

Ana Elizabeth Jardón Hernández

International Migration and Crisis

Transition Toward a New Migratory Phase



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Transition Toward a New Migratory Phase



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Toluca, State of Mexico
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Ana Elizabeth Jardón Hernández

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Just this past year fifteen young men from town went, but only two of them got across, all the others came back; yeah, it's really tough (...) it used to be we'd all cross together, wandering around like I told you, but we got across, and there was work back then... Sweet Mother of Mary, now you can't even get across. A compadre who came in those days told me there were all kinds of work, but now they say there isn't that much, not even on the big farms, so now with all these difficulties people think twice 'cause there's no work, not like before; when I was in Chicago there was work all over, in Woodstock, nearby, there were farms where there was work, and lots of factories, but now if you go wetback they won't give you a job (Arcadio, 78 years old).

Over the past three decades migratory processes between Mexico and the U.S. have undergone significant changes in their dynamics and modalities, as well as in the sociodemographic characteristics of migrants (Tuirán 1997). Mexico's economic crisis, economic restructuring in the U.S., the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), and the maturation of transnational networks of migrants all contributed to the enormous expansion of international migration from Mexico; i.e., the accelerated increase of migrant flows—documented and undocumented—the weakening of circular migration, the growing presence of Mexicans in the U.S. and the explosive increase of monetary remittances (Lozano et al. 2010; Zúñiga et al. 2004; Leite et al. 2003; Leite/Acevedo 2006; Cornelius 1992).

In terms of public policy, the massive scale of migratory processes and their historicity led the Mexican government to choose a model of development based on migration, monetary remittances and the export of cheap labor force to the U.S. (Delgado et al. 2006). The promotion of this strategy meant that many communities in Mexico found in international migration an escape valve as they strove to resolve problems such as unemployment, labor precariousness and the poverty that plagued many households, especially in rural areas.

As a work strategy, international migration from rural regions has been reinforced by the deep and diverse demographic, economic and institutional transformations that the Mexican countryside has experienced and which have introduced, as corollaries, the redefinition, adaption and diversification of life and survival strategies among rural families. This conceptualization that Arias (2009: 10) argues has meant nothing but a resignification of the rural household itself, the author

suggests that peasant families have come to depend more heavily than ever on a strategy based on multiple economic activities that increases the importance of non-agricultural income such as that derived from the incorporation into American labor markets.

In recent years, however, international migratory processes involving Mexicans have registered significant changes that seem to reposition its role as a work strategy, compared with the boom period and its increases in the scale of migration and remittances, the recent transformations have generated a new moment; one characterized by the deceleration and contraction of migration. The reduced flow of new migrants to the U.S., the higher proportion of the return population, the decreasing presence of Mexicans on American soil, the declining number of apprehensions at the border, the historical increase in the number of deportations, and the deceleration of monetary remittances emerge as the principal changes that the migratory dynamic between Mexico and the U.S. are now experiencing (Alarcón et al. 2009; Passel/Cohn 2009; Papademetriou/Terrazas 2009; Martin 2009; Lozano 2011).

As the current debate makes it clear, these transformations have been attributed to three recent phenomena: first, the 2008 international economic crisis; second, the hardening of U.S. migratory policy; and, third, the reemergence of strident anti-immigration movements and xenophobic measures that promote persecution, harassment and securitization (Durand 2010). Although this has occurred in a context of crisis at a critical economic and political conjuncture, the transition from a migration boom to a moment of deceleration seems neither temporary nor a short-term phenomenon for, as Durand (2012) points out, the dynamics of continuity and change in Mexico-U.S. migration suggest that changes occur approximately every twenty years, marking the end of one migratory phase and the beginning of a new one. If we deem Durand's proposal to be true, then we can argue that Mexican migration commenced a new phase in 2008; one characterized by reflux, repression, implementation of new rules and greater marginalization of Mexicans in the U.S.

From this argumentation our work enters into the theoretical debate on the changes and continuities that the dynamics of international migration of Mexicans has been experiencing, but also questioning it as a life strategy of migrant households and communities. As a case study, this research was carried out in a locality called Las Vueltas, in the municipality of Coatepec Harinas, State of Mexico, Mexico (see Fig. 1.1).

It is in this sense that the key empirical findings of this study make it possible to sustain that the new migratory patterns are constructed through the interweaving of changes and continuities linked to the economic recession, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant violence that have once again flared up in the U.S. According to the historical conformation of Mexican migration to the U.S., in this study it is proposed that these processes of transformation are beginning to configure a new migratory phase, one characterized by an inversion of the patterns that had a controlling influence during the boom by deceleration and by the contraction of migratory flows and monetary remittances.



Fig. 1.1 Geographical location of Las Vueltas, 2010. Source El Colegio de Michoacán

This way, at the household level one perceives families that promote multiple strategies of life and socioeconomic diversification as alternatives to international migration. These strategies, on the one hand, situate the dynamics of migratory flows and remittances in a kind of *holding pattern* due to the economic stability of

the U.S., the flexibility and reopening of its borders; while, on the other, reduce the role of migration as a social and economic resource, since in contexts of economic uncertainty and the hostility of U.S. migratory policy, the decision to emigrate moves toward a stage in the migratory career that surpasses economic rationality and leads toward a valorization of both the structure of opportunities in the destination country, and the possible payoff of the risk when there is no guarantee of being able to cross the border and obtain employment. In other words, this study provides evidence that the migrant population and families affected by the changes in the social organization of this process are experiencing diverse patterns of reorganization as they search to develop other life and survival strategies, ones not necessarily linked to international migration (Jardón 2011a).

At the level of community, it has been shown that the changes in the social organization of migration have fostered adjustments in the exercise and functioning of diverse practices that, on the one hand, secure the reproduction of the dynamics of international migration and, on the other, reinforce links between Mexicans in the U.S. and ensure their membership and participation in local customs and traditions.

In summary, this study argues that the recent transformations in the social organization of migration have transcended to configure a new migratory phase; one that is called the period of “contraction and disengagement”. It is characterized by a conjunction of diverse processes of change that have had repercussions on the functioning of international migration as a socioeconomic strategy for families and communities, which today no longer seems to be sustainable in a setting of economic regression and migratory repression.

