

From Dollars to *Changarros*: Internal and International Migration and Social Reproduction in Southern Puebla, Mexico

De los dólares a los *changarros*: Migración interna, internacional y reproducción social en el sur de Puebla, México

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to show how internal and international migration intersect, as well as how such dynamics have influenced strategies of social reproduction in Tulcingo, a township in south Puebla, Mexico. This research presents both a historic dimension ranging from the 1970s until 2018, as well as an ethnographic one, based on 40 interviews conducted in Puebla and on extensive fieldwork done in the Bronx, New York. The investigation points to three moments that guide immigration dynamics within a process that reaches its peak during the 1990s, a phase of accelerated migration, and culminates on a stage of deacceleration after 2001. The article concludes with a reflection on the characteristics of the new era of Mexican migration to the United States and its impact on the immigrant population on both sides of the border.

Keywords: 1. Internal and international migration, 2. social reproduction, 3. new era of Mexican migration to United States, 4. Puebla-New York migratory circuit, 5. Puebla-Mexico.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este texto es mostrar los vínculos entre la migración interna y la migración internacional, y cómo esta dinámica ha influido en las estrategias de reproducción social en Tulcingo, un municipio del sur de Puebla. El texto propone una perspectiva histórica que abarca desde la década de 1970 a 2018 y se basa en la elaboración de 40 cuestionarios en el municipio, así como trabajo de campo en el Bronx, en la ciudad de Nueva York. Se obtiene como resultado tres momentos que orientan las dinámicas de migración en un proceso que llega a su pico más alto durante la década de los noventa, con una fase de migración acelerada, y culmina con una etapa de desaceleración después del 2001. Se concluye con una reflexión sobre las características de la nueva fase migratoria y sus repercusiones para la población inmigrante en ambos lados de la frontera.

Palabras clave: 1. Migración interna e internacional, 2. reproducción social, 3. nueva fase migratoria, 4. circuito Puebla-Nueva York, 5- Puebla-México.

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INTRODUCTION

Tulcingo is located about 170 kilometers south of the city of Puebla, the state capital. It is a township bordering the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca, as well as the Puebla townships of Albino Zertuche, Xicotlán, Chila de la Sal, Tecamatlán and Piaxtla. According to the Mexican Intercensal Survey of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI for its acronym in Spanish, 2015), there are 9,854 inhabitants in this township. This article briefly tracks back the recent history of the township, emphasizing the disappearance of traditional forms of social reproduction and the pursuit of strategies based on a precarious economy of services. This article summarizes some of the findings of the doctoral research *Earning a living, gambling luck: an ethnography on merchants, labor markets and mobility between Tulcingo, Puebla and the metropolitan area of New York (1970-2017)*, which is a review of the migratory circuit Puebla- New York from a case study on the township mentioned above (Vázquez Zúñiga, 2018).

Social reproduction is explored, understood as the implementation of the strategies that guide households in the search for subsistence (De Hann, 1999; Jardón, 2011; Smith, 1989). On the one hand, it is assumed that the relationship between migration dynamics and social reproduction evidences the social forces that shape labor markets as frameworks for action orchestrated by the political context and, on the other, the ways in which ordinary people resent and experience these social structures and, in turn, organizes decision-making under multiple setbacks, contingencies and circumstances (Narotzky & Smith, 2010; Smith, 1989).

Thus, social reproduction is understood in a broad sense, which enables the search for daily sustenance, in addition to the provision of well-being and social mobility for future offspring. It is in this search for daily living expenses that the subjects of this research have sorted their lives between Tulcingo, Puebla, and New York City, adding the migratory variable as a possibility of upward social mobility and a source of expectations on improving the living conditions of their families.

Therefore, this article ascribes to an ethnographic perspective that makes visible the complexity of the processes of social reproduction in the times of contemporary neoliberalism, on the background of the social forces that shape the labor markets (Kasmir & Carbonella, 2014; Narotzky & Smith, 2010; Smith, 1989). Likewise, it shows evidence warning that recent changes are shaping a new era in Mexico-United States migration characterized by the decrease in international migratory flows, the increase in return migration,² and the diversification of strategies that imply internal migration (Durand, 2013; Jardón, 2017).

² Although this work does take some clues from return migration in Tulcingo, for the sake of clarity, it should be stated that it will not delve into the subject in-depth due to space. The

The “accelerated” migration in this southern region of Puebla, also known as Mixteca Poblana, has reshaped it as a reserve for the labor markets in New York, which implied the disappearance of artisan activities, and created lifestyle expectations related to the acquisition of goods that older generations had not experienced. Reproduction activities, which by the 1970s and 1980s were more linked to subsistence livestock farming-agriculture, were transformed into activities in the service sector (the precarious maintenance of grocery stores or family businesses, personal services, and small businesses), thereby seeking an intensification of tertiarization processes,³ a fall into precariousness that had already been happening throughout the country. In what follows, how this transition was experienced from this township is explained, as an example of a dense and historically long-term migratory circuit.

