditional Oaxacan dish of mole negro to be sold during the following week.

My investigations for this project were conducted in only one community. Clearly, migrants arrive to the U.S. from all parts of Mexico – from a number of states, cities, and small towns as well as from other Latin American countries. By focusing on only one community, my study lacks a comparison of or outlook on how the causes and effects of migration vary from one population to another.
YOGANA AT A GLIMPSE

Before delving into the more serious issues currently confronting the community of Yogana, it is important to have a basic understanding of the layout of the municipality. Yogana is a small rural town located in the Valles Centrales region of the state of Oaxaca and in the district of Ejutla de Crespo. Within the community, approximately 1,413 occupants reside in 319 living spaces (Pacheco Mendez, 79, 81). Yogana is located two hours outside of Oaxaca City and one-half hour from Ejutla. To get to the community, one must depart the newly constructed, government-funded highway in exchange for a narrow dirt road stocked with pot-holes and lingering dust clouds. Nevertheless, the surrounding countryside is stunning to say the least. Rolling mountains stretch as far as the eye can see, covered in a variety of cacti and other desert plant species. In the dry season – roughly October through May – barely any clouds are visible. Rather, a soft, blue sky illuminates the dry, dusty landscape from dawn until dusk.

As you draw closer to Yogana’s town limits, basic characteristics of the community begin to unveil themselves. First, the established municipal valley for garbage disposal - better described as a disheveled trash dump. As you continue on, prepare for a number of stops, first for one of the few pick-up trucks en route for Ejutla stocked to maximum capacity with women heading to the market or men leaving for work in construction jobs on the highway, and secondly, for the parades of sheep, donkeys, cows, and goats being herded to and from the fields.

Traveling from house to house within the community is another adventure in itself. Though home to less than 1,500 residents, the town of Yogana is fairly spread out geographically and is broken into three sections or barrios – Arriba, Medio, and Abajo. To travel from one end of the community to the other, residents need at least thirty minutes of
walking time but many usually call a moto-taxi operated by one of numerous adolescent chauffeurs. This geographical stretch is a result of the basic composition of residences in Yogana; farming land and grounds for animals surround the homes of each family. Along the edges of the rugged cobble stone or dirt roads, trash lays discarded. This is a result of both the distant location of the town trash dump from most homes and a lack of garbage service within the community. A river runs through the town, separating a section of the population from the other. And in walking from place to place, citizens carry large rocks as protection from the near wild packs of dogs that patrol the streets like vicious predators, ready to pounce at any unfamiliar passerby.

And thus, we have entered the rural Mexican community of Yogana.

LIVING CONDITIONS IN YOGANA

In examining the brief overview of the community, a general sense is developed of the living conditions within its town limits. However, to truly grasp the realities of everyday life in Yogana one must observe the lifestyles of both the individuals and families of residence.

In terms of home life, more than 72% of families in Yogana reside in one-bedroom houses with an average of 3.64 members living in each home. Likewise, more than 72% of the population is without running water, relying instead on a set number of wells found throughout the community. A little more than 35% of families own televisions, 24% refrigerators, and 0%, computers (Pacheco Mendez, 79-80). According to Juliana García Ramírez, almost all homes rely on dry, outdoor latrines due to lack of running water or sewage lines. Many homes feature indoor stoves or comales, which are commonly used for cooking tortillas. Though actions are occasionally taken to correct these measures, poor
ventilation systems for the *comales* often present a series of respiratory problems, especially among younger children in the home.

The rainy season (roughly May through October) brings with it a number of problems for residents, especially those residing on the far, west side of the river. If the river becomes too high or the road leading out of the community too muddy, citizens become stuck in their homes, unable to travel to work or school outside of the town.

“Water comes inside [our home] when it rains now,” testified Jacinta García Cortes, “and right now, we have telephones that don’t work very well.”  

_Doña_ Jacinta resides in _Barrio Arriba_ and explained how unreliable phone lines in her section of the community often force residents of the _barrio_ to travel to the other side of town – to _Barrio Abajo_ – for service.

Along with better telephone services, _Barrios Abajo_ and _Medio_ feature the community’s kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools. Adolescents must make the thirty-minute trip to Ejutla in order to attend high school. In addition to lacking a high school, Yogana does not have a pharmacy or dentist and possesses only one doctor. “Here in Yogana,” attested Guadalupe García Martinez, “we need a lot…we don’t have enough doctors and because of this, many have not received good attention.”