1.1 Study Community

Las Vueltas is one of the seven communities located in the southwest region of the Municipality of Coatepec Harinas; it borders to the north with the localities of La Galera and Texcapilla in the municipality of Texcaltitlán, to the south with the locality of Pachuquilla in the municipality of Almoloya de Alquisiras, and to the west with Chiltepec, also a locality in Coatepec Harinas (see Fig. 1.1). Las Vueltas has a surface of 1,733 ha, which account for about 6.1 % of the total municipal surface (28,050 ha) (GEM 2002; GMCH 2004).

Las Vueltas is divided into five neighborhoods: El Cerro, El Rincón, El Centro, El Plan and Huizcatepec. As in many other migrant-sending locations in Mexico, the rural locality of Las Vueltas has registered processes of depopulation that relate as a demographic phenomenon, at least in part, to the spatial mobility of its inhabitants, specifically the migratory flow toward the U.S. In 1990, Las Vueltas had approximately 1,220 residents, but this figure has shown a steady reduction to 1,155 people in 2000 and just 841 in 2010.

1.2 Methodology

The methodological strategy adopted in this research combines qualitative and quantitative methods in order to broaden the author's vision and knowledge of the processes of change and continuity in international migration in periods of economic crisis and anti-immigrant violence. Qualitatively, research tools as participant observation and in-depth interviews were used; while quantitative analyses included statistical information from population censuses (2000 and 2010), the Survey on International Migration of Inhabitants of the State of Mexico to the U.S. (EMMEU-2009), and the 2011 Family Socioeconomic Survey, which was designed by the author and applied in Las Vueltas in order to obtain direct information on the principal socio-demographic and economic components of the place under study.

In this research process, the main methodological tools that supported the fieldwork strategy were participatory observation, in-depth interviews and a semi-structured questionnaire (Family Socioeconomic Survey, Las Vueltas). The following section examines each one of these instruments in detail:

Participatory observation was performed as an interaction strategy that allowed entering into the life of the community and the everyday existence of *Vuelteños* (demonym for local people). This methodological tool also provided us with the opportunity to socialize and share with the townspeople, and also to widen our vision of the complexity of migration as a social process and of the role of individuals as social agents.

Regarding the in-depth interviews, guidelines were designed and grouped by topic and type of informant. The topics included in the interviews were: transformations of the processes of international migration; the situation of vulnerability of *Vuelteño* migrants in the U.S.; the migratory history of Las Vueltas, and its forms of social, economic, political and cultural organization. A total of 45 interviews were conducted; the approximate duration was 2–3 h.

The Family Socioeconomic Survey (hereinafter, FSS) was designed as a semi-structured questionnaire that included pre-codified and open questions. The latter offered informants an opportunity to express their opinions instead of inducing simple responses. The design of this instrument included five sections: the first was set up to gather sociodemographic and economic information on the members of the nuclear family; the second focused on the migratory experiences of the members of the household (primarily the first and most recent trip to the U.S.); the third section dealt with behaviors related to monetary remittances, but only for individuals with migratory experience, whose most recent trip occurred in the year 2000 or later; the fourth part probed the presence of other family members in the U.S.; while the final section contained a series of open questions planned to collect information on changes and continuities in the international migratory processes, specifically in relation to migratory decisions, the deceleration of monetary remittances, family strategies, and situations of vulnerability among *Vuelteños* in the U.S.

In order to assure that the survey would be representative of the community, it was sought to achieve a coverage percentage of approximately 61.1 % of the 198

inhabited houses. The selection of households was at random and conducted on the basis of a mapping of the locality. Hence, a total of 121 questionnaires were applied.

1.3 Organization of the Text

Although most international migration studies have focused on the rural sector in Mexico, one of the principal contributions of this work is that it presents the study, analysis and explanation of the transformations and continuities recorded in international migratory processes in situations of economic crisis and political hostility, especially from the perspective of a sending community where the historical depth of migration meant that “the North”¹ became one of the main sources of income and economic diversification in the family and community.

In order to explain the changes and continuities in the processes of social organization of international migration from Mexico to the U.S. The analysis emphasizes the current situation and the deceleration of migratory flows and remittances. Thus, the first chapter analyzes the principal conditions that constitute the new context in which migratory processes involving Mexicans are unfolding nowadays, namely: economic recession, labor crisis, unemployment and the stiffening of migratory policies in the U.S. Also, an analysis of secondary data allowed identifying some of the indicators that provide evidence on recent transformations in the international migratory processes involving Mexicans.

Chapter two discusses the main changes in the dynamics, intensity and magnitude of the migratory flows among *Vuelteños*, the behavior of migratory decisions in contexts of crisis, the situations of voluntary and involuntary returns, the configuration of forced temporary stays in the community of origin, the deceleration in the circulation of people from Las Vueltas who reside in the U.S., the reduced reception of family remittances, and the situations of vulnerability that *Vuelteño* migrants face in “the North”.

Finally, the third chapter seeks to explain the principal effects of these transformations on the strategies of life of households, on the local culture, and on the dynamism of the economic community. To this end, instead of conceptualizing migration as an escape valve, this research seeks to demonstrate that the symptoms of change in the international migratory processes of *Vuelteños* reflect the ‘overcrowding’² of local labor markets and a reduced tendency to risk making the trip to the U.S. In this context, we discuss the most important strategies of life that are currently being implemented by the households that are facing bankruptcy due to the reduction of what was, up to just a few years ago, their primary source of income.

¹Term used by *Vuelteños* to refer to the U.S.

²Term used by a woman from Las Vueltas (*Vuelteña*) to refer to the problem of the scarcity of employment in the local context.

Chapter 2

Continuity and Change: From the Boom to the Slowing Down of International Migration from Mexico to the U.S.

Let's see the mistreatment in emigrant, so cruel they give to him. Once I was caught in Woodstock (Illinois), I was caught in a factory, they called it the factory of peaks, I was one of the first that fell into the trap and they filled a car with about 60–70 people. That's right, I don't know if right now you ignore this that appears on TV, they handcuff and shackle the emigrant I say, why do they do that? I think that the emigrant thing can be solved with some easier topics than that. Now, how many poor souls have died during the trip, I suffered a lot, twice on the brink of death (Antonio 2011).

2.1 Explaining the Continuity and Change of International Migration

In the literature on international migration we notice important efforts to explain, according to various perspectives and theoretical approaches, why do people migrate? And, which are the factors that explain the continuity and change in the international migratory processes? According to Cornelius (1992: 157) four are the factors: the economic crises in Mexico, the economic restructuring and demand for labor migrants in the U.S., the changes in American migratory policy and the maturation of migrants' transnational networks. It might be said that these four approaches allow explaining the dynamics of continuity and change that Mexican international migrations have historical witnessed: the demographic, economic, political and sociocultural approaches.

