



Migrant Bodies: Corporality, Sexuality, and Power Among Mexican Migrant Men

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Abstract: In this study, the authors explored the construction of embodiment among Mexican men who had experienced migration between Mexico and the United States—and between Mexico and California in particular. The body emerged as a basic, fundamental underpinning of the migratory experience and as a space in which relations of gender and power, identities, sexualities, and desire converged. The migrant men constructed the body in specific ways depending on the different contexts they inhabited. Based on these findings, the authors have detected 2 paradoxes that are essential to understanding the relationships among body, power, and sexuality in the context of gender relations for these men: a paradox manifesting as an estrangement from the body in relation to the migratory trajectory, and a paradox of identity resulting from the collapse of the gender and sexual orders in which the men had been educated.

Key words: embodiment; Mexico; migrants; cultural differences; gender

Displaced Bodies

This study explored the construction of embodiment among Mexican men who had experienced migration between Mexico and the United States—and, in particular, between Mexico and California. Migratory experiences, with all their nuances and specificities, can be analyzed in many ways. We have focused on two aspects of such experiences: the construction of the body throughout the process of migration—during the trajectory toward the destination, while in residence at the new location, and on the return journey to the place of origin—and the effect of migration on gender relations, especially in terms of migrant¹ men's control of women's

bodies, whether in terms of sexuality in general or in the context of marriage.

Based on our findings, we have identified two paradoxes that emerge from the complex interaction of migration with the body, masculinity, and gender relations. The first paradox, which we have termed the *paradox of the body*, resides in the fact that migrants are, if nothing else, moving bodies that are physically and symbolically marked by the experience of migration. However, the body that enables the move from one location to another is itself radically transformed: In the United States, the migrant body symbolizes otherness and thus attracts discrimination and racism, whereas

¹ In the United States, the term *migrant* is generally applied to those foreign workers, both legal and illegal, who work in agriculture. In this article we use the term to refer to people

who have moved from Mexico to the United States irrespective of their place of U.S. residence and their occupation.

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upon its return to the place of origin, the body signifies success and so invites exhibition and celebration. This transformation of the meaning of embodiment via the migratory experience is neither seamless nor coherent; the resulting body image is fractured because the body is at once a source of humiliation and a source of admiration. The second paradox, which we have identified as the *paradox of masculine identity*, becomes apparent with the collapse of the matrix that structures differences between men and women in the sphere of sexuality, as well as the transformation of power relations between men and women that results from the increased empowerment of the latter. Men continue to use gender difference and power as coordinates to construct their own masculinity, but these coordinates become increasingly unstable, if not inoperable, due to migratory experiences.

The body as a field of study and as a point where diverse social relations, distinct practices, and meanings converge has gained importance in the social sciences over the last 2 decades. The politicization of certain relationships as a result of feminist, gay, and lesbian activism, as well as concerns about the proliferation of the AIDS epidemic, together with new cultural phenomena related to the aesthetic, corporeal, and social expression of individuals (among others factors) have allowed researchers to turn their gaze to a dimension that, in many ways, had been veiled or invisible.

Likewise, the body became an analytic dimension by means of the intellectual practices of feminism and the interrogation of some of the moral and reflexive parameters of specific philosophies. From very early on, feminism highlighted the embodied dimension of all experience and of all oppression (Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004; de Lauretis, 1986, 1987; Gatens, 1992; Harding, 2003); simultaneously, philosophers (Habermas, 1992) questioned the classic tradition concerning the constitution of the subject. The body emerged as a decisive territory for the comprehension of power and gender relations, as well as the constitution of identities, forms of sexuality, and various types of resistance and liberation (Grosz, 1994, 1995). Foucault (1978) analyzed the body as a complex field of power relations, disciplines, and social technologies oriented to the constitution of a specific type of subject, with specific moral and political parameters (Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988). This microphysical approach was soon picked up by feminist theorists (Butler) and, again, the discussion about the embodied dimension of experience, oppression, power, and desire came to the forefront.

However, despite these developments, the body has been obscured as a phenomenon relevant to the understanding of concepts such as migration. This situation presents a curious paradox because the ultimate underpinning of migration will always be a body that is physically moved from one place to another. Ignoring the body's role in this actual movement, however short, would place writings about migration in the sphere of travel literature, which allows for the exploration of unknown territory as an exercise of the imagination. Migratory displacement of bodies over the surface of the earth, across national boundaries and cultural limits, is a constitutive dimension of the sensibility of late modernity—a dimension determined by phenomena related to globalization in a postcolonial era (Young, 2003).²

Migration, the Body, and Masculinity: Antecedents and Analytical Directions

Any discussion of the relationship between the body and migration requires acknowledging a series of issues concerning identity, sexuality, gender relations, and health, as well as their effects in complex and conflictive contexts. Using existing research as a starting point, we chose to base our analysis of migration on several issues. From a health perspective, considering issues of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) allows the identification of sexual risk factors or behavior of individuals and groups who contribute to the dissemination of these diseases (Bronfman, Leyva, & Negroni, 2004).