Guadalupe also brought to my attention another important aspect of daily Yogana life. “I usually only eat two tortillas with my breakfast and two with lunch; if I eat anymore, it’s just too much weight on the stomach,” she explained as we ate together one morning. A typical Yogana diet consists, more or less, of these few ingredients: black beans, eggs, rice, salsa and occasionally, chicken or pork. Bread, cheese, and vegetables are rarities. In fact, the only time I was offered vegetables throughout my stay in the community was on the evening of Guadalupe’s oldest son’s birthday when it was apparent
that much of the family’s current savings had been used to entertain close relatives and friends.

Every meal is accompanied with large, hand-made, corn tortillas as Guadalupe was discussing. Not only does this staple food cause intestinal pain if consumed in quantities too large, but it also consists of a near 50% of the caloric intake of rural Mexican citizens. This combination along with poor eating habits such as the over-consumption of Coke and other processed foods, has led to a high level of poor nutrition, especially among Yogana youth. Many of the teenage girls and small children with which I passed time were quite underweight, often looking much younger in appearance than they actually were.

**UNDERLYING PROBLEMS IN YOGANA**

Already, some of the daily issues facing Yogana citizens have been clarified such as lack of access to the basic necessities of proper nutrition, education, transportation and communication. These concerns in conjunction with various other setbacks continue to have a negative effect on the quality of life in Yogana as well as perpetuate the pressing need to migrate.

In returning to the subject of education, only 6.63% of the community’s total population has completed basic schooling (Pacheco Mendez, 80). According to Antonio Morales, more than 80% of Yogana women cannot read or write (29 Nov. 2010) and more than 55% of citizens as a whole are illiterate (Pacheco Mendez, 80).

Environmental destruction also takes its toll on the municipality. This is a result of both the presence and burning of access trash as mentioned previously as well as the current methods used for cooking (García Solano). Erosion during the rainy season, deforestation, and poor agricultural practices also have their negative effects. Inadequate
Agricultural practices have led to low production yields (the main source of daily alimentation) among families as well.

In addition to high illiteracy rates, the women of Yogana face a continued cycle of interfamily violence and paternalism. A calculated 70% of women have and continue to confront at least some type of violence in the home (Silencio Ortega). Furthermore, the principal role of townswomen is work in the home – cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. The history and continuance of these phenomena have a grave effect on many of the young girls within the community. Most are taught from a young age how to – more or less - be a “good” wife; accept spousal abuse, make tortillas, raise children, etc. (Morales, 19 Nov. 2010). Some underlying causes of interfamily violence are the high rates of alcoholism and growing number of addictions to substances such as cocaine that are commonplace among men in the community (Silencio Ortega).

Alcoholism among townsmen has spawned from a number of potential causes, one of those being the unfortunate lack of available employment in Yogana and in turn, the elevated level of poverty among families. Of the nineteen locals I interviewed including youth, women, and a past migrant, all but two specified family members’ reasons for migrating to the United States as a result of lack of money, work or both. Aside from agricultural work or the installment of small convenience stores within homes, there is no other work in the town. In a survey conducted among sixty-two citizens of Yogana and a neighboring community with similar economic characteristics, Huateca Altas, it was found that over 86% of families lived off of less than 1,500 pesos – or 125 dollars – per month. Nearly 77% of these families consisted of three or more residents. In terms of more concrete statistics, according to an annual report by Yogana municipal president C. Ricardo Pacheco Mendez, the average annual income per home is 2,039.87 USD (85).
The combination of the above factors has developed what can be seen as nothing more than a genuine lack of agency among the citizens of Yogana. Low education standards, poverty and the absence of available employment leave little room for options other than work outside of the community. Consequently, for a large majority, this means migration to the United States.

MIGRATION IN YOGANA

In examining the causes and effects of migration in Yogana, it is important to remember that each individual and family has its unique and personal histories in relation to the process. However, with this being said, a number of recurrent micro and macro causes and effects can be gathered when examining migration as a whole. Before observing the reasons and outcomes on a more personal and community level, it is necessary to understand how the significant role of forces at the national and international stages is involved.

