

ETHNOGRAPHERS OF MIGRANT MIXTEC WOMEN IN CALIFORNIA. AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO NARRATIVES OF TRANSMIGRATION, TRANSNATIONAL MOTHERHOOD AND PREGNANCY IN THE CONTEXT OF WESTERN MEDICINE¹

ETNOGRAFÍAS DE MUJERES MIGRANTES MIXTECAS EN CALIFORNIA. UNA APROXIMACIÓN ANTROPOLÓGICA A LAS NARRATIVAS DE TRANSMIGRACIÓN, MATERNIDAD TRANSNACIONAL Y EMBARAZO EN EL CONTEXTO DE LA MEDICINA OCCIDENTAL

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Abstract

This article examines the narratives of mixtec women from Oaxaca, Mexico, who migrated to Oxnard City, California, USA. The ethnographies derived from their migratory process were analyzed through 27 in-depth interviews.

The complexity involved in the study of international migration, intersected with

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gender and ethnicity, has required a multi-methodology in accordance with this specificity. Through a decolonized investigation this research examines the situations of inequality and oppression that affect indigenous women, defined in different historical contexts than those of urban, white, western and heterosexual women, which classic feminism has formulated.

The first section of the article focuses on the narratives of transmigration, which are analyzed in relation to the dimensions that influence and intervene in terms of gender roles. The second section explores the complexity of transnational motherhood in the host society as mothers or mothers-to-be, approaching the multidynamics of transnational care, and how the health management of pregnancy is a complex issue in the face of cultural difference and the lack of an inter-ethnic sensitive health care system. This research highlights the challenges and cultural impacts that they face as indigenous women, migrant women, and mothers, in a transnational and migratory context.

Everything related to their role as mothers is very complex, since they are the ones who entirely take care of their family. This assumption of care empowers the agency of these women who are attentive to their family on both sides of the border.

This research has focused an approach on these subjects and underline how colonialism, gender and ethnocentrism constantly act on indigenous populations, greatly affecting women, as well as to highlight on the transformative and significant involvement and agency of these women.

Keywords: ethnic migration; indigenous women; transnational motherhood; mixtec community; gender roles.

Resumen

En este artículo se examinan las narrativas de mujeres mixtecas provenientes de Oaxaca, México, migrantes en la ciudad de Oxnard, California, Estados Unidos. A través de la realización de 27 entrevistas en profundidad, se han analizado las etnografías derivadas de su proceso migratorio. La complejidad que conlleva el estudio de las migraciones internacionales, cruzada con el género y la etnicidad, ha requerido de una multi-metodología acorde con dicha especificidad. A través de una investigación descolonizada, este estudio examina las situaciones de desigualdad y opresión que afectan a las mujeres indígenas, definidas en contextos históricos distintos al de las mujeres urbanas, blancas, occidentales y heterosexuales, que el feminismo clásico ha formulado.

En la primera sección del artículo se analizan las narrativas de la trans migración en relación con los aspectos que influyen e intervienen en cuanto a los roles de género.

En la segunda sección, se explora la complejidad de la maternidad transnacional en la sociedad de destino en su condición de madres o futuras madres. El artículo se aproxima a las multidinámicas del cuidado transnacional, y a cómo la gestión sanitaria

del embarazo es un asunto complejo ante la diferencia cultural y la carencia de una sanidad con sensibilidad interétnica. Este trabajo pone de manifiesto los múltiples desafíos e impactos culturales que concurren en sus personas como mujeres originarias, migrantes y madres, en un contexto transnacional. Todo lo relacionado con su papel de madres es muy complejo, ya que son ellas las que íntegramente se ocupan de su familia. Esta asunción de cuidados potencia la agencia de estas mujeres que están pendientes de su familia a un lado y al otro de la frontera.

El foco de esta investigación se dirige a subrayar cómo el colonialismo, el género y el etnocentrismo actúan constantemente sobre las poblaciones indígenas, afectando en gran medida a las mujeres. Asimismo, se enfoca en la significativa participación y agencia transformadora de estas mujeres.

Palabras clave: migración étnica; mujeres indígenas; maternidad transnacional; comunidad mixteca; Roles de género.

1. INTRODUCTION. MIXTEC MIGRATION TO CALIFORNIA

The migratory context and how such process differentially affects indigenous mixtec migrant women in Oxnard, California, in terms of gender roles and the so-called transnational motherhood, is the subject of this paper.

Mixtec migration to the U.S. is not recent, indeed it has a long history. Since the 19th century, various indigenous mexican ethnic groups have been working in the mines and agriculture of the United States (Oehmichen Bazán, 2015). Fox and Rivera-Salgado point out that the implementation of the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) led to large migratory movements from the countryside to the city in the interior of the country, or to the United States (Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004). However, these international migration flows to the US are more recent. Rivera Salgado points out that it was not until the end of the 70s of the last century that they began to arrive in a more considerable way to the states of California, Oregon and Washington, principally (Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Zabin, 1992).

