

ABOUT TRANSNATIONAL MALE MIGRATION: STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND GENDER IN CAMPESINO COM- MUNITIES OF ESTADO DE MÉXICO*

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ABSTRACT: This article confronts the notion that male migration and remittances sent home enable women's autonomy and improve their living conditions. From the perspective of structural crises, the implications of migration on women's lives are generally negative, as inequality is further increased and violence towards women is not eliminated. Based on in-depth interviews with 30 women from the Estado de México between 2005 and 2006 and framed within the context of rural life, this article discusses how structural crises reproduce patterns of violence, discrimination, and exclusion towards women. It also proposes some hypothesis concerning the role of structural violence as an instigator of gender-based violence. The article ends with a reflection on the role neoliberal welfare policies have on the degradation of women's human condition.

KEYWORDS: Structural violence, Male migration, Rural crisis, Gender, Estado de México.

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INTRODUCTION

This article is an empirical confrontation between the notion that male migration and remittances sent home enable women's autonomy and improve their living conditions (Rosas, 2005).³ Our arguments will be supported on a structural analysis of the implications this migration has had on the lives of women. We are particularly interested in showing how male migration has led to the reproduction of inequality and violence towards the female gender, placing women, regardless of fact that they may consider themselves or not heads of a household, in a situation of crisis, while acting as pillars of social and biological reproduction to preserve the economical and cultural life of the rural way of life.

This discussion is the result of field work carried out in 2005 and the beginning of 2006, with exploratory nuances, in six rural communities of Estado de México.⁴ Three of these communities, situated to the south (Las Vueltas in Coatepec Harinas municipality; La Unión, in Almoloya de Alquisiras municipality, and Potzontepenc in Sultepec municipality) have solid migratory networks and flows towards the United States of America, having engaged in international migration for over three decades. The other three communities, located to the northeast (San Francisco Tepeolulco in Temascalcingo municipality; San Lucas Ocoltepec in San Felipe del Progreso y Santa Rosa de Lima municipality, and El Oro municipality), with a high index of Mazahua Indians, have only integrated male transnational migration to their way of living very recently.

The purpose of this article is to propose a series of hypothesis concerning the social and gender effect transnational male migration currently has on rural municipalities in these territories.

We start with a brief historical sketch that includes the socioeconomic contexts which have cornered *campesino* societies into not being any longer an important productive segment in Mexican economy and becoming the clientele of policies to combat poverty and illegal immigrant in the United States. We also describe how the rural way of life is structured and proceed to analyze how these structures reproduce violent discrimination and exclusion models against women who stay home. In the third section we develop a number of hypotheses regarding the role of structural violence as the root of gender-based violence. We conclude considering the role neoliberal welfare policies have had and still have on the degradation of the human condition.

³ See also some of the articles compiled in Barrera and Oehmichen (2006).

⁴ Estado de México is one of the thirty two states comprising the Mexican Federation. It is one of the most populated states in Mexico (14 million inhabitants according to the population count made by the Instituto Nacional de Geografía e Informática in 2005). It also has geographically and socially-contrasting spaces, such as megacities and industrialized areas, like the semi-urban area of Mexico City of the capital city of Toluca as opposed to the great number of rural municipalities, which base their livelihood on subsistence agriculture.



More than a description and based on in-depth interviews to 30 women, we include a theoretical and normative analysis to propose future research lines. The considerations lead to a series of broader ideas that go beyond a case study to become general working hypotheses.

DECLINE OF THE RURAL WORLD: POVERTY AND MIGRATION

Migration from rural communities in Estado de México is not new; it started over six decades ago, during World War II, with a program requesting Mexican agricultural workers for the United States. Ever since then, migration is still constant in several rural communities,⁵ although this migratory process has increased exponentially in the last twenty years. From being a state with relatively few immigrants to the United States, in the 90's Estado de México became one of the main exporters of labor to that country.⁶ Municipalities to the south of the valley of Toluca in Estado de México currently have the highest numbers of migration intensity, as do those from the north and northeast of the state.⁷ This means that a considerable percentage of homes receive remittances sent by relatives working in the United States and Canada.⁸