In relation with the first of these approaches a relation between demographic explosion and economic tension is assumed; in this approach, the demographic growth generates a demand of employment and consumption, which if it is not met, becomes an imbalance between offer and demand (Weiss-Altaner 1973: 166), this is to say, saturated labor markets and stark discrepancies between employment opportunities and requirements (Rionda 2001). In such situation Mexico found in international migration an escape valve for unemployment, poverty, marginalization issues and for the absence of an efficacious model to promote development, to

the extent that numerous urban and rural households and communities found a strategy in migration to generate monetary incomes.

In like manner, the continuity and change registered by international migrations of Mexicans is closely linked to Mexico's demographic transition, since the transformations observed in the composition and structure of the families modify the socioeconomic organization, the functions, roles and arrangements in the households that nowadays experience a decrease in their average size, an increased presence of feminine heads, a growing economic participation of women [whose roles as providers are revalued in migration and gender studies] and an accelerated aging process (López 2001: 7).

From an economic perspective, the origin of international migrations are explained by the presence of macrostructural factors such as economic crises and wage differences between countries and regions, which make migration a market competition, in which workers are mobilized as a result of wages and employment (González 2002) and base their migratory decisions on cost-benefit criteria, searching to maximize their incomes. This way, according to this perspective, the main reason for the migratory phenomenon are wage gaps, for it involves workers who displace from areas with low salaries toward areas that offer higher incomes (Massey et al. 1993). This is to say, it is assumed that the actors estimate the expected incomes according to an equation in which the income expectations in the destination country, the probability of finding and keep a job and the income received in the origin place concur (Massey et al. 2009a: 16).

Following this line, but now from a microeconomic approach, migration rests upon the individuals' economic rationality to maximize their wages and expectations of upward social mobility (Pinto 1996 in González 2002). Here, rational decision models warn that population movements correspond to the economic cycle in which the sending and recipient countries are (Cerdio 2004), adjusting to the changes in their financial conditions (Ruíz/Vargas 2010: 175). Thus, the migratory flow intensifies when the economic growth of the recipient country is high and the probability of finding a job is higher, however it decreases when growth is slow and there is labor force scarcity.

If this is so, excluding other sort of factors and only paying attention to those of economic nature we notice that at times of crisis and employment scarcity in the recipient society, the dynamic of the process expresses a deceleration of the flow of migrants who leave their origin communities in order to look for employment options in the U.S. (Mendoza 2010; Orozco 2009). Even if the economic platform is one of the main components interrelated with the continuity of migrations, we know that "the motivations to emigrate are not restricted to these cost-benefit calculations [...] because the lifetime maximization of the expected incomes is only one of the many motivations for international migration" (Massey et al. 2009a: 16–17).

In the face of a much more complex reality, the American political scenario has also determined the continuity and change in the patterns of international migrations, while its migratory policies have moved from recruitment to restriction, and from acceptance to exclusion, oscillating with recession and expansion periods and

also with the prevailing ideological trends (Timmer/Williamson 1998 in Massey et al. 2009a: 14). According to this political and intervention management approach, the implementation of initiatives that facilitated migration, such as the Bracero Program and the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) are positioned among the principal measures that promoted and reinforced the migratory patterns of Mexicans, even though at the same time, IRCA paved the way for the implementation of restrictive immigration policies that fostered a new migratory pattern (Massey et al. 2009b).

Therefore, it might be said that in the American migratory policy, the topic of migration has been dealt with heavy ideological and racist biases, which have rested upon the formulation of repressive policies (military and police) and the execution of anti-immigrant measures, in which the promoters of hardening find that extreme punishment is a dissuasive factor for undocumented migration (Schmidt 2008). It seems as if it is occurring that way, for the observed changes in the international migration dynamic of Mexicans show close links to the securitization of the border, as well as the set into motion of restrictive actions that criminalize migration, increase the vulnerability of migrants in the U.S. and promote voluntary and involuntary return.

Among the cultural factors of migration Massey et al. (2009a: 25) state that along the migratory process there appear conditions that open the possibilities to perpetuate international migration over time and space. Here, social networks acquire a fundamental role, since one person has emigrated, quotidian friendship and kinship bonds turn into a resource to become employed in the recipient country and to obtain other sort of help, which increase their emigration probabilities. Although culturally, the continuity of migration is also supported on the northern-becoming processes developed in the migrant communities, where emigrating to and working in the United States becomes a tradition, a way of life and a rite of passage, we have to bear in mind that migration is also part of the reproduction and social organization of the households that seek strategies to survive and reach higher wellbeing levels (Alarcón 1992: 315–317).

This way, migration as a process is not only perpetuated from the social structures, as beyond the participation of the states, policies, demographic changes, unemployment and other economic motivations, it has been observed that the action of social subjects is the one that defines the logic and functioning of the migratory system, to the extent that the strategies [the action] promoted by the social actors stand out according to the migratory cultures of each locality, in which for instance, “emigrating can mean courage, decision or endurance of a youngster to become a man entering into another country in order to have a try, work and gain prestige” (García 2008: 78).

Finally, migration maintains and reproduces, while rooting is attained between the migrant population and the origin communities, in order to preserve customs and the instauration of practices that foster the feeling of belonging and feed the illusions of return in the near future; at the same time these practices promote communal improvement and wellbeing.

This way then, the interrelation of these four approaches demonstrates that migration is a complex and chaining phenomenon, in which the economic, political, social and cultural structures of the sending and recipient countries intervene, which on the one side, determine the contexts in which migrations occur and the decisions to leave are made, and on the other, the ways the migrant population has to enter into the recipient society. This is to say, regarding the Mexico-U.S. migratory system, these approaches are, partly, a platform to explain the patterns of continuity and change in migrations, as well as the transition between the various migratory stages.

From this stance, the analysis of the transformation processes upon which our argumentation on the configuration of the new migratory phase is supported pays especial attention to the articulation of the economic and political approaches; firstly, alluding to the 2008 international financial crisis, and secondly, to the hardening of American migratory policy.

2.2 Economic Crisis and New Perspectives on Migratory Policy

In the second half of 2008, the most severe financial and crisis ever since the Great Depression unleashed (Zúrita et al. 2009); even if the 2008–2009 Great Depression, thus named by Tanzi (2010), started in the U.S., it acquired a global dimension, as there were several countries affected by it. The origin of the American economic crisis is due to a number of causes; it is partly explained by the crisis of the real estate sector facing the payment difficulties experienced in the high-risk mortgages (Lozano et al. 2015). Because of this, the financial crisis that started being announced in 2007 took place when the prices of houses stopped increasing, to later dramatically drop; at the same time, the interest rates for house buyers increased and many of the recently-built houses were not sold (Tanzi 2010).