In this sense, it seems pertinent to highlight the periodization of stages that Laura Velasco proposes in relation to mixtec migration, incorporating the integration of women in these stages. This author places the first stage between the years of 1940 and 1960, being Veracruz, Mexico City, and the USA the main destinations. Women were incorporated into this migration as domestic workers. In the second stage, from 1961 to 1980, agricultural

migration to the northwest of the country took hold, and women began to migrate in order to regroup their families. The third stage refers to the years from 1981 to 2000, when the establishment of the mixtec community on both sides of Mexico's northern border was consolidated. A fourth stage, from the 2000s to the present, could be defined as the continuity and permanence of the mixtec settlement in California. At this stage, women do not migrate exclusively for family projects, but also for personal autonomy projects.

On the other hand, the Oaxacan indigenous people have represented the so-called «ethnic replacement» (Oehmichen Bazán, 2015; Velasco Ortiz, 2005; Zabin, 1992), by a certain tolerance for harsher working conditions, and by the resistance of mestizo day laborers to accept new precarious conditions after years of struggle in the Californian countryside. By the 1990s it is estimated that the mixtecs were the most numerous indigenous people in California, surpassing even Native Americans (Oehmichen Bazán, 2015). The exact number of mixtecs in California cannot be known today, given the irregularity associated with their migration. However, in 2010 there was an estimation of 165,000 mixtecs working in agriculture in the Central Valley of California (Rivera-Salgado, 2014; Velasco Ortiz, 2005).

The region in which they reside in Mexico, the Mixteca, was one of the most populated in Mesoamerica, and of great political and artistic importance. It is a large territory divided into four regions that stretch from the border between Guerrero and Oaxaca, to the Valley of Oaxaca, and from the south of Puebla to the Pacific Ocean. These regions are known as: The Mixteca Alta, the Mixteca Baja, the Mixteca Costa and the Valley of Oaxaca.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The methodological framework that has been articulated for the development of this research has been multimethodological, which, according to Ariza and Velasco «does not have a unified theoretical body» (2012, p. 19). The complexity involved in the study of international migration, intersected with gender and ethnicity, has required a multi-methodology in accordance with this specificity. The result allows establishing a greater focus and level of reflection revaluing the knowledge of indigenous communities and women, through their narratives (Ripamonti, 2017) in order to displace the hegemony

of the western understanding of the world, to give way to an «ecology of knowledge» (De Sousa Santos, 2012).

In order to carry out this type of research, I have worked in the context of the civil society organization, Mixteco Indígena Community Organizing Project (henceforth MICOP), which is located in the city of Oxnard (California). It is made up mainly of indigenous Mixtec migrants, although Zapotec and Guerrero migrants also swell its ranks. Collaborative research was established with the organization (Hale, 2001; Speed, 2008; Paris Pombo, 2012; Stephen, 2012), through which participant observation was developed in that organization during the month of April 2014, and in the months of April and May 2016.

I conducted 27 in-depth interviews with mixtec migrant women, who were farm workers and community promoters in MICOP³. Participant observation also consisted of being part of the workshops they attended and coming to social events that took place in the context of the city of Oxnard, as well be present at various programs on Radio Indígena. This organization promotes the leadership of the indigenous migrant community through information campaigns and social programs. The different programs have a common denominator: to reinforce the positive meaning of the mixtec identity. This reverses the focus on ethnicity as a value, rather than as a stigma.

According to M^a Dolores París, this type of research «highlights the social agenda [...] This signals an important epistemological transformation: our counterparts are considered as subjects (and not objects) of knowledge, their knowledge and experiences are valued as a central part of the research process» (2012, pp. 259-260). This aspect comes to question the authority of the researcher's knowledge as valid or unique.

The gender perspective, present in their programs, has been the guiding thread of this study. This approach allows us to analyze how patriarchy in a silent way promotes more hostile contexts for the development and social acceptance of women as epistemic and productive subjects, as opposed to their role as social reproducers (Beauvoir, 1949/2000; Scott, 1996; Butler,

3. The real name of the interviewed people has not been used in the verbatim quotes included on this paper. Conversely, I used a pseudonymous (quoted in italics) to protect their identity.

2007), and in turn, how their reproductive role is conditioned by their position in the social structure. Thus, being a mother, indigenous and migrant, entails roles, impacts and stigmatizations that are far from the more idealized vision of motherhood. Indigenous women are affected by historical social displacement (Robles Santana, 2014) that increases the structural and accumulated vulnerability they carry. Their gender condition increases the ideology linked to the development paradigm that has justified their stigmatization, since as women in their communities of origin, they have had less access to formal education and to the possibility of being included in organic structures outside the domestic-family order.

Indigenous migrant women in the USA, placed at the crossroads of irregularity, associated discrimination, and integration into the new destination society, are in addition highly pressured by patriarchal social mandates. In the migratory framework, the assumption of other identity models, is extended in terms of the incorporation of new roles and gender relations that are emerging in new contexts outside the community. This gives rise to an identity readjustment which underlies a symbolic border, since in some way they continue to live between two cultures, and between two cultural systems of gender, both of which are crossed by norms contextualized in the current coloniality of power (Quijano, 1991), and the coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2008).