This process has developed alongside four very important contextual phenomena at a national level: increasing inequality regarding wealth distribution; fewer opportunities to have access to the social service coverage offered by the State (health, schooling, basic infrastructure for homes and communities, food supply programs); depletion of fertile lands as a result of inadequate programs to modernize the countryside, and lack of well-paid rural jobs, explained by the exclusion of the *campesino* segment from the national economic model. This may be in turn characterized by lack of policies to promote and support the rural segment.⁹

⁵ There was an important migration of Indian municipalities to neighboring cities during the 70s and 80s, which is the case of the Mazahua groups found to the north of Toluca valley (Patiño, 2002).

⁶ Historical migration, that is, individuals born in Mexico who have become United States residents, amounted to 233,962 until 2002. However, recent migration to the United States, that is, migration from 1995 to 2002, consisted of 127,425 people. The number of migrants in Estado de México for the year 2000 is only superseded by the states of Jalisco (historical migration of 1,743,837 and recent migration of 170,793), Michoacán and Guanajuato, in this order (Garavito and Torres, 2004).

⁷ The important number of speakers of the Otomí and Mazahua Indian languages is a characteristic of this area.

⁸ Some of the municipalities that stand out because of their high migratory indexes include Coatepec Harinas, Ixtapan de la Sal, Malinalco, Tejupilco, Tlatlaya, and Tonalco, among others. Statistical information may be found in: <<http://www.conapo.gob.mx>>.

⁹ In Mexico we may speak of *campesino* or rural agriculture, the social and economical sector that emerged with land distribution, an achievement of the Revolutionary War (1910-1921). *Campesino* agriculture produces basic grains (corn, particularly) based on techniques and an ancestral knowledge related to the preservation of agricultural and ecological resources, with intense use of family labor. This social and productive sector has small one-to-two hectare land plots as its



As to the wider gap between classes and region, the 90s were particularly instructive, something which was not only experienced in Mexico but practically in all Latin American countries.¹⁰ With neoliberalism as the economic model, access to social services offered by the State was restricted in almost every country of the continent. Amendments to the social security system in Mexico, for instance, decreased the rights of citizens, transferred some of the responsibilities of the welfare state to the market and undermined the solidarity principle of the welfare state (Dion, 2006).

Exclusion of the rural segment from the economic model based on the exportation of manufactured goods has signified the slow social destruction of this segment, in a process that began with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The opening of United States' subsidized market of basic grains to the Mexican market led to disloyal competition for Mexican producers, particularly in the case of corn. Unable to compete with the prices of this kind of subsidized goods, Mexican producers suffered unavoidable social and economic insolvency in their economy (Calva, 2001). It is important to remember that this economic and social project was endorsed by neoliberal technocratic groups consolidated during former President Salinas' term (1988-1994), for whom *campesinos* as a class were dysfunctional for the modernization of the country and the new economic project based on export-oriented industrialization (Levy, 1994). One of the most controversial ideas of neoliberalism in Mexico from beginning of the 80s and the 90s was the non-intervention of the State in agriculture.¹¹ In practice, this idea involved abandoning most of the policies of rural development which had been implemented as a means for national food self-sufficiency.

Under neoliberalism, food self-sufficiency is not relevant, as it is assumed that *campesinos* would have to be economically reconstituted as producers capable of competing with the new rules of a (global) market or look for other economic alternatives to survive (tourism, services, migration to cities or abroad). Programs for agricultural development, as well as those for food provisioning and price guarantee for basic grains, were replaced by programs like Procampo¹² to subsidize small producers with the purpose of promoting competitiveness among peasants. Nonetheless, the program turned into a program against poverty.¹³ Neoliberal poli-

main asset. Culturally it focuses on the imaginary signification of the traditional community. In Mexico, it was comprised by over 25 million people in 2004.

¹⁰ There is considerable literature about this. Hoffman and Centeno cite a large number of references for the Latin American case.

¹¹ A notion that contradicts what happens in countries with advanced capitalism (the United States and the European Union), where there is strong protectionism for food markets as well as an important policy to subsidize the agricultural sector.