Macro Causes

“Economic crises provoked by NAFTA and other economic reforms are uprooting and displacing Mexicans in the country’s most remote areas” (Bacon, pp. 2). According to Noam Chomsky:

Such measures are designed to insure that U.S.-based corporations control the technology of the future, including biotechnologies, which, it is hoped, will allow protected private enterprises to control health, agriculture, and the means of life generally, locking the poor majority into dependence and hopelessness. (14)

Mexico entered into the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 with the concentrated goal of establishing itself as a more developed socio-economic nation like the United States. However, sixteen years later, Mexican citizens continue to face economic despair and a lack of several basic human rights.
With NAFTA came “corn-dumping,” a process which has forced Mexican farmers to compete with subsidized corn from huge U.S. producers, a feat which has proved near impossible. Over the years, NAFTA has continued to pull down a number of customs barriers resulting in the dumping of even more agricultural products on the Mexican market. With meager selling power and prices doubling on staple foods such as the corn tortilla, rural families are going hungry. Undoubtedly, such measures have become an “important source of pressure on Mexicans to migrate” (Bacon, pp. 7).

Furthermore, the year 2009 has been reported as the “worse year of economic downturn in Mexico since the onset of the Great Depression.” According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, more than 3.6 million Mexicans fell into poverty in this year alone. It should not be forgotten that in 2009 - in terms of the economy – U.S. citizens were also hit quite hard; however, “when Uncle Sam sneezes, Mexico gets pneumonia” (Cypher, pp. 1, 2, 6). U.S. economic policy has become inextricably linked with the monetary successes and downfalls of the Mexican economy.

**History of Oaxacan Migration**

It is not to say that migration - specifically Oaxacan - began in 1994 with the initiation of NAFTA. While the agreement has unquestionably caused an immense increase in the movement of peoples, history also plays a role in the process. Mexican migration can be observed in three phases and dates back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During the first phase, Mexicans sought refuge from the onset of the Mexican Revolution by crossing the border. Many found work in industry or with railroad lines and following the launch of World War I, in the Bracero Program. This first bracero program, which ran from 1917 through 1923 was created as a supplement for U.S. labor shortages and usually involved agricultural work. “The program guaranteed Mexican men (and only
men) the right to work in the United States under formal short-term contracts that specified rights to food, housing, medical care, fixed pay, and funds to cover returns to Mexico. The U.S. government played the role of employer and assumed that U.S. farm and plant managers would comply with the programs regulations” (Cohen 54-55).

The second phase began with the initiation of a second bracero program in 1942 which likewise, sought to fill labor shortages resulting from U.S. involvement in World War II. Migrants were required to have permits in order to cross and work; as a result, a rising number of “illegals” is first witnessed in this phase as various Mexicans were able to cross unauthorized, finding work without contracts. The second bracero program ended in 1966.

The most recent phase began soon after 1966. Primarily, among central valley communities, internal migration to cities such as the state’s capital or to Mexico City was most prevalent; nevertheless, following a series of economic crises that hit Mexico in the 1980s, a “rapid rise” in migration to the U.S. took root. Even still, prime movement among Oaxacans began in the early 1990s and most readily, following the commencement of NAFTA in 1994 (Cohen, 54-56).

Migration Rates in Yogana

Of the nineteen residents of Yogana interviewed, 100% had family members who had migrated to the United States. These family members included aunts and uncles, cousins, fathers, brothers and sisters, and nieces and nephews. An estimated 45% of Yogana’s population currently resides in the United States (Morales, 29 Nov. 2010), several in the state of California – in what has become better known to Oaxacans statewide as “Oaxacalifornia.”
Life Before Migration: Why Yogana Citizens Choose to Migrate

“Well, before, we didn’t have things to live. Like this house – we didn’t have it. We had a little make-shift shelter where we all slept.” –Guadalupe García Martinez, age 50

“There wasn’t enough money. We couldn’t buy the things that we needed – like clothes. Well…there was just very little.” –Yesenia López García, age 16

“There was a lot of violence with my mom. And we didn’t have much money to feed ourselves.” –Vanessa López García, age 15

Many of the reasons for migration among Yogana citizens have already been discussed in previous sections. These include but are not limited to a lack of jobs within the community, a lack of basic education, low agricultural productivity, the effects of economic agreements such as NAFTA and as a result of all of the above, poverty. In questioning subjects why family members decided to migrate, all had similar responses in relation to these causes: “for lack of money,” “for necessity,” “because there isn’t any work here,” etc. Aside from such answers, some also added motives such as having family members already in the U.S. or wanting to get to know the U.S. more.