Likewise, through a decolonized investigation (Hale, 2001; Speed, 2006), I wanted to examine the situations of inequality and oppression that affect indigenous women, defined in different historical contexts than those of urban, white, western and heterosexual women, which classic feminism has formulated (Espinosa et al., 2014; Millán, 2014; Suárez & Hernández, 2008). Theoretical and methodological assumptions were based on the consideration of the cultural differences of the population under study and myself, the researcher. Taking into account the above and following the proposals and guidelines of several authors (Speed, 2008; Castañeda Salgado, 2012; Oehmichen Bazán, 2014), these differential power relations between the researcher and the person being researched must be taken into account. In this way, it is intended to avoid being mediated by coloniality in the production of knowledge, and that the knowledge generated is produced in dialogue with the population studied (Hale, 2007).

3. ETHNOGRAPHIES OF TRANSMIGRATION: RESISTANCE AND REACTION STRATEGIES

The narratives of Mixtec women regarding their motivations and experiences of migration to the *North*⁴, indicate that many of them decided to go alone, a situation that has been documented in other investigations (D'Aubeterre, 2003; Klein & Vázquez-Flores, 2013). The years 1984-85 could be identified as the time when the migration of mixtec women to California began to increase in number and frequency (Nagengast & Kearney, 1990). The decision to migrate is not insignificant, since the route entails risks that many are aware of, but do not measure the extent of them. Other women, on the contrary, are not aware and prepare themselves for a venture that seen in the temporal distance, has not left them indifferent. However, despite the insecurity of the route and the crossing, many of them, even if they are detained and deported, repeat it and try again as many times as necessary:

I came on my own but with a coyote just the same, the second time it didn't go so well, the first time two hooded men had assaulted us on the line [border], they surrounded us, they had kidnapped us and I was the only woman they had stopped, and I don't know, they wanted to do something more about it. It was a terrible experience because I expected the worst, so that was the first time. The second time there were shots, we all ran, a lady was shot but on one foot... very ugly experiences... we passed by Tijuana. At that time, I did not measure the consequences, I was a child who did not care about the consequences of these acts. I was just making the decision of the acts, I want to go, I leave and that's it. But once being there one sees the things that happen, but that didn't stop me. I came to this country to work in the fields again, maybe I didn't last long, maybe I didn't know what I wanted anyway. I also suffered from domestic violence, just once with a relative here in the United States, because I had no father in my house and in that matter no one hit us more than my mother, so we never knew it was a male's hit. I decided to report that, I have never been one of those submissive people, never have been and never will be, I think. I called the police but this person managed to get out in time and that's when I said, I'd rather go back with my mother, and be there. I left again and went to Mexico, I was there only for a short time, I came back again, it was the third time and I said enough. (Ana, April, 2016)

4. Migrants speak of the «North» to refer to the United States of America.

Ana's narrative gives an account of the personal agency that involves her decisions, with projects of autonomy and liberation beyond the family. It also reflects the intersection of multiple pressures and oppressions linked to her gender (Robles Santana, 2020), which are not only present at origin, but in the migratory trajectory and at the destination.

The decision to migrate is related to a range of facts and circumstances, among which the following stand out: 1) The motivation preceded by successful migration experiences in the North by other migrants in their community. 2) Flight from gender violence by a family member or neighbor. 3) The financial motivation to help their family, which leads to the conscious separation of one or more of their children. 4) The absence of personal development options in their community, or because of the structural violence that plagues indigenous communities. 5) Family reunification, whether are women who reunite with their husbands, or minors and young people who reunite with their families.

Regardless of the different motivations, it has been documented after the discussions held, that there is an idealization of migratory opportunities, which is based on the idea of getting out of the cycle of poverty-violence in which they find themselves and weaving a more promising future, mainly for their offspring. However, the decision to migrate in women, involves a lot of resistance from their family and community, which can be seen in the maintenance of control beyond the border.

My dad objected and said, «If you leave and come back with a son, you're no longer my daughter because you're underage, I'm gonna throw you out». (Elisa, May, 2016)

Women have to face several challenges in the context of international migration: the separation from their community and family, the questioning of the *abandonment* of their children under the patriarchal punishment linked to being a *bad mother*, the transmigration with the associated dangers, and the beginning of a new life very different from that of their origin. As they begin the journey alone, they are faced with a journey full of uncertainties, dangers, risks, and multiple violence, where male presence and domination is a constant.

We came walking across Tijuana through the desert, there were several women from different states, and so, among women we protected each other. It's what we always do, when we don't know anyone because we say OK, she's my relative, she's my cousin, she's my aunt whatever, even if you're nothing, because it's the only way you protect yourself from someone... Sometimes, the leaders are the ones who hurt us, or rape the women, or do any evil. We are in agreement. (Sofía, April, 2016)

The above words show gestures and strategies of sorority among women against male dominance, which helps to increase their protection. These women weave networks of communication and mutual support to face migratory vulnerability, increasing their security in defenseless scenarios. This way of acting, shows how they defy the same gender strategies where only men are sought for support. Women themselves form a nucleus of defense that serves as a shelter, as a guarantee of care and reciprocity in watching over themselves, as opposed to the insecurity projected on them by men.