¹² Procampo is a federal program of economic transference to *campesinos*. Its purpose is to promote the production of basic grains in small land plots. It has been chiefly criticized because of the small economic amounts it grants. Information about this program may be found in <http://www.procampo.gob.mx>.

¹³ Throughout its existence, Procampo has revealed numerous focalization problems and bureaucratic and administrative inefficiency. (Arzate, 2005b; Vizcarra, 2005).



cies were also fostered by discourse and ultimately with the end of the Land Reform, which materialized with amendments to Article 24 in the Constitution. Having established that land distribution had come to an end gave way to the liberation of lands owned by *campesinos*, thus ascertaining legal conditions for land commercialization.

NAFTA represented an actual offensive against the rural sector and little by little led to the impoverishment of the Mexican countryside¹⁴ by underscoring asymmetrical relations between the countryside and the city and strengthening historical relations of discrimination and exclusion of Indian groups. Neoliberalism was a model of excluding subordination of the exploited classes; specifically the *campesino* classes as food producers and the working classes (both urban and rural) as consumers (Rubio 2001).

Along with the recurring crises which have characterized the modernization of the Mexican countryside, neoliberal policies have signified the decline of rural societies in the broadest sense. As a process, it has generated more exploitation (both in production processes as in goods circulation), leading to an increase in inclusion and discrimination, understood as the denial of real possibilities for the development and reproduction of the economy, culture and identity of rural societies. In short, the economic model only increased the structural inequalities which the *campesino* and Indian social and economic sectors in Mexico have endured.

It is within this context where rural migration to the United States proliferates in municipalities and communities in Estado de México. Throughout the last decade, this migration (mostly male) has increasingly become the sole survival strategy for rural homesteads. In some communities, this recent wave of migrants has taken advantage of the historical migratory networks in process of consolidation. In municipalities to the south of the valley of Toluca, migrants have been able to build social mobility networks which have helped their successful insertion in the clothing manufacturing industry (a trade they master) in Californian cities, and this has also been seen more recently in flower-growing municipalities like Tenancingo and Villa Guerrero. In the communities and municipalities under study, some migrants have worked in cotton and mushroom crops in Pennsylvania and many others work as gardeners in Texas. Men from the municipalities to the North of the state, particularly the Mazahua and Otomí, work in the construction industry, usually in New York, and in fruit and vegetable fields in Florida and California. Although it is known that male migration and youth migration (both sexes) in this area of Mexico is not new, having been part of social reproduction strategies since the 70s (Vizcarra, 2002), these internal, temporary, and cyclic migrations have been an important background to promote the second wave of transnational migration because, before migrating to the United

¹⁴ By means of an integrated method to measure poverty, which is a generous measurement method, Julio Boltvinik found that in 2004, rural poverty affected 23, 795,000 people; that is, 94.26% of the total rural population. *La Jornada*; November 18, 2005.



States to work as construction workers, most of the males had already worked as such in Mexico City and Toluca City, whereas the young women had in turn worked as domestic help in the residential areas of these cities and do so now in the United States (Patiño, 2002).

The current administration of President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) has seemingly made no attempts to restrain this increasing migratory flow to the United States, at least not in terms of reactivating agricultural production and guaranteeing *campesinos* an honorable life for the present and future. What is certain is the institutional continuity that has purported to combat poverty through focalized compensatory and welfare programs. In this sense, *campesinos* and their families are no longer social actors of rural development policies and have turned into “vulnerable groups” worthy of institutional intervention to decrease or hamper the social and human devastation brought by extreme poverty and international migration.

ABOUT STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND THE GENDER ISSUE

During field trips, a process of “de-ruralization” is repeatedly seen in the countryside.¹⁵ Although the exodus has consisted largely of men in productive age, the last decade has witnessed the gradual migration of young women, some even with their children, and even of entire families.¹⁶ What we see as part of the rural landscape is bleak: uncultivated land, women who live alone, and boys, girls and youths living with elderly adults. Loza et al. (2007) observed that women in the south of Estado de México adopt the role of head of household when they stop receiving remittances or when their husbands have migrated over five years before, making them generate their own income.¹⁷ On the other hand, young women with small children usually remain subjected to a causal pattern of domination and abandonment. That is, even though the husband is not physically present, his leadership remains defended until he no longer supports the household (abandonment). This same defense reproduces the classic forms of male domination, which are coordinates in patriarchal culture (Vizcarra, 2005b); we are speaking of the recruitment of women to take charge of tasks concerning biological repro-

¹⁵ This same situation and pattern were observed during field work carried out in Otomí rural communities of the Mezquital valley in the state of Hidalgo (Arzate, 2005b).