Second, we must take into account the cultural transformation that migrants experience while in the United States: Unfamiliar with either the language or the cultural codes, they must also negotiate a different construction of gender and sexuality. Additionally, their illegal condition³—which applied to 75% of the migrants who

² The migration of Mexican men and women to the United States is a growing phenomenon that involves thousands of individuals every year. An estimated 26.8 million Mexicans were in the United States in the year 2000 (Consejo Nacional de Población, 2002), mostly in the states of California, Texas, Arizona, and Illinois. In California, Mexican migrant men and women constituted 13% of the population, amounting to 4.7 million people in the year 2000. Likewise, an estimated 400,000 people cross over to the United States as migrants every year, three quarters of them illegally (Consejo Nacional de Población). Of these 400,000, 92% are male and 8% are female, 45% are from 24 to 29 years old, and another 16% are from 20 to 24 years old (Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Consejo Nacional de Población, & Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2004).

entered the United States from 2001 through 2004 (Consejo Nacional de Población, 2002)—and the racism to which they are subjected significantly modify their identities and practices (Documét & Sharma, 2004; Organista & Kubo, 2005).

Research (Vega, Kolody, & Aguilar-Gaxiola, 2001) has shown the relevance of migrant men's perception of their own well-being not only to their physical and mental health but also to their high-risk sexual behavior. Other studies (Bronfman & Denman, 2003) have identified a collection of factors that limit migrants' access to health care: the conception migrants have of their own health care, their lack of information about medical prevention, and the precarious conditions in which they live. Some studies (e.g., Pylypa, 2001) have shown that migrants believe that their illegal status does not allow them to receive medical attention. Other factors contributing to migrants' lack of adequate health care are poverty, inadequate education, and beliefs and perceptions (principally among men⁴) that diminish the importance they give to their own health (Sarmiento et al., 2005).

Sexuality, Masculinity, and Risk

Sexuality is undoubtedly central to an understanding of masculine identities and affects migrants' health in many ways. When migrant men leave their homes to explore a completely different space, the tensions and risks they encounter transform their representations of sexuality. The migratory process brings about important changes in sexual habits and, in effect, results in migrants' adoption

of new practices that increase the risk of HIV transmission (Bronfman, Amuchástegui, Martina, & Rodríguez, 1999; De Keijzer & Rodríguez, 2007; Rosas, 2007).

Thus, in 2000, although Latinos represented 30.8% of the population in California, this group comprised 34.2% of the new cases diagnosed with AIDS. The percentage of cases of AIDS among Latinos who were either Mexican or Mexican American increased from 36.5% in 1995 to 47.7% in 2000 (Sánchez et al., 2004). Furthermore, of the 9,424 cases of AIDS reported among Mexicans before 1999, men made up 92% of the total (Sánchez et al.).

Many of these migrants do not take preventive measures even though they have at least some information about the risks of unprotected sex, the ways in which HIV is transmitted, and available prevention methods. The reasons for this behavior are many: migrants' unauthorized status, fear of discovery, different cultural contexts, search for affection, and social marginalization (Magis-Rodríguez et al., 2004). Given that migrants may encounter considerable problems if they publicly acknowledge that they practice high-risk sexual behavior, they are reluctant to take either preventive or curative measures (Bronfman, Sejenovich, & Uribe, 1998). Additionally, migrants often experience barriers to receiving adequate health care even when they do seek it. Therefore, as Castañeda and Zavella (2005) pointed out, migrants are subject to multiple risks that relate not only to the information-conduct binary but also to symbolic, social, economic, affective, and subjective factors. These factors— as well as those mentioned above— interact in complex ways and increase AIDS-STD risk among migrants.

Furthermore, the beliefs held by members of the Latino community with respect to the AIDS epidemic have contributed significantly to its growth among them. For example, Latinos(as) often believed that HIV could be acquired casually, transmitted through coughing or physical, nonsexual contact with an infected person, as well as sexually (Urizar & Winkleby, 2003). Research (Driscoll, Biggs, Brindis, & Yankah, 2001; Urizar & Winkleby) also has shown that beliefs about STDs and HIV/AIDS do not vary with age, gender, race, or the amount of time migrants have spent in the United States, but rather that these views are linked to migrants' level of education.