On the other hand, the young Mixtecs who take the route to reunite with their families endure added stress. Being a minor, a woman, a migrant and an indigenous person increases their vulnerability and the possibility of being the subject of violence(s) on the route when they go to meet their parents —often against their will— of whom they have vague memories, or do not remember them. It is not a decision of their own, but they are forced to leave their community because their parents demand it, something that also generates nervousness and stress. Along the way, in addition to being exposed to the abuses described, they may also be detained and sent to juvenile facilities in the United States (from now on the US), without knowing what will happen to them.

When I came to the border it was difficult. I came here alone. I took a truck that was leaving my town for about an hour and I arrived in Tijuana, I lasted about 3 days, and from there my father was already talking to a man, he had contacts that could help me get through. When I tried the first time it was difficult because they caught me, I was a minor, they had to put me in a Juvenile Center. I was there for about two days, and my dad talked and they took me back, they took me out in Tijuana, I was there for about 15 more days with an aunt who lived near there. And again I tried, again they grabbed me, but my dad spoke again, he said to take me out, but it wasn't like that. From there they kept me for about

a week in the Juvenile Detention Center, but there were older people, and from there they sent me to San Diego and they just put me there. I was there around 20 days and my father was already worried because he didn't know anything about me, some people told him that I had disappeared in the desert, others told him that I had already returned... Since the Migration agents took me to San Diego, I had to stay there. I didn't know my dad's number, I had no way to reach them, until my dad started talking to Migration. When they finally found me, about 20 days had gone by. Even though I was treated well in that shelter, I didn't like the food because we hardly ate anything... My father arranging all the papers, asking for records, 'Yes I am his daughter'. It took me more than a month like that... I didn't bring all the papers with me, my grandmother was also worried, they sent the papers, my parents received them, but... It was difficult to be with many young people in the same situation, but there were different ones, some came from El Salvador, Ecuador, Honduras. I didn't speak any Spanish, none at all. (Sandra, May, 2016)

All women, regardless of their age, are susceptible to detention, abuse, and legal limbo, and therefore fall prey to the uncertainty and insecurity associated with irregular mobility. However, the minors and young women claimed by their families to be reunited in the United States suffer more intensely these consequences, since they are sent and it is not a decision of their own in many cases.

I arrived and got in the car but I didn't feel so happy, I felt sad, I didn't feel so happy, my parents, my mom, I felt that they weren't my parents, I arrived somewhere else...and I was here for two more hours in Oxnard and I arrived at the house and it was so different, and my mom 'is that you', and she hugged me and cried! She hasn't seen me for 7 years and then she said, I don't know you but I'm beginning to acknowledge you and I didn't call them my parents because I didn't feel they were my parents. And then my mom was like this, she made me chicken broth...in the village I didn't eat that and when I arrived I didn't feel like eating because I didn't feel like it. If I had gone to where my grandmother is, I would have wanted to eat there because it is the joy. And I arrived here and I felt sad and they asked me many things but I did not feel like my parents, I am going to tell you many things, and it has been a long time and I had already gotten used to the United States here, and when I entered the school I felt how my world changed, what existed before in my class, in the school, no longer existed. The kids made fun of me because I didn't know how to speak much Spanish, English. Even now I don't understand much English, but well, there I didn't know and I felt very sad, and now life is like... (Dolores, May, 2016)

After the study, it has been observed that whether they are adults, young people, teenagers or girls, they develop strategies of resistance and reaction, which allow them to prepare themselves for the changes they continually encounter. The reaction capacity is what builds the change, because it is the product of the initiative, of the management of the problem. In the transmigration route it is not easy, because they find the normalization of the abuse to their bodies, crossed with their defenselessness. Therefore, in this context, they experience the vulnerability associated to their bodies, and even more, they are more likely to be harassed by their biological sex, ethnicity, irregularity situation (Robles Santana, 2017). Bodies, which because of the historical burden of ethnic-gender discrimination, for the other non-ethnic, involve the articulation of power relations with a strong colonial burden⁵. Even in the existing tension between accumulated vulnerability and migratory vulnerability —the latter represented by the system that sustains it, and by the authorized criminality that is present along the way— there may be nooks that allow them to maneuver in other directions, or at least to build spaces of defense. One of them, as we have seen above, is the practice of sorority. They do not save them from situations of domination, but they protect and empower them. These strategies of resistance and reaction account for the agency they develop as transformative agents, which operates and modulates in different ways according to the factors involved, allowing them to alleviate the socks they face. The different ways in which women react to the various circumstances that they experience throughout their migratory project are the responses to those external limits and structural constraints that are imposed on their daily lives. Consequently, their responses are the different strategies that they consciously or unconsciously develop to resist these obstacles, or to transform the situation (Robles Santana, 2017).

5. Ethnicity and gender are constructs that justify social differences and hierarchies. Therefore, they cannot be separated from the migration process of indigenous women, since ethnicity is constructed from an occidental and colonial domination that has historically excluded ethno-cultural otherness.

4. NEW CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS ON THEIR STATUS AS MOTHERS: ARTICULATING MULTIDYNAMICS OF TRANSNATIONAL CARE

Mixtec women, upon arriving in the United States, find themselves in the circumstance of having to change their life habits. Through fieldwork, it has been documented that a drastic change is revealed between their life in the community and their life in an unfamiliar city far from their cultural codes; between Mexico and USA. However, not only the lifestyle changes, but also the language, the experiences, the interpersonal relationships, and even the family ones.