METHODOLOGY

This article brings forth a historical perspective that summarizes the dynamics of internal and international migration, and that examines the social reproduction processes of the inhabitants of the township of Tulcingo in the state of Puebla. To achieve this, fieldwork was carried out in the township seat of the same name, and some families from Tulcingo who live in the Bronx, New York, were visited. The fieldwork was organized in two stages: a first exploratory stage in which 40 questionnaires were made to households, and a second deepening stage in which 15 in-depth interviews were conducted. In addition, in the second stage, a fieldwork period was undertaken in the Bronx that consisted of conducting ten in-depth interviews with Tulcingans who had already settled in New York City.

The questionnaire carried out in the first stage yielded general information on the migratory trajectory of the family members, identifying internal and international migration. Information was also obtained on work trajectories, thus indicating recurring activities and their links with migration. In the second stage, in-depth interviews were conducted with leather tanning artisans, township authorities, owners of businesses, and return migrants. All this in order to identify long-term transformation processes in social reproduction strategies. In other words, to explore how the activities linked to the countryside had been dismantled and international migration consolidated as a determining factor in domestic income. So, although vast information was obtained that supports broader research, this article

importance of return processes for these communities is acknowledged, yet we argue that the issue deserves dedicated attention.

³ In this work, tertiarization is understood as the growing relative dominance of the activities of the tertiary sector (commerce and services) over the other economic sectors, namely, the primary sector (agriculture and livestock, and extraction of natural resources) and the secondary sector (industry and transformation of raw materials). This is related to the uneven and intensive growth of the so-called “informal economy.”

emphasizes the transit of these families in reproductive activities and how, in broad processes, there was an interrelation between internal and international migration, which provide a general view of the migratory processes in this region.

To explain these changes, the analysis of three “moments” that summarize the recent history of this township, which structure this text, is suggested. This historical segmentation was made from the ethnographic information generated from fieldwork, and according to two key dates in the complex relationship in terms of immigration policy between the United States and Mexico, namely the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which allowed the regularization of the immigration status of millions of Mexicans who had entered the United States undocumented; and 2001, because of the September 11 attack, which contributed to the intensification of border security and the reduction of undocumented migration flows into the United States. To address them more easily, these moments are described as stages.

The first stage dates from the 1970s until 1986 in the 20th century. In this period, the dismantling of artisanal activities (tanning of cattle skins and making huaraches), the crisis of agricultural-livestock activities, and the consolidation of trade (through the management of supply stores, family businesses, and small-scale commerce) as the dominant and self-employment option before the lack of labor markets aided by state intervention. At this stage, the first international migrant networks were developed. They allowed the accelerated growth of migratory flows of the 1990s throughout the region and created internal migration circuits to Mexico City, whose urbanization process was in full swing.

A second stage spans from 1986 to 2001, and in it drastic changes related to the massive international migration, the influx of remittances to the region, and the tertiarization of the local economy were institutionalized. The decade of the nineties was significant in the township since both the increase in population and the influx of capital contributed to the transformation of Tulcingo into a small city, an administrative, services, and basic supply center for nearby communities. Due to the consolidation of the migratory circuit between Puebla and New York, many families were able to invest in modest businesses in the locality. There was a growth phase of the local construction industry, which required labor from neighboring regions. These years represented massive international migration, leading Tulcingans to occupy positions in restaurants and factories in New York City.

The last stage is from 2001 to 2018 and stands out for the gradual deceleration in the flows of undocumented migration from Mexico to the United States, a stagnation of the local economy that had developed with excessive dependence on remittances in the 1990s, and an environment of "saturation" among local businesses (Fitting, 2006; Lee, 2008). During this period, the meanings that had been attributed to the migratory experience were eroded, such as the possibility of generating savings and a family business that would ensure certain economic stability (see Jardón, 2017). As a life strategy, international migration is no longer

a viable measure in the face of possible domestic economic crises, and so there has been a slowdown in migratory flows and greater fragmentation of local labor options.

This article aims to contribute from social anthropology to the migratory studies of the Puebla-New York circuit (Binford, 2003, 2004; Cordero, 2007; Cortés, 2003; D'Aubeterre & Rivermar, 2014, 2007; Lee, 2008; Ortega, Cruz, & González, 2014; Rivera, 2007, 2011, 2012; Smith, 1995, 2006), the exploration of which has been prolific since Robert C. Smith's well-known work on Ticuani (Smith, 1995, 2006). Likewise, it provides ethnographic evidence of the impact of global processes on the recent decades of neoliberalism in rural locations in south-central Mexico (Fitting, 2006; Macip & Flores, 2017; Rothstein, 2003, 2015). The containment of migratory flows to the United States seems to be a response to the adjustments of a neoliberal economy that are creating an increasingly fragmented, competitive, flexible, and ethnically differentiated labor market (Pacheco & Morfín, 2014). Likewise, this transformation responds to the current political conditions that reinforce feelings of discrimination, xenophobia, and anti-immigration, especially in the face of the coming to power of Donald Trump (2017-2021). This new facet in migratory history invites us all to reflect on the current conditions of populations with a long migratory tradition in the context of the Mexico-United States relationship. In this sense, it is necessary to investigate the costs and benefits brought about by the interweaving of long-range migratory processes and the structural forces that affect the organization of social reproduction.