The 2008 crisis, in spite of sharing similarities with previous episodes (such as a fast increase in the price of assets; a credit boom; a dramatic expansion of loans; and a sort of regulation and supervision that was not able to keep up with the occurrences) has its own characteristics, among them: the existence of benevolent macroeconomic conditions before the crisis; the opacity of financial transactions and a prominent role of non-banking institutions; together with a high degree of international financial integration, in which advanced countries played the leading roles (Lozano et al. 2015).

The 2008 global economic crisis had devastating consequences for the national economies, businesses and workers in both industrialized countries (Awad 2009) and emerging economies, to the extent that it ravaged financial systems and abruptly modified the behavior of markets for goods and labor (Martínez et al. 2010). During the last two trimesters of 2008, the U.S. registered a negative growth (−0.5 and −6.2 %) and reduced productivity in the main economic sectors, specifically those that had experienced expansion with a growing demand for labor, particularly that of Hispanic workers, most of whom are of Mexican origin (Awad

2009; SRE 2009). In that year, the most severely affected sectors of the U.S. economy were construction and manufacturing, with annual percentage GNP change rates of -5.6 and -4.6 %, respectively (Mendoza 2010: 5). Among other effects, this decelerated the demand for labor and entailed a loss of approximately 1.1 million and 207,000 jobs, respectively, in these two industries in the first months of 2009 (Awad 2009; SRE 2009).

In this regard, some authors (e.g., Papademetriou/Terrazas 2009) have stated that the concentration of migrants in the most severely affected economic sectors had serious implications for this population because in conditions of crisis and work scarcity it is one of the most vulnerable; often, its members are among the first to be fired. In this respect, the recent economic crisis has been one of the direst in terms of duration and impact, since one of its main consequences was the destabilization of the American labor market. According to BBVA (*Banco Bilbao Vizcaya* 2011), the 2008 recession caused the largest loss of jobs, as the unemployment rate reached historic dimensions in a short period of time, rising from 4.9 % in January 2008 to 9.7 % in August 2009 (Mendoza 2010: 6). Even though the economic recovery began in 2010, the process has been very slow: in fact, only around 20.0 % (1.7 million) of the almost 8 million lost jobs have been recovered (BBVA 2011).

In August 2011, the lack of dynamism in the U.S. economy was reflected in null job creation, despite the fact that some 215,000 employment opportunities were generated between February and April of that year, and 53,000 more from May to July. As a result, it is estimated that the unemployment rate remained steady at around 9.1 %, which meant five consecutive months at levels above 9.0 % (Almonte/Morales 2011).

In this context, Latin American migrants recorded a higher unemployment rate than those of the North American population and foreigners from other countries (Orozco 2009). During the first trimester of 2008, when the economic crisis struck, the general unemployment rate was 5.0 %, but for the Hispanic population it reached 7.3 %, and for Mexican workers, 8.4 % (Tamar 2009). Between the fourth trimester of 2009 and the third trimester of 2011, the situation of Mexicans may have seemed to improve, but in reality it continued to be unfavorable, because while the unemployment rate for the nation as a whole dropped from 10.0 to 9.1 %, among Mexicans the change in the same period was from 12.9 to 11.6 %.

During this very gradual recovery of employment in the U.S., it has been argued that Hispanics are among the most favored sectors, since between the fourth trimester of 2009 and the third trimester of 2011, of 1.33 million jobs generated, 668,000 were taken by Latinos; that is, 52.0 % of all new employment. Estimates indicate that 17.0 % of these jobs were filled by Mexican migrants (BBVA 2011). In that year, the main sectors in which Mexican migrants found jobs were commerce, education and health, agriculture, fishing and reforestation, and professional and entrepreneurial services. Meanwhile, the sectors in which employment shortages persisted were tourism and entertainment, other services, and manufacturing (BBVA 2011: 8).

Accompanying this recessive process, the international migratory agenda, in spite of registering formal advancements in years previous to the crisis,¹ has also witnessed significant drawbacks, apparently stressed by the 2008 economic recession, in virtue that the American migratory policy experienced deep changes in the attitudes toward labor migration, since the reduced employment offer stirred feelings of discrimination, violence and xenophobia (Awad 2009), which materialized as the implementation of restrictive measures that made the lack of protection, irregularity, uncertainty and intolerance which the migrants in the U.S. are subjected to more visible: strengthening of border securitization campaigns; criminalization of the hiring of undocumented migrants; persecution and harassment in the workplace (Kibble 2010).

The anti-immigrant bias renewed in the American migratory policy provoked the reduction of Mexican presence in some states as a result of the interstate mobility registered by such population searching for employment and fewer restrictions. In this mobility process the states that were not usual migrant recipients and that suddenly were overwhelmed by a wave of undocumented population (for instance, Colorado, Virginia and Georgia) responded to the phenomenon with overtly anti-immigrant laws (CNDH 2009).

Between 2010 and 2011, six states in the U.S. (Arizona, Tennessee, Georgia, Indiana, Alabama and South Carolina) promulgated anti-migrant laws, while two others (Florida and Utah) discussed their implementation. It is no coincidence that such measures were ratified or discussed precisely when the protracted decline in the need for labor meant that there was much less demand for this sector of the working class.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has also modified the measures applied to control undocumented migration through actions that promote deportations, criminalize the hiring of undocumented workers (Kibble 2010), foster persecution and harassment in the workplace, and problematize the migrants' social interaction by enforcing economic sanctions and suspending their eligibility for social services and health care programs (Durán 2011). It is this setting what Durán (2011) calls a strategy of *forced erosion of the population*; i.e., implementing control and stigmatization policies to confront the problem of undocumented migration by racializing certain segments of the population, since these measures seem to offer a better option than a migratory reform or massive deportations by virtually forcing undocumented migrants to abandon certain states for fears of arrest or deportation (ibid. 2011).

By the end of 2015 and early 2016, the situations of violence against migrant population have been aggravated by the deportation measures that the American government has promoted to send broad sectors of migrant population, particularly

¹Martínez et al. (2010: 13), point out that in “recent years there was intense activity around the topics of the contemporary migratory agenda fueled by noticeable events such as the UN High Level Dialogue (2006)”, the constitution of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the constitution of the Ibero-American Forum on Migration and Development and the irruption of numerous intergovernmental, agential, academic and civil-society activities.

that in the states of Georgia, Texas and North Carolina, which reached the border in the 2014 wave, was detained by the Border Patrol and received a final deportation order from an immigration judge.