¹⁶ In the case of Estado de México in 2000, migrant women constituted 23.7 percent of the total state migrations (INEGI, 2000).

¹⁷ Definition of female head of household is still under debate by many feminist theoreticians. On the one hand, when a woman adopts the head of a household, this is generally the practical consequence of an absent male partner “forcing women to take total charge of the household’s sustenance...” (Acosta, 1997:95). On the other hand, adopting the head of a household allows women to make decisions which were previously exclusive to men, thus leading to the internalization of certain liberties and autonomy. It is understood that being the head of a household goes beyond the limits imposed by the Mexican nuclear family model (Garcia and Oliveira, 2005).



duction, daily child-rearing and cultural production in the households and within the community itself.

By awarding women the role of heads of household or safekeepers of the male role, migration, seen as the physical absence of heads of families, ultimately binds women to a circuit of unequal relations which are difficult for them to handle. This causal chain of inequality revolves around at least three structural coordinates:

1. Noosphere – Stigma. The first coordinate and the one that preserves the existence of the other coordinates is the same patriarchal ideology that prevails in rural societies, with the belief that women have no social acknowledgment in the public sphere. This belief is in itself excluding and discriminatory. At the social imaginary level it also restructures a series of stigmas towards the female gender (González y Vizcarra, 2006).
2. Work – Exploitation. When domestic work done by rural women is not considered productive, a chain of exploitation arises in three socioeconomic niches: within the *campesino* economy itself, because this kind of work lacks usage and exchange values; within the formal labor market and the informal labor market outside the home, since it is widely acknowledged that women are paid less and that they will accept the worst working conditions; and, through the State itself, when women consider their work as subordinate work to accept the responsibilities imposed by focalized social welfare programs.
3. Work – Exclusion. This implies exclusion of rural women in the formal labor market due to their few skills (most of them do not finish grammar school and many Indian women are illiterate). Therefore, possibilities of accessing a social security system (healthcare, daycare, benefits, pensions and retirement) are unavailable for them, as for their children and parents.

Manifestations of inequality are accepted with submission and in a natural way by women themselves and communities in each of the three structural axes—interconnected with each other. However, when not named, these inequalities become invisible, not only within the household or community, but by the larger society as a whole, including the State. In terms of law and social justice, this situation or structural assembly of gender inequalities means that the citizenship status of rural women is blurred by the set of social inequalities which they face in daily life and which have structural roots. In addition, in subjective terms, citizenship rights are non-existing for these women. When they suffer prostration, abandonment, mixed feelings of hope and emptiness, sadness, anxiety, uncertainty, disease and extreme economic poverty—situations that define their active life— they are subjected to a state of affairs where imposed unequal and unfair obligations are accepted as something natural, rarely demanding equal rights and human dignity.

It is difficult to talk about a female “head” of a household under these conditions. On the one hand, this position is a social category tailored for men and, there-



fore, under patriarchal sponsorship. This position enjoys ample social recognition because men are the “main” economic support of the household. Males are likewise awarded more authority and liberty to make decisions about their family and each of its members (Mallimaci, 2005). With male attributes such as liberty and autonomy, with the abandonment of the head of the household in a patriarchal economic and sociocultural context, how can we talk about a female head of household, if the principal characteristics are found within a string of multiple situations of social inequality?