TULCINGO IN THE 1970s: LIVESTOCK FARMERS, TANNERS, AND MIGRANTS

In 1951, Tulcingo became a township because of the political-administrative adjustments that the post-revolutionary period brought about. The arid geographical conditions of the land and its scarce exploitable resources for transnational capital influenced the need to seek jobs in nearby cities and the high regional mobility of its inhabitants since these decades (Flores, n.d.). Tulcingans combined their income with agricultural and livestock activities, in a regime of self-consumption that was complemented by short-distance trade and the tanning of cattle skins (*ibid.*).

The cultivation of agricultural produce was always dependent on the weather, which kept Tulcingan productivity low in relation to the capitalist market and allowed the development of extensive cattle ranching. The lands were better used for raising cattle and goats, mainly, thus generating an economy more akin to that of the ranching societies described by Barragán (1997) in his studies of the Jal-Mich mountain range. The ranchers are mainly independent livestock farmers who kept certain privileges after the post-revolutionary adjustments in rural areas and far from the urban centers of the country (Schryer, 1986). These privileges mainly consist in the accumulation of land ownership under the concept of small property, the accumulation of capital from the possession of livestock, and the

dominance of the options for supplying basic products to the smallest localities in the region. Likewise, towards these decades, this area of Puebla underwent what has been understood as a tendency towards livestock activity in agriculture, when the state government promoted a change in cultivation patterns that replaced the production of basic grains with that of forage products that serve as a food base for cattle (Cordero, 2007; Rappo, 1997). Thus, despite self-consumption productivity, livestock ranching resulted in greater capital accumulation.

This tendency towards livestock activity in agriculture allowed the operation of a regional economy through sales circuits of a series of livestock-related goods (creams, cheeses, beef, and goat meat, salt production, sale of hides and their byproducts, etc.) and it was for this reason that bovine leather tanning emerged in the township as an activity that generated income opportunities for a large part of its population. Tulcingo became the main leather supply center in this micro-region, leather which was tanned following a traditional method based on preservation in salt. Don Gilberto, a 43-year-old tanner, mentioned in an interview that the leather produced in Tulcingo had a finish called “oscaria,” used in the footwear industry to make soles and various types of huaraches, as a type of rustic leather sandal particular to Mexico is known, which used to be worn in the fields.

The leather tanning process was favored by the existence of wells throughout the region, whose water had a high concentration of sodium. Family workshops dedicated to tanning had access to this salty water without having to pay for salt, and so this activity had a slight expansion phase during the seventies, declining towards the nineties. Gilberto mentions that in the San José neighborhood alone, nine tanneries produced approximately 50 hides per “harvest”⁴ (Gilberto, personal communication, January 3, 2017). During this boom, leather production met with the making of huaraches and other goods destined for agricultural activities (cruppers for donkeys, cords for gathering animals, etc.).

Thus, it can be seen how Tulcingans combined various strategies of social reproduction that made this region a relatively autonomous area with little state intervention, at least during those decades. Back then there also was high mobility to various cities in Puebla, Veracruz, Morelos, and the metropolitan area of Mexico City (see the works by Rivera, 2011, 2012). Likewise, there is evidence of the first trips to California and Arizona through the Bracero Program (Délano, 2006; Durand, 2007) and New York and New Jersey in the 1960s and 1970s.

However, as discussed later in this article, the massive international migration flows emerged only towards the 1990s in part due to the search for new horizons after the configuration of a series of factors that made it preferable for many families to leave Tulcingo. On the one hand, the complete lack of government support created a critical

⁴ The tanning process takes approximately a month and a half, so the production at workshops is constant to obtain the expected profit for investment.

situation for cattle ranchers and leather artisans. On the other hand, international mobility and income in dollars allowed the acquisition of experiences valued as positive and the possibility of obtaining consumer goods out of the reach of past generations. The children of those who partook of the Bracero Program (1942-1964), for example, saw in international experience the possibility of being employed in other sectors of the economy that did not involve agriculture or livestock. This generation laid the foundations for the search of new destinations towards the east coast of the United States (in the New York metropolitan area) and the consolidation of support networks for the reception and settlement of relatives and countrymen in the arrival areas during the 1970s and 1980s.