However, it is also true that control measures and border security have been issues in the U.S. since the early 1990s (Koslowski 2011), as shown by the application of initiatives like “Operation Gatekeeper” in 1995, and HR Law 4,437 in 2005 (Rocha 2006). But the measures taken today to protect the border have been intensified by securitization campaigns reinforced by an ever-growing availability of human and material resources and infrastructure, and through the enactment of proposals like the 2010 Emergency Border Security Law (Kibble 2010). These later changes in the measures that originally increased the difficulties faced by migrants seeking to cross the border in recent years to achieve a better quality of life are currently reflected in the deceleration of the average annual number of undocumented migrants that attempt to settle in the U.S. (Durand 2010). Other expressions of anti-immigrant hostility and violence seen in recent years include the historic increase in the number of deportations (from 81,000 in 2008 to 195,772 in 2010), the higher number of arrests and sanctions applied to employers who hire undocumented workers (from 135 in 2008 to 196 in 2010), and the number of notifications of workplace inspections, which reached 2,393 in 2011, for an increase of over 375.0 % with respect to 2008 (Kibble 2010 and 2011).

All signs indicate that the American government will go on enforcing these actions, in spite of the contradictions, in terms of how the economic and political systems of the country articulate, given that unskilled migrants represent only a modest threat to the American population, while offering significant benefits to employers, consumers and the economy in general (Holzer 2011). Nonetheless, these economic changes have materialized in a migratory legislation that is harsher toward migrants who, many believe, overload the welfare system and occupy jobs that pertain to Americans (Papademetriou/Terrazas 2009).

2.3 From High Tide to Reflux: Transition to a New Phase?

In a changing scenario, the crisis has become a necessary frame to analyze contemporary international migration at one of its most significant historical moments, due to the amount, diversity and dynamism of human mobility flows (Lozano et al. 2015). Being so, with the hardening of the migratory policy and economic contraction in the United States, the migratory processes of Mexicans experienced important transformations that apparently establish a migratory status different to the stage of boom and uninterrupted growth of migration and remittances.

From high tide to reflux is the process, which according to Durand (2012), starts to characterize the end of an era and the beginning of a new migratory phase that takes place in an environment of repression, contraction and definition of new rules. Among others, the principal elements that have made room for the emergence of a new pattern are: selective and racial deportation, the contraction of the American

labor market, the slow recovery of labor options and the implementation of increasingly severe administrative sanctions.

Academic studies that take part in this debate have stressed seven principal aspects, which are: diminution of Mexican migratory flows toward the United States; progressive increase of return migration; lesser presence of Mexican population in the U.S.; increase in deportations; diminution of border arrests; deceleration of remittances sent to Mexico; and, the increasing vulnerability of the Mexican migrant.

2.3.1 Slowing Down of Migratory Flows Toward the U.S.

“Potential migrants, considering the high costs of migrating and reduced employment opportunities in the destination, have chosen not to migrate” (Awad 2009: ix). According to Awad, in situations of economic and labor crises in the recipient society, the rationality of individuals and migrant households impacts the processes of deceleration and non-mobility because many potential migrants simply decide to stay put. In this regard, and in accordance with rational decision models, the reduction of migrant flows to the U.S. can be explained, in part, by the economic logic of population displacement (Cerdio 2004) and adaption to the changes in the financial conditions in the sending and recipient countries (Ruíz/Vargas 2010: 175). This is because migratory flows intensify when economic growth in the recipient country is high and the probability of obtaining employment improves, but tend to shrink when growth is slow and work becomes scarce.

There is no question that the international mobility of Mexicans has decelerated in the wake of the 2008 economic recession in the U.S., the fall in productivity in the sectors that employ numerous Mexican workers, and the hardened border control measures, all of which function to contain and impose limits on flows of migrant workers (Orozco/Landen 2009: 15; Mendoza 2010: 10).

As a result of this behavior, the National Survey on Occupation and Employment (*Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo*, ENOE) demonstrated that the annual flow of Mexicans into the U.S. decreased from 1.026 million in 2006–2007 to just 636,000 in 2008–2009, while the Current Population Survey (CPS) registered an irregular behavior pattern in the size of new migrant flows in the 2001–2009 period, when the annual influx of approximately 443,000 entries in 2007 fell to just 156,000 new arrivals in 2012, and of only 145,000 in 2014 (Passel et al. 2012; Gonzalez-Barrera 2015).

This change is more visible depending on time periods, noticing that from 1995 to 2000 the number of Mexicans who entered the U.S. was close to 3 million, while from 2005 to 2010, i.e., the years of the 2008 depression, this flow decreased to 1,370,000, and to 870,000 from 2009 to 2014; last period in which however, the U.S. started shown signs of economic recovery (Gonzalez-Barrera 2015) (Fig. 2.1); this seems to indicate that in the pre- and post-crisis periods the diminution of the Mexico-U.S. migratory flow is sustained.

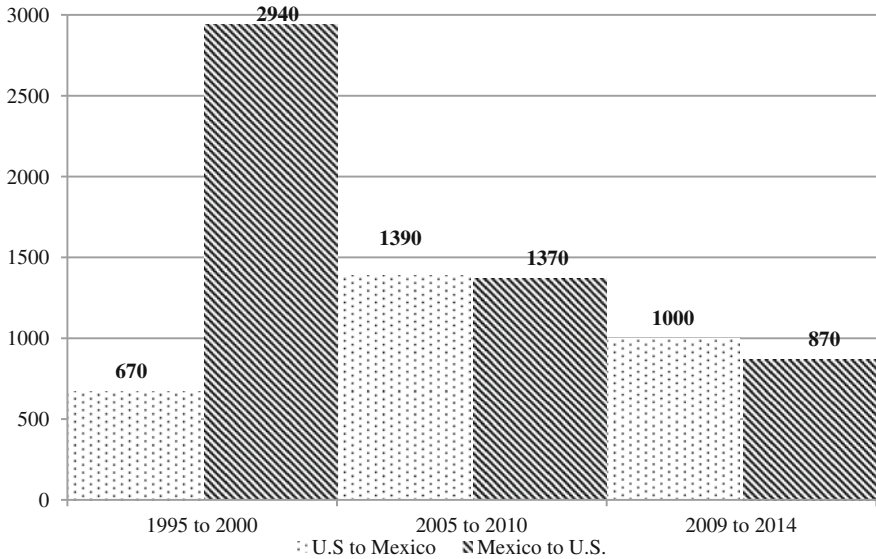


Fig. 2.1 Net Migration (*in thousands) from Mexico below Zero after the Great Recession. *Source* González-Barrera (2015)