Migration is not an isolated event. In fact, it can be better viewed in terms of a cycle of continuous events which amount to the main overall cause of movement among Yogana citizens – poverty. The cycle of poverty contains four main components:

(Morales, 12 Nov. 2010)
As mentioned previously, current capitalist practices have led to increasing rates of poverty and hunger in Mexico especially among those rural communities such as Yogana. As a small percentage continues to grow wealthier, a gap continues to widen between those few elite and a majority poor. The result is a lack of basic human rights and necessities such as adequate education, technology, alimentation, and housing for a large majority of the Mexican population. Likewise, a strong emphasis on consumerism – the backbone of the free-market system – influences citizens on both sides of the border, undoubtedly in Yogana as well, to buy and own more and more things.

The result of this phase of the cycle is the abandonment of traditional values, outlooks and practices. Centuries old agricultural applications are replaced with mono-cropping and harmful pesticide use – actions which produce lower crop yields and furthermore, harm the environment. The drive for more consumer goods, poor education standards, and a lack of capital leads to the degradation of communities such as Yogana with soaring illiteracy and unemployment rates.

The accumulation of these effects and outcomes has led to a poor standard of living - or overall state of wellbeing - as witnessed in Yogana. A deficit of human development and access to basic goods such as running water and proper nutrition permeate all aspects of social life from the personal and family levels to that of the municipality as a whole. It then comes as no surprise why the final phase of the cycle, migration, has become so customary in communities such as Yogana. As seen in the diagram, migration leads back to the effects of capitalism. This is explained with the return of migrants from the United States and the influence of those still remaining in the North, which consequently threaten cultural practices, introduce more drugs into the community, and encourage others to migrate as well.
The Effects of Migration on the Citizens of Yogana

“[Migration] allows my girls to go to school. Our diet and clothes are better too.”
– Juliana García Ramirez, age 40

“It’s hard living without family members. We always miss them… but now the girls eat better and we can buy shoes.” – Jacinta García Cortes, age 51

“[Crossing the border] was difficult. We all suffered a lot from hunger, thirst. It took a month to pass and four days in the desert. Then I was robbed…I come and I go, but there’s a lot of racism. A lot more people are starting to go there; there’s nobody here anymore.” – Felix Jimenez García, age 28

Migration among Yogana citizens has a number of effects both on those who decide to travel to the U.S. and those who remain in the home. Along with a strong influence from Western culture, the process also generates an on-going wave of emotional baggage, not to mention the leading motivation of migration – the remittance of money.

Missing family members and close friends who are often gone for years at a time is a near-daily occurrence for those on both sides of the border. Women cry for the absence of their sons, daughters, and husbands and often find it difficult to complete all of the necessary daily household and agricultural chores. Predictably, nearly all of the nineteen subjects interviewed attested to missing family members who had migrated. Responses such as this of seventeen-year-old Luis Alberto Ordaz Pacheco were quite common:

“I’m sad for my brothers [in the U.S.]. Sometimes I’m happy because some things are better, but still…”

For some, the migration of family members has dramatically different emotional effects. For Juliana García Ramírez, the migration of her husband signified the end of years of spousal abuse. “Before, there was a lot of violence for me - with my husband, but now, no.” Others like Jacinta García Cortes have husbands that have left and never returned, likewise never sending remittances to the family. “He left ten years ago and never came back…I don’t want him anymore.”
In witnessing the different lifestyle and culture present in the United States in comparison with that of their poverty-stricken communities of origin, many migrants – especially those of younger age and with fewer ties to family structures – feel more pulled to stay in or return to the U.S. Returned migrant Felix Jimenez García speaks of his decision to return to the North:

*My hope for the future is to be there, in the United States permanently...it’s another life, a better one. There’s more work; it has everything. I’m going back for the necessity of money, because here there isn’t any work. There, well, there’s work, but here we suffer more to find money. I wish that my mom and little brother could come too.*

Despite these feelings of unhappiness, remittances have undeniably improved the everyday living conditions of Yogana families who, once again, live off of average annual incomes of 2,039.87 USD. Money sent from the United States is primarily used to cover basic necessities of the family (food, clothing, health, education, and transportation) (Ruiz García, 135-136). Some families also use remittances for home improvements, savings, or in starting a new business.