On the other hand, inequality rooted in the patriarchal structure puts these women at extreme risk because what predominate in social reality is a situation where women, heads of households or not, lose their status as subjects capable of promoting social changes in their human condition and their families. On the contrary, abandonment and domination of these structures construct these women socially as objects while a legitimating discourse is socially developed about the underprivileged woman, vulnerable and victim, through which she may be used as a sexual, reproductive and cultural object by the male, her family, her children, the State with its institutions and agents, as well as by the market which both exploits her unqualified, abundant and cheap manual labor and turns her into consumer of expensive industrialized food products.¹⁸

From this point of view, to talk about the vulnerability of women of rural origin, of *campesino* and Indian women abandoned by their men because of the transnational migration process, signifies accepting a complex reality where women socially adopt, compulsorily or discreetly, a role of exhaustive domination present both vertically and peripherally in a system of social relations interwoven in their daily life which, because of this, tends to make the processes of structural violence arising from this social situation invisible. In the social imaginary, this exhaustive domination of the productive young woman who has children and is temporarily or definitively abandoned is normally a self-acceptance by women themselves under a justificatory discourse where self-compassion, resignation and making sacrifices for others are the semantic axes of a discourse ultimately legitimizing this situation in rural communities.

This implies that the collective meaning of patriarchal social order has managed to reproduce on an ideology of female self-immolation. Because of this, gender perspective has attempted to abolish this ideology in all the dimensions that traverse social reality, since this will be the only way women will be able to achieve liberty, autonomy, self-recognition, trust and self-awareness (Vizcarra, 2005b). On the contrary, reproducing and preserving resignation alters the deep meaning of what the scope of *work* is, the daily social action directed to reconstitute the social realm with vitality, creation and reaction to the domination processes. It is thus a question of stimulating the imaginary signification to implicitly and

¹⁸ This is not something new. Mexican social sciences have documented this exploitation process of gender, particularly in the case of Indian *campesino* women (Arizpe, 1975).



explicitly reject domination in all societies; it is a question of not nourishing the virtuous circle that regenerates processes of domination and violence towards the female gender. It is necessary to avoid a modernity that will become for them a prison of violence-diseases. These structural coordinates of inequality are just an additional way of defining modernity for rural women, where well-being is not the articulating axis of their social life, since constant precariousness socially relegates them. When accepting patriarchal culture and abandonment of the head of the household, women make themselves invisible and are no longer able to think critically of themselves as dominated, subjected to violence or assaulted by a social system or structure. Under these conditions, women generally say that these forms of domination only exist in relation to their husband, father, son, father-in-law, brother-in-law or brother and not to their social environment or modern institutions (school, religion, healthcare facilities, government programs and the market).

This is how subordination is ultimately a co-substantial element of all processes of social action, weaving active life in households and communities. Life, as production of life, is filtered by a series of feelings and social actions of resentment, loneliness and existential emptiness. This is why the ability to think for these women ranges between a listless complaint and the hope the male will return. Nonetheless, they can rarely adopt a different perspective and think of themselves as an *I* with signification of autonomy, with the ability of an independent and necessary being to construct their dignity as women. This imaginary of resignation is reinforced by the inequalities that structurally pervade their regions, communities and institutions and which ultimately restrict their possibilities and opportunities. These inequalities have specific expressions for people (illiteracy, ignorance about rights, lack of productive capacity) and for infrastructures (lack of schools, means of transportation, basic public services).

In other words, male domination is projected in the exploitation-exclusion ways of the market and in the neoliberal strategies adopted by the State Nation's focalized (excluding) programs. Vulnerability of women must be referred to a system of risk which is present every day, making it impossible for women to realize themselves as social subjects of the female gender (free, reflective, self-aware), liberated from the structural risks that assail their human condition. As long as the male structures that produce all possible and imaginable social inequality continue to be reinforced, and not only between genders, but also among classes, races, ethnic groups, religions, and ages, we will scarcely approach the field of emancipation whose main ingredient is empowerment,¹⁹ concept which for the time being is not even theoretically relevant inasmuch as it would demand the exis-

¹⁹ Empowerment should be conceived as a process of gender awareness. Nonetheless, institutional beliefs, that is, the State through its social policies, views empowerment of women as the strength behind family and community welfare. It is thus believed that empowerment is the best means to decrease poverty (Vizcarra, 2005b:22). For a better understanding about the debate of the concept, see Batliwala (1997).



tence of minimal citizenship attributes and thus a minimum of attributes in terms of an agency and autonomy to promote social change.²⁰