Following this tendency, the 2000 and 2010 Population and Housing Censuses (*Censo de Población y Vivienda*) in Mexico estimated that the population of international migrants declined from 1,607,357 to 1,072,792 individuals between the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010; a percentage change of -33.3% and a reduction in the annual average from 2000 to 2010 of approximately 321,000–214,000 people.² This deceleration of international migrants was recorded in 22 states that presented negative percentage changes from one 5-year period to the next; among them, several with long migratory traditions, such as Jalisco (-50.4%), Michoacán (-47.8%), and Guanajuato (-26.2%), as well as others considered as ‘emerging’ migrant states, like the State of Mexico (-38.4%), in which according to González (2002: 228), some communities have branches in both countries to secure the economic survival, becoming transnational households, which nowadays face a number of economic vulnerability situations, because of the change processes observed in the migratory dynamic and the familial remittance sending patterns (see Fig. 2.2).

According to the type of migratory movement, at national level we observe that the emigrant population declined from 1,209,834 to 683,829 individuals, a change of -43.5% between 1995–2000 and 2005–2010. For the State of Mexico, it is estimated that in the first 5-year period around 74.7% (98,811) of the total

²These amounts include the international migrant population that remained in the U.S., international migrants who returned to Mexico during the five years prior to the date of the census, and unspecified values.

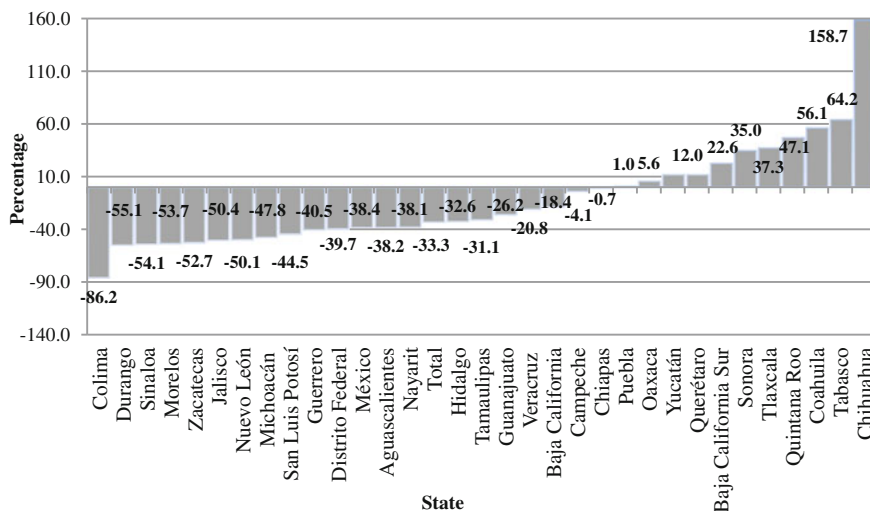


Fig. 2.2 Percentage variation in the international migrant population between the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses

international migrant population (132,266) were emigrants. However, during the 5-year period 2005–2010, this population reached a total of only 46,001 people, a percentage variation of -53.4% (Fig. 2.3).

Additional census data show that the municipalities in the State of Mexico witnessed important changes, including a deceleration of the international migrant population in 73 of its 125 jurisdictions.³ Of these, Coatepec Harinas (the municipality where Las Vueltas is located) experienced a percentage variation of -53.2% between the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010. However, we also find that other municipalities in this state with traditions of migration suffered an even more marked deceleration in the size of their international migrant population: for example, Tejupilco (-74.7%), Villa Guerrero (-66.4%) and Tlatlaya (-60.5%). It is also important to mention that this pattern of deceleration is not exclusive to municipalities in the south, as it was also registered in municipalities that border Federal District: e.g., Nezahualcóyotl (-69.9%), Naucalpan de Juárez (-69.3%), Ecatepec de Morelos (-63.4%), and Tlalnepantla de Baz (-59.8%). Finally, this distribution shows that most municipalities in the State of Mexico are making adjustments and rearrangements in the processes of the international mobility of their inhabitants.

³Of the remaining 51 municipalities, 48 registered a positive percentage variation between the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010, while the information available for another 4 is insufficient to make estimates.

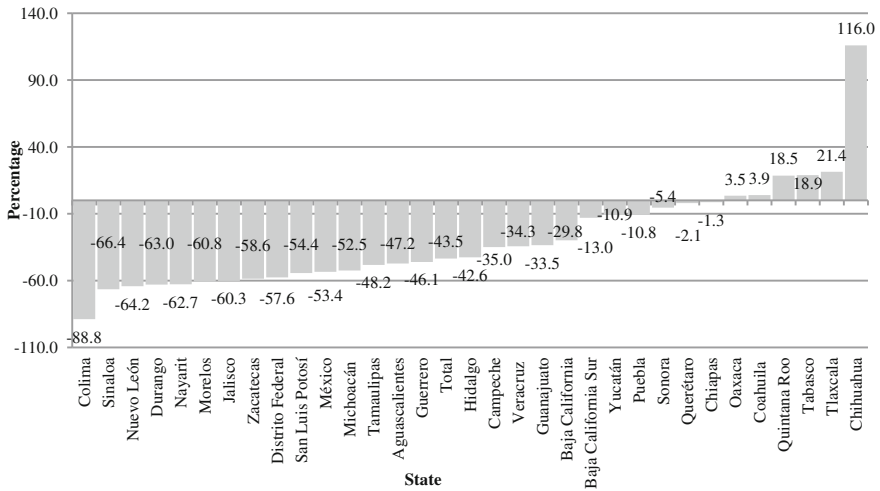


Fig. 2.3 Percentage variation in the international emigrant population between the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses

Regarding only the emigrant population, it is estimated that 93 of these 125 municipalities experienced a negative change in the number of people who left with the intention of finding work in the U.S., Coatepec Harinas, for example, registered a reduction from 2,058 to just 917 migrants between these two 5-year periods, with a percentage change of -55.4 .