It is important to note that despite current strengthening of border security and the installment of Senate Bill 1070 (better known as the Arizona Immigration Law), “the governments of both Mexico and the U.S. are dependent on the cheap labor of Mexicans.” Between 2001 and 2006, migrant remittances accounted for 2.14% of Mexico’s gross domestic product. If over $25 million dollars was remitted in the year 2006 alone, it is easy to see why the Mexican government has little intention of stopping the flow of migrants to the North. As for the U.S. economy, a number of corporations have become dependent on the “immigrant stream” in remaining flexible with the highs and lows of market demands (Bacon, pp. 27, 31).
HOPEFUL ALTERNATIVES FOR THE FUTURE OF YOGANA

While all of the previously discussed issues remain a part of daily life for Yogana citizens, a number of promising alternatives and recent visible changes within the community have begun to re-shape a once inevitably bleak future. Working in conjunction with the organization Lubizha – a partnership which began eight years ago - residents of Yogana have initiated various community development projects including a neighborhood greenhouse workshop, a beauty shop class for youth, and a women’s support group.

The Organization: Lubizha

Lubizha has worked with the community of Yogana since 2002. Since the initiation of its work in the community, the organization has aided in developing workshops in work skills in construction and most recently, in beauty (hair cutting and design, make-up, nail work, etc.). Lubizha started a stove project which has installed comales with improved ventilation in more than sixty homes. Along with its beauty shop class – as mentioned - Lubizha also presently directs a community greenhouse project, a meat processing workshop and a women’s support group.

The principle goals of the organization are to develop integral formation through the development of work abilities and the promotion of youth, their families and the community. Lubizha strives to develop a high level of participation in municipalities such as Yogana through the execution of diverse projects with a focus on sustainability, in turn creating alternatives for local development and the transcendence of families and youth (“Misión y Visión,” pp. 1-2).

Apart from Yogana, Lubizha works in five other communities in the Valles Centrales region. In addition to three fundamental workshops – those of human development, agroecology, and work production – presented in each town, the organization also works
with a basketball program in Huactecas Altas and a clothing design practicum in Coatecas.

In the coming months, Lubizha will also be initiating another work abilities seminar in Yogana on home electricity.

**Community Greenhouse Project**

“One of the most important things that I have learned [from participating] is the importance here of nature. I would like to go to other communities to explain more about trees and plants to others.” –Leticia Martinez Fabian, age 17

“This is another way; there are options other than migrating. Yes, one can live here; it’s nothing more than knowing how to work. It’s the field, the field, the field everyday – nothing more, we’re not learning anything else. But this, this is another way of supporting the community.” –Cesar Mendez Hernandez, age 17

The Yogana community greenhouse project was initiated in June of 2010 with the help of a grant from SEMARNAT, the branch of the Mexican government responsible for developing environmental policy and legislation. Over 2,500 individuals and organizations applied for this grant but only 300 were awarded funding – including Lubizha. The endowment was used to install greenhouses in both Barrios Abajo and Arriba. Projects are open to all interested in the community and are conducted each Wednesday and Saturday. Currently six to twelve youth offer their time in the two greenhouses each week.

Project coordinator and student of forest engineering, Alberto García Solano, works with the youth involved to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of the cultivation of native plant species. The growing of plants native to the region of Yogana will aid in reforesting the community in the coming years. Alberto also has high hopes that the greenhouse will soon act as a source of employment for youth through the growing and selling of specific plant species.
Youth Beauty Course

“This is something, well, that can help us. It could be a way that I’m able to do something, make a business. If I have knowledge in this then I can find something in which I can work...I can find work so that I won’t need to migrate.” –Yesenia López García, age 16

Approximately ten teenage girls and one boy gather each Saturday and Sunday afternoon for beauty school. Students have learned and continue to learn a variety of skills in this eleven month course including proficiencies in: hair cutting, manicures, make-up, and hair-braiding. The instructor of the course, a twenty-year old named Clara from a community two and a half hours from Yogana, received her cosmetology training in a similar workshop. She now manages her own beauty shop which is a goal that all students relayed in speaking of their futures. The course, along with all others supported by Lubizha, is free of charge to participants.