Other difficulties faced by migrant women are those related to transnational motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997), that is, not only those derived from family separation and the organization of care on both sides of the border, but also from social criticism and the difficulties of exercising the role of mother from the distance. According to several authors, transnational motherhood contradicts white and middle-class models of motherhood, as well as most notions of Latina motherhood, which has profound costs (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). These costs are located in the financial, social, and emotional domains, according to the authors themselves (Bruhn & Oliveira, 2021; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Oliveira, 2018; Parreñas, 2000).

Today, in Mixtec communities in the state of California, Mixtec migrants are faithful to their community obligations by participating in the social, religious and political organization of their community of origin. In this way, the community on the other side of the border is recreated, in what has been called the transnational community (Kearney & Nagengast, 1989). However, women do not participate, so they are left out of this social reproduction of the community in terms of the community political-economic system. It has been detected that they maintain the link with the transnational community insofar as they participate in its symbolic reproduction. In some communities they are invited to express their opinions, but not to hold community positions. What they emphasize is the permanent bond due to the family they have left there and which they still take care of. Transnational motherhood connects them emotionally, being subject to what we could call for

this case a culture of waiting, uncertainty and continuous care insofar as they do not feel their migratory project is complete as long as their children are still on the other side and cannot join them to the migratory project they have initiated.

For women, crossing the border does not mean that they are no longer subordinated to the dichotomous structural subordination of gender; the role of care continues to be exercised by women. However, as Carmen Gregorio points out, immigrant women are not «mere passive reproducers of patriarchal structures of societies considered more backward in comparison to the West» (Gregorio Gil, 2004, p. 23). Nonetheless, the decision to leave one of their children behind is not trivial, as it implies a strong transnational family architecture, what several authors describe as an «intergenerational family network that motivates and facilitates migration» (Bruhn & Oliveira, 2021, p. 2). In their study of Latin American migrant women in Boston, these researchers report on how women approach transnational caregiving through the extended family. The women interviewed in this research have articulated the intergenerational family network by leaving their children with their grandmothers, operating this (gender) network in a multidirectional manner. Patriarchal cultural codes perpetuate gender mandates in line with what Marcela Lagarde (1992/2005) conceptualized as the captivities of women, placing these transnational mothering practices within the western stigma of bad mothers. However, this study reveals the opposite, since their objective is to improve the structural living conditions of all their offspring, those they leave behind and those who accompany them.

Family separation entails strong emotional costs for children and parents, due to detachment. Many go through depressive processes that are equally connected with the low self-esteem that begins to get triggered in the society of destination as a result of interethnic estrangement, the new structure of life, which a priori is very violent. Later, when they get the money to bring their children, the reunion can be very painful because, as it has been documented, many no longer recognize their mothers and fathers because of the time that has passed since their parents left them, as shown above. This situation increases the anxiety of the women in this venture, since they have done it to improve the quality of life of their family. All the years in which they have built a sort of transnational maternity, that is, the

sustainability of the family at both sides of the border is initially questioned by the opposition of those who are no longer children.

In Oxnard, the destination society, the new family situation, in which the two main family members become wage earners, and proceed to work for others, does not disrupt gender roles. Women do not neglect their role as mothers or as wives, the difference resides in the fact that they now have to combine it with their new role as extra-domestic workers. They begin a daily routine that burdens them with responsibilities that did not exist before and therefore, with more time invested in the management of family welfare. The absence of co-responsibility for family tasks produces states of discomfort in women in this new environment. The assumption of new tasks in the society of destination, previously absent in their daily lives, is a profound cultural shock. In addition, they face the management of an unknown bureaucracy, in which the language barrier overshadows and hinders the scenario and its resolutions, since many only speak their native language.

Among the new roles that mothers should include in their routine is hiring a nanny to care for their children until the time they enter school, since they begin their workday in the fields hours earlier. Because the migration, they lose the family network linked to care; moreover, they lose money by investing it on this task (Stephen, 2007). Added to this, is the anxiety of leaving your child with a stranger.

In the social organization where the collaborative research was conducted, the community promoters are counseling parents to report if they see their children have bruises on their bodies, encouraging them to lose their fear of the threats they receive to call the migration authorities.