Clearly, the behavior of these indicators suggests that migratory flows have diminished, since people no longer perceive substantial incentives to emigrate to the U.S. under the existing conditions of “low job creation and high unemployment” (BBVA 2011). Under these circumstances, economic contraction, stiffer migration policies, and increased border security, all seem to have become factors that demotivate emigration (Orozco/Landen 2009: 15), thus situating the dynamism of this process in “waiting mode” (Arango 2010). This phenomenon can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that communications between migrant populations and their home communities warn that movement by undocumented workers is hardly feasible under the current conditions (Tamar 2009: 592).

2.3.2 Return Migration

In the context of the economic crisis in the U.S., the massive return of Mexican migrants emerged as one of the main consequences of the marked contraction of labor markets. However, the actual number of people that were forced to return as a result of the economic downturn was much lower than what projections anticipated

(Awad 2009). Interpretations of why no such massive return took place despite the conditions of economic crisis and vulnerability for Mexicans in the U.S. refer to a whole series of factors: the economic obligation they have with their families back home; the monetary costs involved in returning; the difficult prospect of attempting to re-enter the U.S. at a later date due to the increasing securitization of the border; the legal status they may have obtained and the benefits it offers; the attachment of those who have consolidated families in 'the North'; and, more generally, the perception of economic weakness and scarce job opportunities in Mexico (Awad 2009; Orozco 2009). In other words, the enormous asymmetries in the degree of development between the U.S. and Mexico serve to de-stimulate any massive displacement or return by migrants (Martínez et al. 2010: 8). This would seem to indicate that the decision of whether return or not is more closely related to the level of economic development in the country of origin and the ease of circulating back to the U.S., than strictly to the economic conditions in the recipient country (Papademetriou/Terrazas 2009: 13). None of these approaches, however, succeeds in explaining an apparent contradiction: even though the return of Mexicans has not been 'massive', it has been increasing over time.

In this respect, in Fig. 2.2 it is observed that in the three analyzed periods, the number of returned migrants has been on the rise, changing from 670,000 between 1995 and 2000 to 1,000,000 between 2009 and 2014. Figures that in comparison with those obtained for the Mexico-U.S. flow, indicate that in recent years more Mexicans leave the U.S. than those who enter (Gonzalez-Barrera 2015).

The 2000 and 2010 censuses, however, indicate that the percentage of returned migrants rose from 17.7 % (284,806) to 32.7 % (350,719) of the international migrant population in the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010, respectively. Specifically, and on a state-by-state basis, we observe a significant rise in the number of migrants who returned from the U.S. in those two periods. The State of Mexico, for example, showed an increase in the percentage of returned migrants from 18.0 % (23,781) to 38.0 % (30,946), while in states such as Baja California Sur, Nayarit, Sonora, Campeche, Federal District and Aguascalientes, this phenomenon affected 43.2 % of the international migrant population (Fig. 2.4).

Among the reasons of this population to return, it is noteworthy that in spite of the increase in the number of deported migrants, according to the 2014 National survey of Demographic Dynamic, around 60 % of the population returned due to family reunion and only 14 % because it was deported (Gonzalez-Barrera 2015) (Fig. 2.5).

The next question to be addressed seeks to determine which migrants are the ones most likely to return? In relation to the geographical distribution of return migration at national level, we notice that in the 5-year period 1995–2000 most return migrants settled in states in the traditional migratory region (45.8 %), while 28.0 and 17.3 %, respectively, returned to the northern and central regions of Mexico. In contrast, although in the 5-year period 2005–2010 the traditional migration region remained in the first place, it witnessed a much lower flow of return migrants (37.7 %), while the south-southeast (16.8 %) and central (21.1 %) regions saw their shares increase. It is certainly possible that this behavior reflects

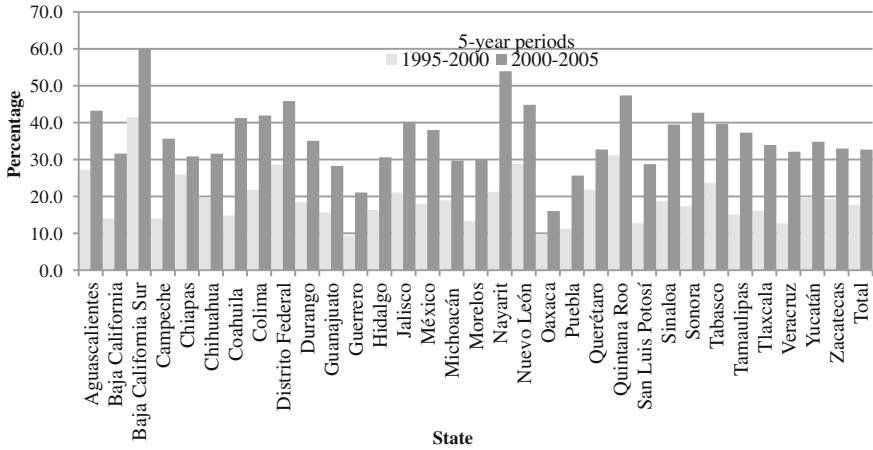


Fig. 2.4 Percentage of returning migrant population in the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2000 and 2010 Population Census

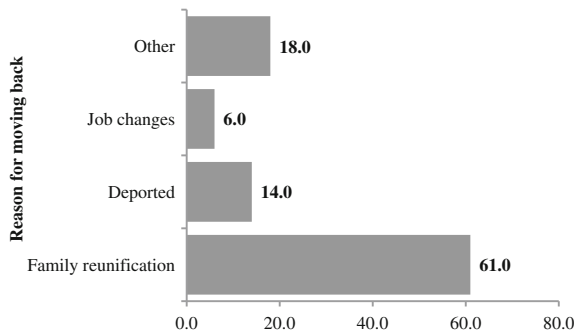


Fig. 2.5 Family reunification main reason for return Mexican migrant to go home. *Source* González-Barrera (2015)

the relative seniority of the migratory process and the maturity of migrants’ social networks, which would allow migrants from regions with long migratory traditions to accrue the capital and other socioeconomic resources required to remain in the U.S. even in times of economic crisis and hostile policies, though perhaps on a somewhat lower scale.

With respect to locality size, it is estimated that from 1995 to 2000 most of the individuals in this population returned to places with 100,000 or more (39.7 %), or fewer than 2,500, inhabitants (27.6 %), although from 2005–2010 the percentage of return migrants to localities with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants (33.4 %) increased. According to this distribution, it is clear that the returning migrant population registered a greater presence in the south-southeast and central regions of Mexico, particularly in rural towns in those states. In terms of jobs and labor markets, the dynamics of these returns in times of crisis will have deep implications and cause

imbalances between the demand for employment and the number of work opportunities offered by the rural settings into which this population is incorporated.