The ways in which migrant men perceive their bodies influence their notions about sexual and reproductive health. A study conducted in San Francisco by Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz (2004) showed that undocumented laborers' constructions of masculine identity organized their experience of corporeal suffering. Additionally, *structural violence*⁵ transcends economic considerations

3 Strictly speaking, *undocumented immigration* refers only to migrants' not having those papers required to enter or reside in the United States. A more accurate phrase would be *without the proper documentation*, because in their countries of origin these migrants do have the required documentation. Thus, when we mention undocumented status throughout this article, we refer to more than a legal situation: Above all, we refer to a cultural and social status that places migrants in a marginal position with respect to U.S. society.

4 The sanitary and socioeconomic contexts of these analyses have made apparent that 55% of the Mexican migrants residing in the United States (5.9 million people) do not have access to health care. Among those who work in the agricultural sector, the proportion rises to 70%. Additionally, more than half of recent migrants do not have access to facilities for regular hygiene (Consejo Nacional de Población, 2005b) and up to one third of adult migrants have not consulted a doctor in the past 2 years. However, Mexican women are more likely to seek health care and assume responsibility for their own health, especially those who have migrated recently (Consejo Nacional de Población, 2005a).

and involves intimacy directly, engendering a personal and family crisis (Walter, Bourgois, & Loinaz).

Research (Díaz & Ayala, 1999) conducted among gay men of Latino origin who live in the United States explored the link between the meanings assigned to the body, intimacy, and health. Díaz and Ayala classified study participants' explanations concerning the practice of unprotected sex into three different categories: (a) the spontaneous nature of some sexual encounters, understood as situations that engendered spur-of-the-moment action; (b) the incompatibility between safe sex and trust, intimacy, and love; and (c) a fatalistic attitude, ranging from utter resignation to open rebellion, concerning the inevitability of contracting the AIDS virus.

The studies reviewed here offer a series of clues useful for understanding the links between the body, masculinity, and migration. First, the body is lived and constructed in relation to the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural contexts in which it is found. Second, health as a social practice and an expression of the relationship each individual has with himself emerges as an issue complicated by not only the migratory process but also migrants' living conditions in the United States. Migrants often remain at the margins of the U.S. health care system; this marginality has little or nothing to do with individual choice but results from deficient and difficult working, living, social, and emotional conditions. In this context, the high incidence of AIDS in these communities can be understood as a result of a complex network of factors that weaken migrants' capacity to care for and protect themselves and others.

Method

The findings we discuss in this article are based on data from a larger research project, conducted in Mexico and the United States in 2003, aimed at discovering the vulnerabilities of migrant Mexicans in relation to the AIDS epidemic.⁶ This qualitative, ethnographic study

used several research techniques, including in-depth interviews, discussion groups, and participant observation. The project was conducted in five different locations: the cities of Fresno and San Diego in California, and the states of Oaxaca, Michoacán, and Jalisco in Mexico. The places chosen had a high concentration of Mexican migrants (Fresno and San Diego), significant levels of migration (Michoacán and Jalisco), or notable levels of marginality (Oaxaca). In each place, we worked with various groups of informants: women who were wives of migrants, health authorities and members of non-governmental organizations, individuals with important positions or with influence in their communities, sex workers, and migrants with differing experiences of migration or deportation.

From this field, we chose for in-depth interviews only migrant men or men who had experienced migration between the ages of 15 and 75. Due to the specificity of these parameters, we could not procure informants from all five of the aforementioned locations: We had to exclude Jalisco because no in-depth interviews took place there. In total, with informants' consent, we recorded 80 interviews on audiotape. Before the interviews, we told participants that interviews would be completely confidential and anonymous, that participants could stop the process at any time, and that certain questions could be left unanswered. Once transcribed, the interviews were coded with the instrumental help of ATLAS.ti version 4.2, software designed for ethnographic analysis by means of in-depth interviews. The research teams in each location where the study was conducted designed the coding guides that they used for the analysis.

Because the interviews did not focus specifically on embodiment or the construction of the body, the analyses presented here are based on those interview questions we believed to be related to the body as a lived experience and the meaning of that experience. The analysis of migrants' attitudes toward the body and embodiment was complex and difficult to develop. In a certain sense, we have words only for certain experiences—experiences that happen above all to the body but do not necessarily give us the language for articulating the bodily experience *per se*. As our findings make clear, some of the predicaments migrant men experienced exceeded their capacity to signify them verbally. How, then, can we analyze the body? As a strategy, we have opted for examining expressions of the body rather than the body itself.

Interestingly, even though they never address the body directly, the discourses of the migrant men are saturated with embodiment. In this respect, attitudes toward the body and embodiment can be used to articulate myriad

⁵ Structural violence is violence that originates from an unjust and unequal social system that has a differential effect on individuals according to the place they occupy within that order.