My children suffer a lot, you have to get them up early, you don't know the kind of people you leave your children with, you just knock on the door and say how much do you charge? And right, but you never know who the people are... and it happened to me with my child, I cried a lot, I suffered a lot and I felt very bad because when I arrived my son had bruises on his legs and I told the nanny what had happened to my child and she didn't want to tell me, and it's like something ugly because you don't know. We go to work all day, from 6 in the morning to 5/6 in the afternoon, and you just look at them for a little while and again. And no, you don't ask our children, or check their bodies... I made the police report, but those people don't live there anymore. I told her dad and he told me that if I was crazy, how could it happen... it was something... instead of supporting me, they

were just against me. That's why I say that many people sometimes don't realize where they are leaving their children. That's what I don't like here, leaving our children, that there isn't much help, like day care, having more support in this is what is missing. Children cannot defend themselves. (Patricia, April, 2016)

The school paperwork for the children is also managed by the mothers. They begin a complicated task by having to deal with the language, school administration and meetings they must attend. Most of them need interpreters. In some schools, there are already Mixtec translators trained by the MICOP organization, however, on many occasions it is the children themselves who have to carry out this task, which is not easy, and which causes them conflict with their mothers:

It was very difficult for me because I have no family here, I had to adapt to a new life, learn English. It became more complicated because I had to go to meetings with my parents and they wanted me to translate for them, and I was barely learning English, and then they would scold me and say the same thing to me as they did to her [her partner and friend, Carolina]: «I sometimes said 'I don't know how to say this', and my mom said, 'Aren't you going to school? They don't teach you this?', and I said 'No, I don't have classes in this, they don't educate us to be interpreters'». (Esther and Carolina, 20 years old both, Zapotec and Mixtec respectively, 2016)

Even for the same interpreters, translation is sometimes complicated because of the different variants of the Mixtec language:

In the beginning it was difficult to partner with the families, especially because there are some who are very shy, they don't trust anyone, and we gained the confidence by going to the house, handing out flyers, giving information about the resources that are there, that MICOP offers, such as the monthly meeting, help for their children. Also in the adaptation of the language, we all speak Mixtec, but it has variations, so, it was a little difficult for me to adapt to how to communicate with the families, as words that can be offensive... but I ask them, and the families clarify it for me. (Silvia, 2016)

Everything related to their role as mothers is very complex, since they are the ones who entirely take care of their family. This assumption of care empowers the agency of these women who are attentive to their family on both sides of the border (Bruhn & Oliveira, 2021).

As a woman, I have a lot of work, besides working outside, also the children, feeding them, the escuela, the language. If we only speak Mixtec, there is a

lot of mockery towards us. Also domestic violence, a lot of it. You are oppressed because you just work and take care of children, you can't improve yourself, you can't study. Many women can't read, they can't write, some don't know how to read a paycheck, and so it's very difficult. (Iria, April, 2014)

Added to this is the culture shock, which not only affects them because of the need to adapt to a new social structure, but also because they see their ancestral mixtec practices in the relationship with their children threatened, since they can be removed from their guard and custody.

The Consul for Protection of the General Consulate of Mexico in Oxnard, relates it to the vulnerability in which the indigenous mothers are:

In the case of the indigenous women there is a very recurrent problem which is that they take care of their children like if they were there [in Mexico], and they wrap the babies up like tamales and here you can't do that, in that sense it is very vulnerable, you do something based on what you see. What she actually saw in Mexico was that, so it's very difficult that kind of thing and there are no programs to educate women in that sense. Where women are very vulnerable is in that part of caring for children. Having the social workers say that the person is very negligent, and they take them first to a shelter and then to a Foster Home which is the most rounded business here. I think there is a lot of abuse because if social workers don't keep a number of children dependent on the court, they run out of work.

If the police report a case of neighbors calling because there is a scandal in the house, and then there are kids in the house, the police call the social workers and they take the kids away. First they take him to a shelter and then to the foster homes that are the Foster. Social workers have a very stable network in terms that each social worker has a home and they are not free. There are many of such cases. The mother has to do a responsible parenting program, besides going to therapy. The responsible motherhood sessions are 30\$ each session and the women see themselves in a circle that they cannot afford nor comply with (they also have to work). They get to see their children once a week, the children are seen kicking, the social worker keeps the children there, because she tells the mother that she is not ready yet. If that child cannot leave, the children after 18 months of dependency on the court automatically go for adoption, and if it is a child 6 years old or younger, they are adopted. If they are older, there is already a lot of trouble about adoption, because they already know what is happening and they are still growing up in Foster Homes. When they reach the

age of 18, the United States regularizes them. Indigenous women are much more unprotected in terms of having their children taken away⁶.

This shows the coloniality of power and the ethnocentrism implicit in the so-called *responsible motherhood*. This is a strong detriment to the education that mothers give their children, as they are being considered irresponsible. They are being judged and deprived of the education of their offspring because of cultural difference. Thus, there is a lack of a decolonial, cultural and ethical perspective, which has as its main consequence the separation of the family.

However, even if this and other pressures influence them, they turn vulnerability into resistance, because their children need them to keep the family machine running. In the end, they are the engine of their lives.

He is now going to finish his High School [her son]. Right now, I am already married, but my children do not have their father, and I have tried to raise my children as best I could. (Cristina, April 2014)

Nevertheless, an important point in the context of the United States is that to be able to function autonomously they need a driver's license and a car, otherwise it becomes very difficult to function in this country, which is built for the automobile, and not for the citizenry. Public transport is practically non-existent: *«I drive out of necessity, not because I want to drive. I asked for an interpreter,»* says Pamela (April, 2016). Therefore, one of their first goals is to get a license so they do not depend on anyone, and to be able to manage their time according to their needs.

The MICOP organization offers a wide range of workshops aimed at educating mothers (and fathers) about the cultural change that is taking place in their lives. Workshops such as «Women and our emotional well-being», «Voice of the indigenous woman», «First five», «Learning with mom and dad», or «Healthy baby» are examples of this.