A typical day in the workshop consists of the students taking turns practicing a variety of hair and make-up techniques on one another. As they work, the young girls – ages fifteen to twenty – joke and chat about the latest gossip in the community. Mexican pop tunes from one of the student’s phones bring an upbeat mood to the small room. Still, aside from this constructive social interaction, a strong sense of hope saturates the room. Nine of eleven subjects interviewed attested to their desires of remaining in the Yogana area after completing their studies. Such actions are central to future development – both socially and economically – for the community. Likewise, all commented on having gained more hope for the future after beginning their beauty school workshop. “I have another way of seeing now,” explained student Yesenia López García, “I can choose my own decisions.”

“I still worry about things,” testified Teodora, another student, “but I feel like I have more freedom now in starting my own business.”
Women’s Support Group

“Everyone from Lubizha treats me really well. I have more self-worth. I have learned a lot of things. My thoughts are better towards myself and life. Before, I was afraid to speak; I was afraid of opening up, but now, no.” –Guadalupe García Martínez, age 50

“The woman is equal to the man, am I right? Before, there was a lot of violence between family members, but that has changed a lot.” –Juliana García Ramírez, age 40

“Well, that’s why we’re a part of the organization Lubizha; to find better solutions [to migration].” –Jacinta García Cortes, age 51

The women’s support group directed by Lubizha has had and continues to have a profound effect on the female citizens involved. As mentioned earlier, interfamily violence, paternalism and poor education standards are commonplace in the lives of Yogana women. However, under the instruction of psychologist Danely del Carmen Silencio Ortega, a number of important visible changes can be seen throughout the community.

Working with Danely, women in the workshops – which are conducted in each of the three community barrios – have covered a variety of subjects including self-esteem, communication, work skills, sexuality, gender equality, interfamily violence, the environment, and values (Silencio Ortega). Lubizha director, Antonio Morales, has witnessed numerous positive changes in Yogana women through their participation in the group:

In the beginning we would ask “What are your needs? What do you want in life?” And they wouldn’t say anything to you. This, they [the women] are breaking. Before, there was this attitude of submission, of low self-esteem. Violence was something normal and every day. Now, they are empowering themselves; they are able to say “no” to whatever activity. They can express their feelings. (29 Nov. 2010)
Even more, six women currently participate in the Municipal Development Council – a space fundamental in deciding the present and future of Yogana. “This is a space of power,” Antonio emotionally proclaimed, “This is very important” (29 Nov. 2010).

Looking to the Future, Grounded by Realities

“I want to move forward with my beauty shop skills. But if there isn’t sufficient work here, well, I’ll have to migrate.” –Vanessa López García, age 15

“I’d prefer to stay here, but I mean, if there’s a necessity, I’ll go [to the U.S.].” –Eric Santiago Cortes Pacheco, age 16

Without a doubt, the work of Lubizha in the community of Yogana continues to unleash a variety of promising alternatives in terms of changing perspectives and future economic potential within the region. Unfortunately, pressures to migrate still remain common as well. A handful of other rural Oaxacan communities have found migration to be of less necessity due to prosperity through craft specialization; an example of this being the municipality of San Martín Tilcajete which is home to alebrijes – “brightly painted wooden animals and zoomorphic figures that are extremely popular tourist items” (Cohen, 15). However, Yogana is without a craft-specialization and remains without a high school or available employment opportunities.

Furthermore, while the current beauty shop course is undeniably beneficial to the adolescents involved, it is difficult to ignore some other potential realities. The small population of Yogana will not need ten hair-dressers in the future, yet the specialized training presented is perhaps the only opportunity that the young students will receive in terms of economic and professional advancement. The idea that not all will have the ability to work in Yogana with these learned skills inevitably means one of three things for the teens: 1) traveling to Ejutla in search of work opportunities, 2) abandonment of acquired
skills and regression to traditional female roles within the community, or 3) migration to larger cities such as Oaxaca and Mexico City, but more likely, to the United States.

CONCLUSION

Migration in Oaxaca and throughout Mexico remains an everyday part of life for millions of citizens. While only 415,055 reported Mexicans made the trek to the United States in 1995, more than 1,050,000 traveled to the North in 2007 (Cuadro IV.1.1.). Following the Mexican economic crisis of 2009 and with the continued social and economic injustices associated with NAFTA and other free-trade agreement such as Plan Mesoamerica, the U.S. has witnessed and will continue to witness the arrival of even more migrants in the years to come. And while organizations such as Lubizha aid in generating local development in communities like Yogana, poverty continues to permeate culture, and a dependence on migration prevails.