Returning to the critical conditions of the regional economy, Puebla was one of the states most affected by the crisis of the eighties, called by some the “lost decade” since “it experienced a net contraction of its economy between 1981 and 1985” (Smith, 2006, p. 37). “From 1980 to 1989, per capita GDP fell by 9%, real minimum wages plummeted by 47%, and the percentage of families in poverty increased from 45% to 60%” (Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2009, p. 89). In this context, many ranchers in Tulcingo rather sold their livestock and invested in grocery stores that supplied more remote areas. Others changed their residence to nearby cities, especially the city of Puebla and others located in the State of Mexico, so their children could have access to better salaries as teachers or qualified professionals. Still, others settled in New York as laborers in textile factories or were employed in care services, restaurants, or tourist services.

On the other hand, the production of huaraches or footwear of this type declined towards the beginning of the eighties for two main reasons. The first one is the introduction to the country of the plastic huarache from China, characterized by low prices, thus displacing the traditional leather huarache or sandal, and the diversification of men’s footwear in nearby markets. The second one is precisely the migration boom, when artisans began to migrate to the United States, abandoning their tanneries. The entry of sports shoes into the regional footwear market led to an imbalance in the price of leather, whose artisanal production no longer seemed profitable.

Although leather tanning was a significant activity for several Tulcingan families, already in those years, many Tulcingans began to look for other employment alternatives in nearby cities in the State of Mexico and the United States. Mr. Andrés mentioned in an interview that many of the sons of the tanners began to leave town to look for work in New York, abandoning family tanneries. Then, leather tanning suffered the consequences of the economic crisis of the eighties, as it had a notable decline when many of the artisans became migrants.

In the same way, many of the tanners quit their workshops when their income was no longer sufficient to cover the consumption expectations derived from the collective experience of their generation since jobs in “the North” allowed access to goods related to

urban life. For example, families with relatives in the United States could afford household appliances, vehicles, or machinery that not all families in town had. The possession of a stove, a television, or a sewing machine was imposed at first as a luxury that little by little became more common and made easier the domestic tasks of housewives.

The perception of work in tanneries, perceived as a heavy and physically exhausting activity, shifted due to the diversification of job options offered by internal and international migration. Gilberto, a tanner who did not migrate anywhere, states that leather production went from being an artisan activity appreciated in the locality to a “dirty” trade from which little profit was obtained. The tanners of the San José neighborhood were called “the *hediondos*,”⁵ a nickname that many of the young Tulcingans shunned in the search for job options that would cover their social reproduction needs (Gilberto, personal communication, January 3, 2017).

In the mid-80s, Tulcingans began to find a viable and desirable option in international migration, not only due to the possibility of obtaining a better income in New York City, but also to the opportunity of experiencing learning processes, of acquiring development tools, and because of the development of consumption expectations, which were decisive in the consolidation of mobility circuits. Mr. Juan expresses this search for “a different life” in the following terms:

The phenomenon first exploded as a way to improve living conditions and was realized as a way of overcoming obstacles, and then being in the United States we began to learn what we saw and began to step away from the fields, step away from cattle. And so, we welcomed what you could term capitalism. A society that consumes products, goods, and services, we learned a new way of living in another place (J. Fuentes, personal communication, March 24, 2015).

As tanneries decreased their production, internal and international migration increased. Tulcingans of this generation had grown up between rural and urban areas, with greater access to schooling and a greater preference for jobs in the service sector, within the narrow framework of job opportunities in the town.

“DOLLAR TULCINGO” AND ACCELERATED MIGRATION

By the end of the 1980s, this area of Puebla went through an unprecedented economic crisis due to a complex process made up of several elements: polarization of the local class structure between ranchers and merchants, and those “independent” workers who did not own land; the relative absence of the State materialized in the lack of government inputs for agriculture and livestock farming; and finally, the development of consumption expectations

⁵ The word “*hediondo*” is synonymous with smelly, fetid, stinky. It refers to the odors that the leather gives off during the tanning process when mixed with the materials that allow tanning.

among the population of the locality related to the acquisition of electrical appliances and houses, financed by immigrant workers who were already settled in the United States. To illustrate this crisis, many informants suggest that this time was experienced as a “historical oblivion” (Rivera, 2007) in terms of the state’s attention to this region, which translates into the lack of an intervention policy to guide the population towards more enduring labor markets.

On the other hand, the IRCA of 1986 resulted in substantial changes to the configuration of migratory patterns between Mexico and the United States, since it allowed for the regularization of the migratory status of thousands of undocumented immigrants who were already in the United States (Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2009). According to Robert C. Smith (2006, p. 38), in the case of New York, “Mexicans were the second largest group after Dominicans to request amnesty in 1986,” so this reform played a fundamental role in increasing migration flows with the acquisition of legal residency. The regularization obtained by means of the reform strengthened the networks that already existed and aided in family reunifications by changing circular patterns and temporary migration into longer stays in the United States. Then, the possibility of migrating to New York became more and more evident and desirable for Tulcingans since many of their relatives were able to obtain residency through the amnesty that the IRCA made possible.