INVISIBILIZATION CHAINS OF VIOLENCE TOWARDS WOMEN

Violence towards women is mostly discussed in academia and politics, both in the United Nations and in its member countries, possibly because it is the most visible type of violence. It has been defined as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.²¹

Some feminists claim that conceptualizing women who have suffered violence as victims corresponds to the same definition which socialized the belief and acceptance that they must agree to an obedience and victimization role. In other words, there is ample justification for those who produce violence, whereas victims are blamed for having been subjected to violence (Aresti, 2000; Valladares, 2004). In this sense, visibilization of physical and criminal aggression is evidenced in the female body, where the cell of violence demonstrates its highest efficiency, although without allowing the understanding of why this violence is not only allowed within the household but is also cyclic, progressive and perpetuated in social structures (Segato, 2003:104).

Gender-based violence is not only about women suffering acts of power and domination, but also about patriarchal ideology, which reproduces social conditions for the perpetuation of violence against women. This is why feminist studies have focused their attention on understanding how this ideology supports a system of social reproduction based on sexual differentiation and how it promotes the idea and values that the male gender is superior to the female gender (Lamas, 1996) without actually viewing or understanding the restraints developed by the patriarchal system as a whole. It is necessary to understand how the chains binding women to a status of vulnerability or any type of violence is rein-

²⁰ Social change from the feminine perspective not only refers to changes in gender stratification (men and women), which give women a relative disadvantage in complex societies, since males are unintentionally in charge of the control (Chafetz, 1992), but to all the change that decrease inequalities based on differences between genders and among classes, ethnic groups and races in each of the social processes (macro-, meso- and micro-) to establish social equality as a normative framework of daily life (Vizcarra, 2005b:8).

²¹ The misuse of power against women worldwide was the groundwork for the Inter-American Convention held in Belém do Para, on June 9, 1994 with the aim of preventing, punishing and eradicating violence against women. The Convention was signed by Mexico and ratified 10 years later. This Convention was the sequel to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women signed on December 18, 1979 and ratified on March 23, 1981. Even though the topic of violence against women was not discussed at the time, it established the groundwork to eliminate discrimination with the creation of a committee for this purpose (CEDAW, 1981).



forced, with “violence” understood as the “reduction of human realization” which in turn implies a loss of human potential in the broad sense of reification, disposability, negation of the reflective conscience, invisibility.²²

It is very important to distinguish the forms adopted by violence; it is not enough to elucidate a system of inequalities, as these do not end in inequity, asymmetry or injustice but socially construct new realities of social action, which include violence. This may be seen as the praxis of inequalities. In the case that concerns us, we believe that inequalities, as a reflex or projection, as a kind of symmetry, derive into other forms of violence, without determining them, toward women who live under conditions of male transnational migration.

We reconsider the three great structural axes on which inequality is interwoven to describe the system of specific violence endured by women in the context of our study (*campesino* women, whether they are heads of household or not).

1. By preserving and reproducing discrimination relations derived from the sexually, culturally and socially constructed differences in the patriarchal system and because of the belief that women are not able to live without the protection of a man, forms of cultural or symbolic violence emerge that cohabit and permeate all aspects of the daily life of women. These forms of violence become visible in the abuse of power to the body and integrity of women. In other words, this gender-based violence perpetuates physical and psychological battering, fully justified by spouses and their peers and relatives. The absence of aggressors (migrants) may clearly relieve and even temporarily free women. But if these women do not go beyond their victim status, resignation and self-discredit, when the migrants return or when they start a new relationship with another mate, they will certainly not be able to escape this form of violence.

Likewise, as part of the normative and control system of temporarily or permanently abandoned women, there are mechanisms to keep an eye on their behavior, restricting their social action. For instance, the majority of women are left behind under the surveillance of the spouse’s relatives. At times the women do not receive the remittances directly but through a brother in law, mother or father in law, who may judge the women’s sexual behavior and punish them by withholding the money. These women are usually controlled by gossip that casts social aspersions about their sociality and a whore stigma is even created about them by the relatives and even the spouse upon his return. In the Mazahua communities under study, a series of violence practices against women’s bodies has been observed whereby women who are alone due to the death of a spouse or abandonment are raped, to mark them as property of others (Guadarrama et al., 2007).