⁶ This project was developed as part of collaborative activities between Mexico and California in the fight against AIDS, which include the Programa Universitario de Investigación sobre el SIDA working with Iniciativa de Salud Mexico-California. This study was funded in the United States by an endowment from the University of California Office of the President and in Mexico by the Secretaría de Salud, the Dirección General de Epidemiología, the Centro Nacional para la Prevención y el Control del VIH/SIDA, the Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública, the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, and the Programa IMSS-Oportunidades.

other issues; focusing on the body allowed us to analyze the experience of transit to the United States, as well as the stay there and the return journey. Likewise, this focus allowed us to study gender and power relations, as well as sexuality and the meanings that these men generated with respect to the bodies of women.

Results

To Suffer, Disappear, and Exhibit: The Migrant Body

The migrant men in this study narrated their journey to the United States, especially if it was unauthorized, as an affliction experienced in the body, pointing out corporeal hardship and states that marked their migratory experiences, such as weariness or exhaustion. They also described their relationship with citizens of the country where they had arrived, the United States, as deeply marked by racism and exclusion, both sustained by a process of differentiation based on physical appearances. In this case, the body signified either belonging or foreignness. Finally, when migrants returned to their place of origin, whether the return was temporary or permanent, their experience also acquired a relevant corporeal dimension in that signs of the migrants' supposed success—such as clothing, jewelry, artifacts, and cars—had to be paraded before their peers.

We can therefore trace a trajectory differentiated according to the stages involved in migration: going, staying, and coming back. In each of these stages, we can find a particular experience of the body, a symbolization of the body, and a specific *semiotic appropriation* of the body.⁷

The first stage of migration is traveling toward the chosen destination. We have mapped a typical journey, one embarked upon either for the first time or repeatedly by migrants who attempted to enter the United States

without the necessary documentation. We have ignored variations of this journey, for example, cases in which the migrant was a legal resident or a U.S. citizen, or in which the migrant traveled in the company of family members. The clandestine journey, undertaken in the absence of affectively significant relationships without friends or family, most dramatically implicates the body because, in the end, the body is the ultimate basis of the illegality that is attributed to it: a body that inhabits a certain space contrary to the laws of a country.⁸

The men in our study experienced migration as a treacherous, nerve-racking transit through uncharted, dangerous territory, usually under the control of a third party—the *coyote*,⁹ with whom they negotiated a price for successful entry into the United States. This experience was centered on corporeal states and processes, signified as both suffering and risk:

Q: How do they lose control?

A: Well, you don't eat well, you don't sleep well; once I saw someone crying, "Mom! Mom!" and the coyote came along and—bang!—he hit him so that he would control himself; he was given a little bit of water and he went on and on and so they left him there....It's horrible, buddy. (Daniel, Oaxaca)¹⁰

Q: What were the greatest risks you encountered when you crossed this time?

A: Well, only that we could be bitten by a snake or something like that, because we would wait on a hill to a certain time; according to the coyote we had to stay there 'til one in the morning since it was the best time to cross, and there are animals and snakes but, as I said, thank God everything went well. (Esteban, Michoacán)

⁷ The origin of semiotics may be traced back to Hippocrates and Galen, who attempted to relate the body to culture by means of an interpretation of symptoms. In its modern use, semiotics is the discipline that studies signs (Payne, 2002). Umberto Eco has pointed out that a sign is anything that may substitute for another thing, creating a relationship between the sign and the signified; he asserted that semiotics studies everything useful to lying (Payne). In this article, we define semiotics as the study of signs, neither false nor true, that allow for the construction of a representation—in this case, about (and with) the body itself. In this manner, we also rescue its original meaning in that we attempt to discern the relationships between body and culture by means of reading bodily experiences and practices, as well as identifying the meanings with which the body is invested.

⁸ Geographic borders between countries separate specific regimes that determine social interaction, belonging, and expulsion. Therefore, illegality can emerge when a body crosses a particular frontier—in this case, a national border.

⁹ A *coyote* is an individual who guides migrants across the border into the United States. The migrant either contacts this person at a Mexican border city or the migrant's family members or friends contact the coyote beforehand. The coyote knows the best routes for entering the United States and receives a certain amount of money for this service. Interviewees in this study mentioned US\$1,500 as the fee, but the amount depends on the place where the crossings occur and the risk the coyote himself has to take. Chávez (1998) has done an interesting study of this phenomenon.

¹⁰ All quotations from the interviews have been translated into English from Spanish.