In the organization, I took training as a promoter, baby classes. Healthy baby management, a program on mental health, another on women's cancer. With the healthy baby program, the community is given eight classes in Mixteco and Spanish, at the end of which they are given a gift. The «Learning with Mom and

6. Consul for Protection of the General Consulate of Mexico in Oxnard. In-depth interview. April 28, 2016.

Dad» classes are for children 2 and 3 years old who are not going to pre-kindergarten or kindergarten, and they are taught basic things, the five colors, also in Spanish and Mixtec, songs also in English. I do all those programs here, now full time. I also worked in «Bridges» helping the community with their medical papers, family leave, referring them to different places where they need... (Iria, April, 2014).

In spite of the difficulties, women have known how to manage a whole family structure, even before shaping their own, because as some emphasized «*I didn't have much childhood, from home I already took care of my brothers*» (Tania, May, 2016).

Mothers, whether single or married, put in place the strategies they can use to move the family forward, despite the obstacles and barriers they encounter. The help of their children in many cases is essential, because all the difficulties that accompany the time they live, along with the handicap of language, require that a team is formed among them. The children, in addition to helping in matters of daily assistance (domestic, bureaucratic), also, in some cases end up supporting the family economy, working on weekends, or summers in the fields mainly.

5. WESTERN MEDICINE: CULTURAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACTS IN PREGNANCY

They gave us training on HIV, prenatal care, mammograms, about all the care. And it helped us a lot, it is very different from our community, there our body is sacred, it is your intimacy. That's the biggest change we've seen in our community, to have a doctor touch you, you just get touched by your partner. We are trying to help them with this process. When it happened to me, I felt that the people in the waiting room were looking at me and knew what they had done to me, I felt bad, embarrassed... and that is what we share with new moms... the process of pregnancy here. The food, the laws... everything is different, it is a very strong change for us when we arrive here [...] and little by little we are adapting. (Olivia, April, 2014)

Another aspect that affects Mixtec women in a differential way and has a strong cultural impact is the management of a new pregnancy in the context of the United States. Western medicine involves the constant manipulation and medicalization of their bodies, which they feel as something very

violent, because it is not part of their cultural codes. Assimilation of western health models affects their traditional practices and impacts different aspects, such as health (Espinoza et al., 2014; McGuire, 2006). Therefore, a series of barriers and cultural changes begin to operate, conditioning the entire process of pregnancy and childbirth. Among the aspects that women report, the lack of knowledge of the language implies multiple limitations, since they can neither understand what will be done to them, nor express themselves freely (Crivelli et al., 2013; McGuire, 2006). The medicalization of pregnancy brings them a strong sense of shame and rejection. They have to learn to accept a new relationship with their body through unfamiliar professionals in a hostile environment such as the hospital. In this context, there are several people who are not associated with healing and childbirth (administrative staff and non-healthcare personnel). They start a schedule of vaccinations, blood tests and medications that have never been present in their traditional pregnancies or culture. In addition to the above, there is a continuous practice of cesarean sections, which they see being practiced assiduously, which makes them completely distrustful of labor and doctors. This brings them anxiety and postpartum psychic repercussions.

When they are going to have their children they are very uncomfortable because of so many people, students. With the shame they close and do not dilate. Very uncomfortable having the baby in the hospital, they are used to being alone with the midwife and no one touching them. Just like the position in which they have to put themselves. They don't like blood tests either. Why so much blood? They don't take pills, vitamins, and here they are constantly being checked, having their blood drawn, coming to appointments. They don't like appointments very much. They don't understand the culture of the people here and say why this, why that. They do not accept each other. (Jimena, interpreter at Clínica Las Islas, May, 2016)

There you have to be in quarantine and then a steam bath [when you give birth], so what they say is that the bones help you to recover. And just now to think that there isn't a mother, a sister, a relative who doesn't help you in those days... We didn't know what postpartum depression was. (Rosa, May, 2016)

The above quotations show the existence of certain structural changes, as well as cultural barriers that evidence a supervening difficulty for women who undergo these practices. According to Minerva Saldaña-Téllez and María Montero (2009) in a study on zapotec women and the taking of cervical

cytology, indigenous women are crossed by three types of barriers: structural, psychosocial and cultural. In the present research it has been possible to observe a large part of the obstacles that these researchers have documented, and which in the case at hand, are detrimental to them, since in some cases they become practices that generate strong impulses that act in a bidirectional manner. The triangulation of these barriers provides a framework for analysis that should be focused on in future research. Health for indigenous communities differs from the conceptions practiced by other migrant communities that do not come from native populations (Crivelli et al., 2013; McGuire, 2006). Health in indigenous communities is not an individualized concept, but a communitarian one (Crivelli et al., 2013; Espinoza et al., 2014), so the introduction into a western health system entails the assumption of patterns and protocols that are difficult to assimilate under a communitarian gaze in which there is another relationship with the bodies and with the people who are dedicated to healing. Everything related to motherhood, as explored, is an abrupt handicap for them, with which they feel strongly violated. In a certain way, transnational maternity also operates in this hospital dimension, assuming other obstetric patterns that differ greatly from their traditional forms of pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum.