2. From the exploitation processes (super-exploitation would be a better term) of female heads of household in the labor market, manifest in the precarious state of their jobs (as laborers, occasionally as house maids, chambermaids or in low-productivity plots, excluded from agricultural commercialization circuits), a type of structural violence we ordinarily call poverty is derived. This is a situation

²² This concept of violence is by Johan Galtung (1995).



where the subordination of women unqualified by unilateral rules of the market places them at risk in terms of their human condition and vulnerability due to their gender. On the other hand, the exclusion of female heads of households from the formal labor market and, as mentioned, along with their children and parents, from the social security system, has generated a different causal chain of disease and exploitation, as women must look for resources to visit private physicians when their children get sick, which in turn forces them to accept whatever they stumble upon in terms of precarious labor. This is why, when rural women work, they generally do it on their own (as street vendors selling candy, food, clothing, and ornaments, and/or ironing other people's clothes or working as housemaids; Baca, 2005). But when informal labor is the only option for these women, the market becomes saturated relatively quickly, dependant on the increase of male migratory flow, thus decreasing possibilities to support their families and relapsing, once and again, on the vicious circle of poverty. In this case, structural violence has no counterweight because the State has no labor policies of a solidarity and compensatory nature to put a stop to this kind of violence against women. This is why in the framework of neoliberal ideologies, particularly when it is considered that the State should no longer intervene in the labor market, these processes of structural violence become deeply rooted, forgetting a basic principle of citizen and human rights: the right to a decent and well-paid job.

3. Lastly, there is also exploitation within the domestic activities carried out in *campesino* households. When a male abandons his family, this implies that the woman must adopt the responsibility of the *campesino* economy, at times only attenuated by child labor or that of elderly adults which, in itself, represents a causal chain of exploitation in different age groups. It must be mentioned that in Estado de México, only 23 percent of *campesino* households have a female head and only 18 percent of plot owners are women. Most of them are today over 60 years of age, revealing that the possibilities of applying for resources to cultivate their land are fewer than if they had been at a productive age. In general terms we perceived that these women depend on the willingness of their children to apply for these resources. On the other hand, owners between 20 to 40 years of age, which constitute a low percentage of female land owners, are more self-sufficient and independent when managing their plots (Guadarrama et al., 2007).

This reality is translated into another kind of structural violence. The lack or little access to productive resources excludes women from participating in agricultural subsistence or commercial activities, besides being subordinated to the decisions of the majority in *ejido* and communal assemblies or commissions (largely comprised by males), where the most important decisions on field productivity are customarily made. It is also worth remembering that most of the women of rural, Indian or *campesino* origin in Estado de México live under a patrilocal and patrilineal system; they are the ones who move out of their home and birthplace to the paternal home of the husband. Being under this patriarchal mandate is just the most fruitless form of subjugation in the life of any human being.



Sometimes it is evident for us qualitative researchers that these forms of violence are not named, that they are made invisible by the predominantly patriarchal social environment (which does not exclude women from it) or by the androcentrist bias of social studies that tends to “naturalize” social and symbolic practices on which violence and its forms are constructed every day (Torres, 2006).

NEOLIBERAL SOCIAL POLICIES: INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCES

Which is the role of the State in response to this process of vulnerability and violence that women live in families with male migration? The State contributes very little to end inequalities and much less to protect women from structural and gender-based violence, be they heads of household or not. Social policies and their different programs are usually inefficient to achieve so-called gender equality. A dramatic example is the case of the Programa Paisano Mexiquense (Program for Compatriots from Estado de México), developed by the Government of Estado de México in 2001 which during its first years of operation had as main purpose the recovery of corpses.²³ Another case, incidentally paradoxical, is the program Progres-a-Oportunidades,²⁴ where the operation regulations of the program subjugate heads of the beneficiary households by means of vertical and bureaucratic domination (through the officials participating in the program, such as physicians, social workers, and teachers). The women thus have to fulfill a large amount of tasks and requirements to continue receiving benefits, which multiply the efforts of these women within a social context of multiple exploitations (Vizcarra and Guadarrama, 2006).