What will it take for both U.S. and Mexican governments to acknowledge the principal role they play in exerting social and environmental injustices on the people and land of Mexico? How will U.S. citizens begin to understand the realities behind Mexican migration with eyes blinded by a consumer-driven society and an unrelenting tolerance of racism and discrimination?

Communities such as Yogana have many important lessons to teach U.S. citizens, not only about the grave realities behind Mexican migration but in the essentiality of family and community values. This report is not intended to point fingers or make generalizations about the actions and attitudes of Americans; rather it is a plea - a plea for recognition and understanding, and a call for sympathy and support. While we cannot necessarily control the harmful actions of our government or transnational corporations, we can educate ourselves, change our perspectives and help others in doing the same. Mexican migration
is not a fleeting phase in U.S. history; it has become an integral part of both our culture and our economy. Unfortunately, for communities such as Yogana, migration will continue to signify the loss of loved ones and the unwavering persistence of social injustice in the desert-countryside of Mexico.
a. “Lubizha es una organización que busca apoyar a las familias con familiares que han sido o continúan siendo los migrantes.” –Antonio Morales, 19/10/2010
b. “Tienes que entender que no tuviste mucho tiempo para generar confianza total entre las mujeres.” –Antonio Morales, 29/11/2010
e. “Usualmente, como solo dos tortillas con el desayuno y dos con la comida…más, pues, es demasiado pesado en el estomago.” –Guadalupe García Martínez, 16/11/2010
i. “Permite que mis hijas vayan a la escuela. La alimentación y nuestro vestido con mejores.” –Julianna García Ramírez, 15/11/2010
k. “Fue difícil. Sufre mucho del hambre, de sed. Tomó un mes para poder pasar y cuatro días en el desierto…luego me robaron…Voy y vengo, pero hay mucho racismo…Sube muchas personas que van allá – no hay nadie acá.” –Félix Jiménez García, 28/11/2010
m. “Antes, había mucha violencia conmigo, con mi esposo, pero ahora, no.” –Julianna García Ramírez, 15/11/2010
o. “Pues, estar allá en los Estados Unidos permanente; es otra vida mejor – por mucho trabajo ya tiene todo…Por necesidad de dinero. Porque aquí no hay trabajo…se sufre un poquito más para encontrar el dinero…Deseo que mi mama y mi hermano puedan ir también.” –Félix Jiménez García, 28/11/2010
p. “…la importancia aquí de la naturaleza. Me gustaría ir a otras comunidades para explicar mas de los arboles, las plantas.” –Leticia Martínez Fabián, 13/11/2010
q. “Hay otra manera; hay otras opciones a migrar. Si se puede vivir aquí. Es nada más que saber cómo trabajar. Es el campo, campo, campo – nada más; no estamos aprendiendo nada mas…Esto es otra manera de apoyar la comunidad.” –Cesar Méndez Hernández, 13/11/2010
r. “Es algo, pues que pueda ayudarnos. Seria como una manera que puedo hacer algo, hacer un negocio. Si tengo conocimiento de esto, entonces puedo encontrar algo en que puedo trabajar…puedo encontrar trabajo para que no necesite migrar.” –Yesenia López García, 22/11/2010
u. “Todos me tratan muy bien. Tengo más valor…He aprendido muchas cosas…Mis pensamientos son mejores hacia mí misma y la vida. Antes, tenía miedo de hablar, tenía miedo de abrir, pero ahora, no.” –Guadalupe García Martínez, 16/11/2010
w. “Es por eso que estamos en la organización Lubizha; para encontrar soluciones mejores.” –Jacinta García Cortes, 27/11/2010
x. “En el principio, le preguntas ‘¿Qué son sus necesidades? Y no te contestaron nada. Esto, están rompiendo…una actitud de sumisa, baja auto-estima. La violencia había algo normal cotidiana…es un resultado de apoderamiento de la mujer – es capacidad de decir ‘No’ a cualquiera actividad…para expresar sus sentimientos.” –Antonio Morales, 29/11/2010
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