6. CONCLUSIONS: THE GRADUAL AND AMBIVALENT CHANGE OF ROLES

According to Pierrete Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila, when women leave their communities behind, «they are embarking not only on an immigration journey but on a more radical gender-transformative odyssey» (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997, p. 552).

The women interviewed, although all belonging to the Mixtec community, the vast majority of whom are farm workers, are women who are attending the workshops offered by MICOP. This may give a false idea about generalizing in relation to their own experiences, because to a greater or lesser extent they are training themselves and are losing the fear of speaking, of telling their experiences, while at the same time it is helping them to know their rights.

In the daily life in the society of destination, one can see how they have been acquiring new tools to continue with the autonomous administration of their lives. Once they face the taboos that surround them as women, indigenous people and migrants, some women come to light and make a vital transformation in which their ancestral customs are recontextualized. So those who traditionally held the power and authority of women's speech, action and representation are being questioned. New life strategies and changes in gender relations are being developed in migratory contexts, which are very complex (Cruz Manjarrez, 2014; D'Aubeterre, 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994).

The complexity is bidirectional, since in many cases it is a matter of making the changes together with the couple, trying to involve the men. The shift away from hetero-patriarchal patterns and those linked to notions of motherhood, interculturality and ethnicity, is not complete without the participation of men, the community, and the institutions. Considering this dynamic that is beginning to be woven in the context of migration, it has become evident that ethnic roles remain intact, because the fact that mixtec women take care of their lives and focus on co-responsibility does not interfere with the totality of community practices and their philosophy of life, which, insofar, continues to be exercised as much as possible.

I have seen women who know their rights and apply them. They are empowered on the issue, «my husband stayed with the children, I came to take this workshop because it is good for me». But there are still women who are very submissive to their husbands, and they have twice as much work, they do everything, and the husband worked and that's it. Those women have arrived here. That does exist, but less so than when they first arrive in this country. (Ana, health promoter, May 2016)

Nonetheless, the change of gender roles does not apply to the whole community. The fact that women are beginning to turn around both the tasks they traditionally perform and the conception that sustains them has strong consequences for their immediate environment. Therefore, it is not easy for this to happen, since the social and family pressures are very strong, as well as the repercussions. This drive in some cases not only comes from the community in Oxnard, it can also influence the community of origin (Klein & Vázquez-Flores, 2013). Laura Velasco points out how migration facilitated

changing gender roles and relationships since Mixtec women began migrating to northern Mexico and southern United States, stating that they «have an essential role in implementing survival strategies when pioneer migrants were absent from their homes» (Velasco Ortiz, 2005, p. 164). For the case studied, it has been observed that these changes come progressively over the time of stay in the destination country. In such a way that migration slowly generates changes in gender roles, which will be more or less perceptible in some families than in others.

All in all, the combination of several elements, such as: facing multiple barriers when they arrive, assuming new life habits linked to the system they are starting to be part of, and knowing their rights as a woman and as an indigenous woman, are the combination that allows them to start acting based on other social criteria within the sex-gender system.

The responsibility that the women who participate in the organization MICOP have been acquiring has been one of the main factors that corroborate the gradual change in relation to their previous status in the family and the community. An alteration in the traditional roles of women and mothers as a consequence of migration is beginning to emerge. Change that they themselves do not expect but that nevertheless, as a result of the continuous development in the organization and the new tasks they must face, is being managed and produced.

All the above allows us to observe the multidynamics that indigenous migrant women deal with in the face of the constant sociocultural and transnational impulses that have repercussions on their condition as mothers in the society of destination, Oxnard. In this sense, it should be emphasized that migration increases cultural adaptations that can have strong emotional costs.

The western obstetric health system requires awareness from both a gender and cultural perspective. This would improve the intervention and behavior of professionals with the mixtec community and with any other non-western culture. It would also break with the colonial stigmas inscribed in the collective imaginary, which place the indigenous populations in underdeveloped spaces, discriminating their cultural practices and rejecting the otherness.

The impact of western medicine on the women interviewed occurs in the context of a neocolonial ideological-structural system that is insensitive to diversity and cultural difference. The solution is not to be found in women changing their beliefs, since they are in that continuous negotiation and modification of their cultural practices. Institutions must be sensitive to the socio-cultural transformation that is taking place because of globalization and the multiculturalism that operates in western countries. By understanding the cultural abyss that exists between both cultures, it will be possible to empathize and manage changes that will have a positive impact on women and professionals, since they can also be affected by the lack of knowledge about their ailments and the mistrust they cause in them.

As some scholars assert about research related to maternal health in indigenous populations, this topic «needs to engage directly with indigenous women and indigenous organizations, acknowledge the context of and influence of colonialism, and seek to value and incorporate indigenous conceptualizations of health and indigenous knowledge» (Patterson et al., 2022).

The aim of this research has been to outline an approach on these subjects and underline how colonialism, gender and ethnocentrism constantly act on indigenous populations, greatly affecting women, as well as to focus on the transformative and significant involvement and agency of these women.

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