The Achilles' heel of neoliberal social policies does not lie in the design of policies nor in their implementation or evaluation process (whose problems are countless) but in the fact that these policies do not stem from the fundamental principle of understanding women as subjects with social rights in their human gender condition, where the State should intervene and protect the female gender and its basic institution, the family, under a system of solidarity. In this sense, notions and theories about human development, and discourses about empowerment, among others, have resulted in reflective ideologies to protect *campesino*, Indian and abandoned women from the complex network of inequalities and its forms of violence. These, however, have proved to be weak tools to promote their social subject status with human and citizen rights. It has been confirmed that focal-

²³ Interview with a former official from the Government of Estado de México's Office of Support to Mexiquense Migrants. Field documents of the Gender Program of the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México.

²⁴ This program is the main strategy of the Mexican Federal Government to fight against extreme poverty. It provides assistance to over 25 million families in urban and rural areas. Something which can be considered characteristic of this program is that it is a programmatic design that literally obeys neoliberal decalogues concerning what a social policy should be. Information about this program may be found in <http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx>



ized programs reproduce inequalities, segment social and cultural structures and leave patriarchal structures untouched. This is why it is not enough to introduce a “gender bias” in the development of social programs or to include a vertical speech by the State in favor of alleged female “empowerment” (Arzate, 2005a; Vizcarra and Guadarrama, 2006).

We believe that social policies should, on the one hand, attempt to counter female exploitation, discrimination and exclusion in all its manifestations by means of strategies that intervene directly in the market, by de-commercializing education, health and pension systems, and intervening in salary, agricultural, and migratory policies, particularly in redistributive policies (mainly the fiscal policy). In a parallel way, however, they should protect the female gender, families and community from violence in all its expressions. More than neocorporatist and welfare-like focalized transference programs, like Progres-a-Oportunidades or Procampo, the State should develop a social welfare policy based on the principles of social solidarity, citizen rights (full citizenship) and on respect to human rights. In spite of the fact that the second wave of amendments to neoliberal notions and programs has consisted in introducing local participation as necessary condition for any social action by the state (Burchardt, 2004), it has not been able to permeate programs such as Progres-a-Oportunidades, since, regarding the alleged participation of female heads of households (beneficiaries), they repeat the same populist program claims from the 70s: verticality, centrality, bureaucratic despotism, antidemocratic practices in women assemblies, vote-winning strategies and neocorporativism (Arzate, 2005b; Villarespe, 2001; Vizcarra and Guadarrama, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

The manner in which the Mexican State has developed a discourse in favor of the economic remittances sent by Mexican migrants is paradoxical, underscoring their importance for macroeconomic accounts yet without perceiving its underlying economic aspect: the destruction of the way of living of *campesino* households, the weakening of the social fabric in the countryside and, certainly, the impossibility to rescue the principles of the gender-based perspective to free women from patriarchal bonds. In terms of an old Marxist concept we would describe the situation as a patriarchal process of expanded reproduction of gender-based inequalities and violence. This means that inequalities and their process of violent social action are accumulative like capital. If this is so, when we approach the problem of male migration in the *campesino* context, several theoretical-conceptual and ethical questions and challenges arise for the social sciences, such as: rather than attempt heedlessly an alleged construction of social capital, why don't Latin American social sciences make the complex social processes of gender



construction-destruction visible as patriarchal objects? Why don't they criticize the action of compensatory social problems to combat extreme poverty in as much as they are tools for electoral cooption used by the State? Or why don't they criticize and document the processes or cycles of violence-disease that affect gender, children and spouses, accumulating like capital by means of the effect of causal chains of social action or vulnerability obscured by the market, the State and society's own institutions?

This research paper has attempted to formulate a series of working hypotheses, which remain open to debate and to the findings of empirical studies of a critical and reflective nature about inequalities, violence, male migration and its effects on the female gender, the reproduction of sociocultural vitality—not only of an economic nature—and the sense of ancestral institutions, such as the Indian *campesino* family and economy within a context where gender-based violence is culturally reproduced and expanded.

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