The massive migration of workers was a response to the crisis of the 1980s in Mexico, as well as to the political situation that the IRCA caused in the United States. In the case presented here, the result was the conformation of a region that would serve as a reserve of workers for the New York metropolitan area in the secondary (construction and textile factories) and tertiary (restaurants, hotels, cleaning and care services) sectors mainly; all of them low-wage jobs under high exploitation conditions. Thus, from 1986 this region underwent a notable growth in migration to the United States, which was a reflection of the critical dismantling conditions of the traditional local reproduction activities, and in turn, of the strengthening of expectations related to the migratory experience where New York was the main destination for living.

Rivera argues that by the second half of the 1980s, “out of every ten Tulcingan migrants, eight went to New York” (Rivera, 2012, p. 43). Likewise, Robert C. Smith notes that Puebla is the main origin of Mexicans in New York, since “by surveys carried out in 1992 and 2001-2002 it is known that two thirds of Mexicans in New York came from the Mixteca” (Smith, 2006, p. 37). For his part, in a study based on a statistical sample of Poblanos and their migratory flows in the 1990s, Cortés (2003, p. 184) pointed out that in the year 2000, some 156,000 Poblanos lived abroad, and out of that total, 64% were international migrants coming from the south of the state, from the region known as the Mixteca Poblana. Likewise, in the year 2000, the censuses of the National Population Council (CONAPO, for its acronym in Spanish) registered a “very high” level of Migratory Intensity in the entire region, placing Tulcingo in the 9th place in the entire state and the 76th place at the national

level (CONAPO, 2014, p. 111). In accordance with these data, out of the 40 questionnaires applied in the doctoral research that supports this article, it is concluded that in the township seat all the interviewees answered they had at least one relative in the United States and listed up to five relatives whose first trip had been during the described period.

To explain these changes in migratory patterns, Binford (2003) proposes the notion of “accelerated migration” for populations with little to no migration history and whose inhabitants became immigrant workers in the United States in a short period. This is the case of the south-central region of the country, wherein Tulcingo is located. During the 1990s, the township had an important rise in terms of the exodus of its population, according to the interviewees. International migration “became institutionalized” when the younger generations began to perceive work in “the North” as their only option at obtaining some stability based on their lifestyle expectations and for a chance at economic success. In other words, the migratory experience became a “planned course of action” (Smith, 1989, p. 97) that organized the decision-making processes of families. Those who had the experience of having worked in the United States were able to save and invest in small businesses that expanded their consumer expectations. In just two generations, a latent and rotating pool of workers was formed, constantly moving between Puebla and New York, facilitated to some extent by the “family reunification” fostered by the IRCA.

On the other hand, the massive international migration resulted in a lack of workers in the locality, in turn, supplied by the arrival of workers from the poor areas of Guerrero and Oaxaca, motivated by the construction boom in the township capital. This way Tulcingo maintained a constant population growth despite the “accelerated migration,” which was consolidated in several townships in the region. The township went from a population of 8,851 in 1990 to 11,025 in 2000 and then had a slight decrease to 9,245 in 2010 (INEGI, 1990, 2000, 2010).

Tulcingo, the township seat, behaved similarly: from a population of 3,765 in 1990 to 5,154 in 2000 and 5,249 in 2010 (INEGI, 1990, 2000, 2010). Rivera (2007, 2011) suggests that the demographic growth of Tulcingo is peculiar, compared to the population loss of the other localities, and points at the fact that the return of international immigrants was also significant since it led to a phase of dynamization of the local economy with the opening of family businesses, investment in the construction of houses and commercial establishments, and the increase in activities in the service sector. The research by Rivera (2007, 2011, 2012) provides valuable information on the demographics and migratory dynamics of this township and shows that between years 1995 and 2000, in Tulcingo “there were 469 [national] returnees [...] and 761 emigrants [from] the United States” (Rivera, 2011, p. 49). In turn, Corona, Ortíz, and Corona (2014, p. 32) point out that in the year 2000 “the highest number of returns as a proportion of the total population of the region was registered in the historical regions of the Mixteca, Atlixco, and Matamoros.”

Continuing with this analysis, the interviews carried out and the analysis of the dynamics of internal migration suggests that the demographic growth of Tulcingo was also due to the demand for local workers, which mainly served the construction industry. The 2000 and 2010 Population and Housing Censuses by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2000, 2010) recorded a considerable increase in people born in another entity who lived in the township of Tulcingo at the time of the census. In the year 2000, the population born in other states represented 7.2% of the total population, and by 2010, this percentage reached 10.40%. Likewise, the entity most mentioned as the origin of internal immigrants is Guerrero in both censuses, with 349 and 463 people, respectively.