A successful migrant is one who has been capable of overcoming risk and suffering to reach the desired destination, to triumph. Others, individuals incapable of enduring the experience, may have fallen along the way. In this sense, migration becomes a trial that tests the body's resistance and the mind's psychological strength. It also constitutes an ethical crossroads that separates those who can control themselves despite the adverse and dangerous circumstances from those who fail:

We walked without stopping; the body no longer responded either to exhaustion or anything, it was like an automaton, as if it were another person: completely numb, but if we stopped we'd be lost, if we retraced our steps the *migra* [officials working for U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement or the Border Patrol] would grab us. We had no choice but to go on and on. It was a fight for life. (Jacinto, Michoacán)

In such situations, the body becomes the only support as well as the limit of the experience. Jacinto mentioned that he felt like an automaton, as if he were another person. The body dissolved; what remained was a certain will and disposition to fight for life. The objective that shaped the voyage prevailed over individual needs and circumstances. Clearly, there is an ethics to the migratory experience that demands that people manage for themselves or face the consequences. Although a border crossing can be collective in the sense that other people are undertaking the same journey, it is a selected and selective journey: Each person is responsible for her or his own fate. Furthermore, given the extreme conditions of the border crossing, misfortune always supposes an essential corporeal dimension. Therefore, the body, which can seem to disappear from the effects of exhaustion, also emerges as the only guarantee of survival.

Carlos, whom we quote below, ran out of water at one point in his journey and was so thirsty that he drank his own urine to survive. Such a situation marks a limit for both personal experience and discourse in the attempt to describe the situation. When only the body remains, exhausted, it is impossible to signify experience. The body is traced as a limit of discourse and a border between life and death. The suffering mentioned has a silent dimension, an excess that cannot be apprehended with words. The impossibility of imagining Carlos's experience indicates that it exceeds the limits of culture (the imaginable) and is located at an extreme in which the urgent task of survival allows certain solutions that are otherwise taboo—to ingest substances

that are expelled, to bring back inside what is outside, to eat or drink of oneself:

Once I ran out of water in the desert, but you have to live with the need to drink water. You can't ask anyone for anything because they get angry and tell you it is not their problem....During one of my attempts I broke an ankle, but because of the fear of being deported by immigration I had to run; then the coyote threatened me and told me that he'd leave me behind in the desert if I didn't walk faster. (Alvaro, San Diego)

Look, just so that you will understand what it feels like, since you have never found yourself at such extremes: The thirst was as if you'd been at the gym exercising nonstop for 10 hours without drinking water....That is why I drank the urine from my own body, it was the only liquid available....Thirst is horrible, you cannot possibly imagine the sensation until you feel it in your own body. (Carlos, Oaxaca)

The Alien Invasion: Racism and Exclusion

The second phase of the migratory experience corresponds to the sojourn at the destination. For this study, we have focused on the embodiment of racism and exclusion. Interviewees pointed out that in the California cities of Fresno and San Diego, migrants are called *aliens*. This term can be interpreted, on the one hand, as a way of establishing migrants' foreignness; on the other, the word emphasizes their strangeness and their invasive nature. What does it mean to be an alien? Perhaps what the word indicates is the paradoxical condition of the migrant body, which is perceived yet negated. The migrant is treated as an invasive body that interrupts the daily routines of the locals. An alien is a being without a place, strange by definition, present but not integrated. What sort of body does an alien have? First, the body itself visually places the migrant as a stranger. Second, the migrant body is emptied of subjectivity and history in that its strangeness inhibits identification and obstructs its integration into the local symbolic networks that name it.

Several degrees of strangeness occur: In comparative terms, some migrants can be viewed as more alien than others. As one interviewee told us, those with more marked indigenous features are perceived as more alien. In addition, he said, some migrants are excluded from certain shared solutions to everyday needs, such as washing clothes. They are strange because of their appearance—their dark

skin as well as the dishevelment produced by their living conditions:

Their height and skin color is relevant. Your features are also important; how you look is crucial to the way in which you are discriminated [against]...the people that are most discriminated [against] are those with Indian features. Someone who is short and dark skinned is more susceptible to discrimination. I have heard [of] people who live in the hills, in the country, who have nowhere to live and who sleep in the hills; these are the people who have nowhere to wash their clothes. One of them was stopped by the police, it was raining and they were all covered in mud; a policeman stopped them and told them they were visual pollution. (Pablo, Fresno)

The body, because of its features, characteristics, and particular traits, is the territory upon which a network of exclusions and inclusions is traced. Racism is organized, in many of its manifestations, as a boundary—an interpretation followed by an exclusion and a rejection of bodies (Foucault, 1992). The body of the other allows the establishment of certain barriers, sealed by disdain and rejection: skin color, demeanor, certain features, particular clothing. So, as soon as migrants have crossed the geographic and legal border, another border emerges as a permanent daily experience—a symbolic, ethical, and political border of identity. A reading of the body by others is the basis of the construction of an exclusion of the entire subject, and it sustains the migrant's humiliation or exploitation (Butler, 1993). The process is comparative: Every feature or trait acquires social value. So, for example, greater height means belonging, superiority, and Whiteness:

You see, when I was there, for example at the restaurants and nightclubs, meaning any place where one is seen as short, dark skinned, or humbly dressed, well, you are simply brushed aside. Those from the north turn their backs on you, because they are tall, it is that kind of physical appearance that is discriminated [against], since at work they see you are humble and take advantage of you—they make you work harder. (Víctor, Oaxaca)

The Spectacle: A Semiotics of Success

The third stage of the migratory journey is the return, be it temporary or permanent, to the place of origin. The first phase was marked by suffering and risk, the second by exclusion; the third is distinguished by spectacle. The body exhibits certain signs of presumed success, and the migrant who has returned is placed in a position of superiority with respect to his peers. One interviewee noted a

certain arrogance, a particular perception of themselves that migrants showed upon their return:

Because sometimes they arrive and show off, they went there, they were there....It looks bad, because they should teach the young that sometimes things happen, there are accidents, in cars; they are very conceited because of alcoholism, because they think they went to the USA and all that. (Alberto, Oaxaca)

Note that this exhibition of success is directly linked to masculinity and proven in the arena of sexual conquest. A man who has migrated to the United States is more attractive to women compared with a man who has remained in his place of origin. According to those interviewed, women judge men according to a migratory parameter: They make themselves sexually available to the successful returning migrant while showing disdain for those who have not traveled:

This is a village in which you are judged according to whether you leave and come back successfully—any broad takes her clothes off—and when you are here and do not leave, the broads themselves say farewell, don't even speak to you, ignore you completely. (Pedro, Michoacán)

The mandate for returning migrants is to exhibit their achievements, a spectacle that justifies the journey and organizes the narrative: Migrants flaunt successes without recounting misfortunes. Ostentatious spectacle demonstrates prosperity and abundance; consequently, there emerges a social scene with two contradictory emotions: embarrassment on the part of the migrant and envy on the part of his admirers. The embarrassment must be overcome in order to produce the spectacle. Víctor said that he is "not embarrassed"; "I do show," he added. Envy follows the exhibition and is premised on a competitive relationship. The body is then constructed as the collection of the objects that it bears—cars, jewelry, clothing:

When you come back, well, you have to show that you went there for something that was worth it. You aren't going to talk about how shitty life was over there. You swallow that, only you know it. Here it is better to show courage....Well, yes, these chains cost me a good deal of dough. They are pure silver. The van, too, it isn't the latest model but it is well equipped. It is the envy of many, especially when I go out with attractive broads. I do show, I am not shy, I have paid the price. If you went to the other side, it was to succeed. If not, well, what is the point: Shitty there, shitty here. No. (Víctor, Oaxaca)

The dynamic Carlos mentioned acquires consistency through the gaze, which functions as a social mechanism of evaluation and grants status to the successful

migrant, who conceals the losses and failures—the “shitty” experiences—and displays only the successes and achievements. This play of spectacle and concealment condenses emotions: embarrassment toward what is shown and what is concealed, envy at what is seen and what is contrasted. Carlos clearly pointed out this contrast: If it was so “shitty,” why migrate? The entire collection of justifications for migration is based on the spectacle, establishing the purpose of the journey retrospectively when those at home see what was accomplished, when it can be displayed before them. It is significant that Víctor swallowed his misfortunes just as Carlos drank his urine. Thus, the migratory move is always corporeal, either metaphorically or physically.

This semiotic of success, which plays out on the bodies of the men who have migrated and returned, operates as an imaginary invitation to migration for those who have not ventured abroad. The signs of success are as visible at home as the signs of exclusion were in the United States. It is as if migration, as a personal project, were premised on this contact between bodies that differ according to their representation and apparel. In the case of returning, the poorly dressed bodies of those who have stayed behind contrast with the well-dressed bodies of those who have migrated and confer, among other things, greater sexual attractiveness. This return, oriented by a demonstration of personal success organized around certain possessions, disturbs the values and status of each and every one of the men in the migrants’ home communities.

Thus, the body is never just a physical dimension because it is permanently signified and resignified according to specific coordinates that organize the social and symbolic life of certain groups. The transformation of the body into a support for determined practices of differentiation allows the creation of certain life projects, such as migration. It also supports the web of gender relations, those between men and women and between the men themselves, who prove their manliness with the migratory process. The scene Víctor described—the taller Whites belittling the shorter, dark-skinned migrants—is, upon the migrant’s return, reproduced on the plane of physical similarity (those who migrated and those who stayed behind have similar features) but by means of corporeal differentiation, in that the body is invested and reinvested with the signs of success:

Q: Why did you come back?

A: Well, when people go there you see that they are well dressed and excited because one imagines that they come here to pick dollars. They save when they go and one sees them dress well [in their community] and one believes that one will

be better off on the other side [in the United States]. And when you arrive, you realize you are the same.

Q: What had you heard about the USA?