The demographic increase in the township seat, the return of international immigrants, and the arrival of workers from nearby towns suggest that Tulcingo became an administrative, commercial, and supply center for the other towns, which registered negative population growth levels or maintained low rates of demographic increase. The Tulcingans interviewed refer that in those years it was increasingly evident that the migratory experience made it easier to save money and increased the possibility of investing in businesses linked to the migratory dynamics. The migratory experience, coupled with the partial disappearance of craft and agricultural activities, permeated the formation of consumer expectations, related to the lifestyles of immigrant workers in New York. An intense service economy developed and was strengthened by the “dollarization” in economic transactions and the setting of prices for land and properties. Tulcingans who returned to the town opened businesses that eventually saturated the center of the capital and transformed the rural landscape into one of greater urbanization. The labor markets that became blurred in these years of “accelerated migration” functioned through the migratory configuration that permeated the socialization relations and the dynamization of a service economy.

Tulcingans at that time called this period of accelerated growth in the township’s migratory trends *Dollar Tulcingo* (Juventino, personal communication, August 30, 2012). In this *Dollar Tulcingo*, the practices of consumption, extravagance, and ostentation prevailed to make notice the presence of dollars in daily economic transactions, in festivities, and leisure activities. The nickname of *The Dollar* suggests the density of the migratory experience in a community and family way, based on the valuation of the economic as successful and as a synonym of social mobility. Mr. Juventino, for example, points out that it was the young people who highlighted in their daily activities the possession of objects considered luxurious by the elderly, as they engaged in consumption and socialization practices to which they were not accustomed:

That’s what they called Tulcingo, they called it *Dollar Tulcingo*, so some teachers told us that they got to the high school some 10, 15 years ago... They told us: so, we got to the high school and saw brand new cars, luxury cars, and we thought “alright, important people is visiting,” so we got in and headed to the principal’s office and we asked, “hey teacher, so whose cars are those outside, are they visiting you from

Puebla?” and well, they were all surprised when they knew the cars belonged to students (Juventino, personal communication, August 30, 2012).

From a historical perspective, *Dollar Tulcingo* is the result of the disappearance of agricultural-livestock and artisanal activity and, therefore, represents the total participation of these populations in the circuits of salaried work both in the United States and in nearby cities (Mexico City and Puebla, mainly). It is also the conjunction of three generations of dense labor mobility towards New York, in which the town of origin stands out as the place of socialization and rest par excellence, after intense annual working seasons in the United States. The institutionalization of the migratory experience worked under a pattern of circularity and frequency of travel, which was sustained until the first decade of the 21st century. Illegal border-crossings were relatively constant and made it possible for undocumented immigrants to visit their communities during vacation periods.

Tulcingo showed the ostentation made possible due to remittances in the patron saint festivities, in the gradual acquisition of electrical appliances, in the construction of houses with large gardens, and in consumer goods such as luxurious cars that previous generations did not aspire to acquire. The expectations of consumption and social mobility were re-signified by the acquisition of material goods that were novel until that moment (Lee, 2008) and nurtured the desire to migrate among new generations that moved away from agricultural activities. In this narrative, very reiterated in the interviews with my informants, there is little room for the social differentiation that occurred between those who had papers and those who did not migrate, as well as for the internal migration that brought with about the departure of the Poblano workers from the region.

THE END OF DOLLAR TULCINGO: THE DECREASE IN INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION FLOWS

The year 2001 is a turning point in the historical recount of migratory flows and the activities of social reproduction of this population in the configuration of labor markets a year that represented a turning point in the policy of national security, immigration, and surveillance on the southern border of the United States (Alba & Leite, 2004; Massey, Durand, & Pren, 2009). The main changes were noticeable in the deceleration of undocumented migration flows from Mexico to the United States, in the decrease in the frequency of trips among immigrants with papers, and in a greater tendency towards settling on either side of the border. In this sense, it is noticeable how in the case of the Puebla-New York circuit there is an end to the circularity in migration patterns, which has generated dynamics of stagnation among local businesses and precarious living conditions for Tulcingan families (see the report by the Puebla Citizen Review on Public Policy for Migrants, 2013).

In addition to this, the 2008 crisis resulted in a progressive contraction in the U.S. labor market that has resulted in an unattractive perception of the economic conditions of the

neighboring country and has made it difficult for migrants to undertake new trips. Immigrants from Puebla living in New York have implemented austerity strategies that range from changing residence to other cities in the United States to seeking alternative jobs to overcome the crisis (Jardón, 2017).

The previous experience discourages young people from new generations to migrate internationally, so they try to look for closer alternatives in cities within the country. According to the analysis carried out by Jardón (2011) to the Population and Housing Censuses 2000 and 2010, “between the five-year periods of 1995-2000 and 2005-2010, international migrant population decreased from 1,632,790 to 1,112,273 individuals, a percentage change of -31.8%” (Jardón, 2011, p. 6).

This percentage decrease matches the decrease in undocumented migration from Mexico to the United States recorded by researchers from the Pew Research Center, who pointed out that since 2007 “the number of Mexicans living in the United States illegally has declined by more than 1 million” (González-Barrera & Krogstad, 2018, n.p.). These analyzes provide evidence that confirms a process of deceleration in the flows of undocumented migration from Mexico to the United States and allow speculation about a possible paradigm shift in migration trends between the two countries (Durand, 2013; Jardón, 2017). Thus, a phase of containment flows is maintained that has lasted until recent years, and which has been strengthened by a context of unprecedented economic, social and political crisis (Durand, 2013).

According to the view of some Tulcingans, the fall of the Twin Towers in 2001 modified the cyclical displacements to which (documented and undocumented) migrants were used since the government severely reinforced border surveillance. These transformations in border security policy were affected by the decrease in migrant visits during the holiday seasons, the closing of businesses, and the search for new job options in nearby cities such as Puebla and Mexico City. Immigrants from Puebla sought to settle longer in New York, or their places of origin as undocumented crossings (previously performed frequently) have become extremely risky.

These changes, especially for undocumented immigrants, have had a notable impact on arrangements and decisions within the family unit, following practices of modesty and moderation, as well as self-employment in the various manifestations of informal economy. In this sense, in the case studied, the decrease in the circularity of migration has also harmed the period of relative economic dynamism that the township experienced during the 1990s. The restrictions in traveling have generated uncertainty in the keeping of ties between families and has diminished the economic benefit that the towns received at the visits of the countrymen. The “dollarized” economy of the *Dollar Tulcingo* years has come to decline, and the labor markets in the region have turned towards a “*changarro* economy” (Ángel Castillo, 2007). This is a reference to the policy promoted by former President Vicente Fox

(2000-2006) during his administration, which promoted the structuring of the Mexican economy through the opening of small and medium-sized companies. His government sought budget items to promote microenterprises through loans and self-employment programs. In Tulcingo, a proliferation of family businesses persists, surviving under precarious and low profitability conditions.

Since 2001, despite the decrease in migrant visits, the township seat has remained the main economic center of the region, offering all kinds of supply products, banking, and administrative services, and it has the best educational options for young people of the surrounding towns. In addition to various basic education options, Tulcingo has a high school and a distance university. Both centers have generated a dynamic of internal migration in which both students and teachers from other parts of the State participate.

In this sense, both student mobility and the arrival of international immigrants and construction workers promote the activeness of regional migration. The formation of this commercial center encouraged the proliferation of all types of family businesses characterized by informal operation, under-productive cycles related to local festivities, and the visit of immigrants who have papers. The fact is, according to field research data, 338 active family business establishments were registered in just eight main streets in downtown Tulcingo.

The meanings of abundance and success that were attributed to the experience of “going North” seem to be eroding as a consequence of the deceleration in undocumented migration flows to the United States and the current perception of the crisis. Given this, the people of Tulcingo receive modest income from their businesses and commercial establishments. Due to the strong dynamics of internal migration, local commerce has predominated as the main economic activity on which Tulcingan families depend. The end of the project to migrate as a work option has reshaped decision-making within families, allocating part of the income to the professional education of young children. The project for these young children is of that of an internal migration circuit: they are supposed to leave town and study in nearby cities, then returning to their locality after completing their professional education. Thus, a resignification of the notion of migrating becomes inspired by professional education, and not in the access to consumer goods as previous generations sought.

A constant between internal and international migration can be noted in the township, which had important highlights during the nineties, consolidating itself into a region of high mobility. By 2010, Tulcingo registered a Migratory Intensity index lower than that of the year 2000 (in 2000 it was 14.15, and in 2010 it was 12.95), matching the recorded general decrease of most of the townships. However, its index remains “very high,” reaching second place in the state list, only after the township of Axutla.

As we have seen, the mobility of the population is explained not only by the diversification of social reproduction strategies but also by the development of consumption

expectations that the artisanal activities could not fulfill, thereby triggering narratives based on the “dollarization” of the township.

In recent years, the dynamism between internal and international migration has strengthened as a result of profound transformations in the patterns of migration from Mexico to the United States. Osorno (2014, p. 60) suggests that in the state of Puebla “the circular migration pattern of the migrant population has been replaced by long-term migration with increasingly prolonged stays in the United States, or by a return migration to the communities of origin.” Above all, with the worsening of the 2008 crisis, Tulcingans have avoided traveling. Similarly, it can be stated that the return of migrants from Puebla has not been massive, as it was speculated, since “between 2005 and 2010 Puebla registered a total of 35,664 return migrants, thus ranking in ninth place at the state level with 4.3% of the national total” (Osorno, 2014, p. 60).