A: No, that you earned a lot and that it was easy, that life was very different, but no, it is a lie. (Luis, Fresno)

As a result of migration, then, the body acquires meaning and is experienced in three different ways: (a) as an ailing body constructed in the process of migration, (b) as a body disdained and obscured by racism and exclusion in the United States, and (c) as a body to be displayed and rewarded that is constituted upon return to the place of origin. Perhaps from the perspective of embodiment, migration must be understood as a divided phenomenon and experience. At one stage, migration requires the permanence of the body; at another, its social and symbolic disappearance; and at a third, its exhibition and semiotic re-creation. Is the migratory body, then, one body? Or is it many different bodies inserted into diverse and conflicting practices, webs of signification and sociocultural contexts that establish its particular status?

Sexuality, Control, and Desire: The Bodies of Migrant Women

The body is the locus of multiple social relationships and varied subject positions (Braidotti, 2000; Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004; Gatens, 1992). Embedded in a network of power relationships, one of the body’s most relevant dimensions is related to sexuality and desire (Foucault, 1978; Martin et al., 1988). Thus, the body is a territory in which gender relationships are played out, with the roles based on determined social practices and fixed meanings.

In this section, we focus on what study participants said about these subjects, grounded as the men are in sociocultural constructions of embodiment and gender and the expression of these constructions in sexuality (González-López, 2005; Hirsch, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). In listening to the discourse of these migrant men, we may ascertain that the bodies of women are imprisoned by their own requirements—that is, the rules of a morality and the demands of a specific organization of gender relationships (Castañeda & Zavella, 2003, 2005). In this manner, women become doubly available: on the one hand, as sexual objects that may be abused; on the other, as guardians of societal customs who must be available for marriage:

She who leaves has more freedom to go wherever she likes and go out with whomever she likes; she has more [sexual] relations here than there. (Rubén, San Diego)

There the women are very liberal I tell you; you arrive, go to a bar or a restaurant and she chats to you, if she likes you she has a conversation and all that, so it is quicker to find what you are looking for. (Ernesto, Oaxaca)

Q: What sort of women do you prefer for marriage, one from the north or one from there [Mexico] that hasn't traveled here?

A: Well, preferably one from there, because here there are women that were very serious over there and here they go to the devil [become uncontrollable].

Q: Have you met women of this sort?

A: Of course. (Fernando, Fresno)

The women who leave... well they have lost because over there they don't have the same modesty, no one around looks out for them. It is best that they stay there; if they return to the village, don't even think that they are going to marry one of those who stayed behind. They don't have the same value. One knows that there women become libertines. Look, there are many places where they can go, like hotels and motels or even in cars, in the parking lots of shopping centers. Anyway, in any little place one can make a bed. (Gaspar, Michoacán)

Migrant males generate a dichotomy with respect to women's bodies between decency (embodied by the wife) and licentiousness (represented by the single woman). The men interpreted the single woman's freedom as a lack of control: The woman who behaves in this way decides whom she sees and when. In contrast, migrant men viewed the women in Mexico as being serious and modest rather than uncontrollable. These attributes of women are structured according to cultural differences between the two worlds that migrant men inhabit: In the United States, women have more freedom (and thus "go to the devil"), whereas in Mexico, they uphold custom and tradition (and so are valued for marriage). The boundaries inherent in migration clearly also include gender relations, tracing limits between women, their behavior, and their associations with the national identity of the male migrants.

Q: And what do they tell you about the girls?

A: That you only have to show up and say it.

Q: To have sex?

A: Yes, to have sex. (Felipe, Fresno)

Well, you see over there you find all sorts but [...] our culture is different. The U.S. is a very developed country, but it is very degenerate also. (Justo, Oaxaca)

This divided imaginary—modesty versus licentiousness—affects migrant men's sexuality as well as their view of women. The migrants who value the modesty of their peers in their home villages and cities mentioned the complete sexual availability of women in the United States. In other words, in Mexico, there is scarcity; in the United States, abundance. Women's uncontrollability in the new land offers a hitherto unknown sexual abundance for the migrant: "[Y]ou only have to show up and say it." Thus, migrant women who are accused of being licentious resemble native women more so than their peers in the United States because they are being held to the standards of Mexican tradition. The forms in which sexuality signifies and is made manifest, the concise semiotic that allows women to be acknowledged as uncontrolled or serious, overlaps with issues of identity and belonging. This application of the standards of Mexican tradition to migrant women replicates a particular association between the nation and the woman by means of sexuality and motherhood, an association that penetrates her entire body as the origin of national identity (Mosse, 1985; Nash, 1996). When asked what happens when women stay in Mexico, one participant replied, "Well, I think that they are more respected, because over there [in the United States] life is very different, more liberal" (Diego, Oaxaca).

Likewise, the imaginary abundance associated with sex in the United States presumes a transformation of the behavioral, ethical, and imaginary frameworks that order masculine sexuality once the migrants reside in that country. On the one hand, given these new moral and behavioral coordinates, it is believed that the voracious sexual appetite attributed to men may at last be fully satisfied. On the other hand, the terms of the relationships between men and women are transformed given that femininity in Mexico is premised on the decency of women, whereas the women in the United States are viewed as behaving like men because of their licentiousness and utter availability. That being the case, the opposition previously employed to construct sexual bonds—the decency of the women versus men's insatiable appetite—is invalidated.

Q: When you have a girlfriend, are you faithful?

A: Yes, when I have a girlfriend, yes. But as a man, if you like women, any woman is attractive. (Miguel, Fresno)

Women over there [in Mexico] are very reserved. They are not as liberal as they are here, you can see them everywhere, in the bars, in all sort of places.

Q: What other difference have you noticed?

A: The only difference is that here they boss us around (laughter).

Q: Who is the boss here?

A: Women, they say that women are the bosses. Who knows? (Bruno, San Diego)

When there is a lot of lonely *raza* [Mexican men], with dough and needs, women have lots of choice. Over there one is very needy, sometimes one feels sad, depressed like. Besides, you know, the flesh cries out, especially after a full week's work, when you've had a few beers and especially...when you have dough and nature becomes feverish...and the problem is that there are not many women who are free. That is why those who are, well, they know what to expect. Many go for that, to catch a good match which they won't find here, since the competition here is big, there it isn't. There is a lack of decent women. (Gaspar, Michoacán)

Furthermore, participants' responses showed an inversion of gender relations for migrant men and women: In Mexico, men were in control; in the United States, women are in control—"women are the bosses." The migrant men made clear that men's control over women was eroded in the United States in three specific ways: They no longer had control over whom the women could associate with, how men used women's personal time, or where women were allowed to go. In their places of origin, men's control over women was ensured by a gender organization that allowed masculine supervision of people, time, and locations—a control over women that was perpetuated in marriage.

Power and Desire: An Orphaned Sexuality

Two important characteristics emerged for the ways in which migration affected the structure of gender relationships. First, in the sphere of sexuality that dictated unrestrained sexual appetite for men and modesty for women, the axis that had structured the differences between men and women collapses as women take control of their own sexuality. Second, the vector of the power relationships between men and women becomes inverted as migrant women gain increasing levels of autonomy and independence. Both characteristics are alien to the gender order in which migrant men were socialized.

Despite the transformation of gender relationships in the United States, a reference to Mexico as evidence that the traditional order works is ever present. In the United States, migrant women resemble men in terms of the power they wield in relationships, a position that mirrors

what men would enjoy if they still lived in Mexico. Therefore, the same generic order, behavioral patterns, and prerogatives apply to migrant men and women in the United States, but this time without the polarity that makes this structure work in Mexico. Once the female body ceases to be a site of control, or when control is weakened, sexuality and power are significantly transformed for both men and women.

But if masculine sexuality is organized according to a vector of control over the body of women and their personal autonomy, it also encompasses a form of desire that falls apart or loses its strength. Given its close link to power, the sexuality of migrant men becomes orphaned: It loses its structural bearings and must respond to new rules that confound and fragment it.

Conclusions

The body, in all its complexities and its nuances, is a dimension of lived experience relevant to understanding the migratory dynamic and allows a specific type of analysis related to embodiment, the limits of language, and relationships of power and gender. Likewise, the experience of the body allows historicizing the migratory process, at least at those moments that we have identified: to go, to stay, and to return. Additionally, migration is an important key to understanding such issues as health and sexuality in migrant populations.

The body and identity are distinguishable only analytically, not experientially. Thus, the links between the politics of the body practiced by the migrants and their gender and sexual identities, as well as their desire and sexuality, allow us to discern the network of gender relationships that are reconfigured by migration. Therefore, when we analyze these constructions of embodiment, we can understand the metamorphoses experienced by changes in the status of the bodies of women, who tend to acquire greater autonomy and determination when they migrate to the United States.

This change in women's status places migrant men in a paradoxical situation. In the United States, migrant bodies—both men's own bodies and those of women—neither work nor respond as the men expect them to, nor do identities function in the usual manner. The network of power and gender relations in which their own identities are implicated no longer work as they should, producing not only a paradox of the body but also a paradox of masculine identity. The dissolution of migrant men's habitual coordinates is partially resolved by constant reference to an idealized place of origin. It is also important to consider that paradoxes emerge in specific situations. Therefore, we could argue that once the social

and cultural conditions that gave rise to the paradox have changed, the paradox would be resolved, allowing migrant men to experience their sexuality and signify their identities in the context of more equal relationships with women to power and gender.

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