The post-crisis scenario has been complex and has had diversified effects, which have impacted social reproduction strategies. Alarcón et al. (2009) highlight that the construction sector and the manufacturing industry have been among the most affected ones, in which the Hispanic population living in the United States has widely participated. In the Puebla-New York migratory circuit, although a large part of Tulcingan immigrants works in restaurants, the crisis has impacted not only in terms of job losses in the industrial and service sectors but also in the perception that things have worsened to such a degree that it is better to deploy moderation actions and job diversification strategies to overcome the crisis. Mr. Rufino, a Tulcingan who migrated to South Bronx (New York) during the nineties, tells in an interview how the new generations have valued more the professional options that their parents offer them by ruling out going to the United States to look for jobs with their relatives there:

In these times it doesn't matter that you have a lot of family over there [New York], it's not enough, because things are very hard. Cousins of mine had to get other jobs on top of the ones they had, just to pay the rent. Others decided to return because if you are going through hardships over there, well you better do that with your family here... things are different than before (Rufino, personal communication, January 14, 2015).

In Tulcingo, the possibility of migrating has been dispelled and the economic strategies generated by migration are also dissipating in the locality. This implies rethinking the meanings built on the migratory experience of those who migrated before 2008. The perception of international migration as a possibility towards social mobility is an ongoing construction that new generations will have to shape and build from new fronts.

CLOSING REMARKS

This article recounts the dynamics of internal and international migration that affect the social reproduction of Tulcingans from the seventies to the present. This process evidenced the disarticulation of leather tanning activities, the elaboration of huaraches or rustic sandals,

and livestock farming, in face of the growing possibility of migrating internationally to work as employees in restaurants and factories in New York City. Due to the fact that “going North” gradually acquired positive meanings in the assessment of social mobility and contributed to creating consumer expectations that, on the other hand, the income generated by local work activities could not cover, the migratory experience was consolidated as a “planned course of action” (Smith, 1989) around which decision-making for individual projects and family life was organized.

Towards the end of the 1990s, the institutionalization of international migration exacerbated the tertiarization processes in the local economy, which were felt with the urbanization of Tulcingo. Just as this area was the origin of a flexible workforce that was inserted into the restaurant and manufacturing sector of New York City, the township of Tulcingo was the center of arrival for workers from neighboring towns, thus influencing the demand for services and business opening. A regional dynamic came to be, which is still in force, enabling a modest economy that depends not only on the U.S. labor market but also on the workforce of the localities of this micro-region and its consumption possibilities. Just as Tulcingans successfully entered the service sector as transnational workers in New York, workers from Guerrero contribute to sustaining the local economy in Tulcingo, thus creating relationships of regional and transnational interdependence.

Despite the narratives of economic success that Tulcingans still have regarding *Dollar Tulcingo*, there has been a substantial transformation in the meanings of international migration, notably after 2001. From being a valued and desired possibility in a scenario of few local job opportunities, going to the United States, even with papers, seems to be a discouraging option and one that involves great risks. The transformation of these expectations about migration seems to match the new facet of the Mexico-United States relationship, which leads to increasingly restrictive policies for Mexican immigrants and their gradual marginalization.

The Puebla-New York circuit is witnessing “the end of accelerated migration” (Pacheco and Morfin, 2014, p. 46) that characterized the 1990s for many localities in this portion of the state. Likewise, the evidence collected supporting this article suggests that the transformations in international migration patterns are felt as the end *Dollar Tulcingo* due to the deterioration of the dollarized economy in Tulcingo. The erosion of the meanings of international migration as a strategy of social reproduction among Poblanos has generated the implementation of recession mechanisms, atomization of labor options aimed at the opening of *changarros*, and the search for new destinations within the country (Jardón, 2017).

When examining the recent history of Tulcingo, the costs and benefits that social forces and migratory dynamics have generated in the lives of these individuals can be noted, this region being the product of a close dependence on New York City. Although the labor

markets generated by the dynamics of internal and international migration aided in immediate improvements to the living conditions made visible especially in the *Dollar Tulcingo* generation in the 1990s, situations of precariousness and alienation were reinforced in turn among more recent generations.

The outlook before an imminent reconfiguration of the political order after the Donald Trump administration is not entirely optimistic. The reinforcement of discriminatory narratives and the xenophobia created and directed especially at Mexicans in the United States, has exacerbated social polarization and generated a hostile environment in the population. In this context, thousands of immigrant families live in uncertainty and fear, in face of the ambivalence of staying in their workplaces with the apprehension of being deported or returning to their places of origin. In addition to the conditions in the United States, there are thousands of families that depend on remittances and the fragile regional economies that emerged after the years of migratory boom during the 1990s, which have declined after the 2008 crisis.

On the other hand, a more in-depth exploration of the effects of return migration in this township is pending (see the return migration protocols by the International Organization for Migration, Poblano Institute for Migrant Assistance, 2018). In this article, the participation of return migrants during the 1990s was pointed out as a significant boost to the local service economy, the investment in construction projects, and to local businesses; little is known about the dimensions of this process in more recent years. We hereby acknowledge the need to examine in greater detail these dynamics that affect mobility patterns and demand addressing new problems related to the economic insertion of this population and their basic needs.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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