In regard to other characteristics, we find that the composition of the flow of return migrants is made up mostly of males, especially during the 5-year period 2005–2010, when the percentage was 68.7 % (Table 2.1).

Upon examining the age breakdown of return migrants, we find that most are still in their productive working years, whereas from 2000 to 2010 it is estimated that around 80.4 % were between 15 and 59 years of age. This result is important in itself because, as we have mentioned, this is a population sector whose needs and demands require successful incorporation into labor markets in the towns and regions to which they return (Table 2.1).

An analysis of the kinship relations of these migrants reveals similar distributions in 2000 and 2010, since records for both years indicate that a higher proportion of household heads and their children remained in the U.S. Despite this pattern, however, it is important to note the higher presence of heads (43.3 %) who returned to their hometowns during the 5-year period 2005–2010.

Turning now to literacy levels, statistics show positive changes at national level, as the percentage of return migrants who can read and write rose from 91.9 to 93.5 % between 2000 and 2010. It is important to mention that during this period the presence of individuals with no schooling also declined (4.4–3.0 %), however the level of schooling continued to be low, since 71.2 % of the return migrants in 2010 had only attended primary school (Table 2.1).

We found the same behavior pattern for these variables in the State of Mexico and the municipality of Coatepec Harinas, albeit we estimate that the proportion of women who returned is lower at municipal level (25.1 %), as is the percentage of individuals born in the U.S., whose proportion fell from 14.5 to 8.7 % between 2000 and 2010 (Table 2.1).

Also, during the 5-year period 2005–2010, the migrants who returned to the municipality of Coatepec Harinas contained a higher concentration in the 15-to-59-year-old age group, while their kinship relations and marital status followed the same tendency as in the rest of the country, with a larger presence of return migrants being household heads who were married or living in common-law relationships. Finally, we see that the percentages of illiterate population and those with no years of schooling are higher among people from Coatepec Harinas who return to their hometowns, and that most of the individuals who did attend school are significantly concentrated in primary education (Table 2.1).

On the basis of these analyses, we can affirm that the migrants who return to their places of origin are mostly male heads still in productive ages. Although these censuses do not provide information on the reason for their return, in the light of the causes that underlie the origins of Mexican migration in the first place, we can assume that these migrants return for a variety of reasons, but clearly one of their most important motives is the termination of the working season and the increasing instability of labor markets in the U.S.

Table 2.1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the return migrant population in two 5-year periods: 1995–2000 and 2005–2010

Variable	1995–2000		2005–2010			
	Mexico <i>n</i> = 337,061	State of Mexico <i>n</i> = 16,346	Coatepec Harinas <i>n</i> = 393	Mexico <i>n</i> = 985,383	State of Mexico <i>n</i> = 60,231	Coatepec Harinas <i>n</i> = 934
	Percentage		Percentage			
Gender	62.3	62.8	74	68.7	71.4	74.9
	37.7	32.7	26	31.3	28.6	25.1
Age groups	20.2	20	18.1	15.6	13.7	7.2
	74.1	77.3	77.9	80.4	83.3	89.3
	5.4	2.3	–	4	2.9	3.5
	0.3	0.4	4.1	–	0.1	–
Kinship relation	37.6	37.1	35.9	43.3	42.8	41.2
	14.5	13.9	7.1	12.6	12	8.4
	34.3	34.5	37.7	30.9	30.5	34.7
	12.4	13.7	19.3	12.3	13.1	14.7
	1.1	0.9	–	0.8	0.9	–
	0.1	–	–	–	0.6	1.1
Literate	91.9	94.5	85.8	93.5	94.7	89.3
	7.8	5.2	14.2	5.6	4.2	10.7
	0.3	0.3	–	0.8	1.1	–
	4.4	2.9	–	3	2	8.1
Education level	69.5	64.6	84.6	71.2	68	84.2
	12.7	14.1	6.6	18.6	21.7	7.5
	11.9	17.4	4.5	6.8	8.1	0.2
	1.6	0.9	4.2	0.4	0.2	–

Source Elaborated by the author based on the 2000 and 2010 Population Census

Table 2.2 Return migrant population of 12 years of age and older, according to condition of activity in the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010

Variable	1995–2000			2005–2010		
	Mexico	State of Mexico	Coatepec Harinas	Mexico	State of Mexico	Coatepec Harinas
Population	<i>n</i> = 276,024	<i>n</i> = 13,375	<i>n</i> = 322	<i>n</i> = 848,381	<i>n</i> = 52,850	<i>n</i> = 865
	Percentage			Percentage		
Economically active	54	60.1	60.2	68.1	72.3	77.6
Economically inactive	46	39.9	39.8	31.9	27.7	22.4
EAP	<i>n</i> = 149,043	<i>n</i> = 8,033	<i>n</i> = 194	<i>n</i> = 577,697	<i>n</i> = 38,236	<i>n</i> = 671
Employed	97.7	97.4	100	91.8	91.3	90.8
Unemployed	2.3	2.6	–	8.2	8.7	9.2

Source Elaborated by the author based on the 2000 and 2010 Population Census

When we examine the data concerning the condition of the work activity that return migrants performed, it turns out that the Economically Active Population (EAP) increased between the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010. Although this tendency is similar at national, state and municipal levels, it is important to point out that the municipality has the highest proportion of economically active individuals. However, the increased presence of working-age population has repercussions on the growth of unemployed EAP from one 5-year period to the next: from 2.3 to 8.2 % at national level, but from 0.0 to 9.2 % in the municipality (Table 2.2).

Also, there are significant differences in relation to the sector of activity and the employment status of return migrants, because while national and state levels show a tendency toward the outsourcing of economic activities, the municipality still shows a concentration in agricultural occupations, even though the participation of return migrants in the service sector has increased (Table 2.3).

In relation to this behavior, the differences in the employment status of the EAP can be explained by the fact that while at national level in 2005–2010 most of these people fell into the categories of employees and workers (45.9 %) or self-employed workers (27.8 %); in the municipality, we found that 43.9 % are agricultural day-laborers and only 21.1 % self-employed workers (Table 2.3).

According to this sociodemographic profile, we can affirm that the phenomenon of return migration consists of a flow made up mostly of men (household heads and their sons) with low educational levels (primary school). In terms of age, it is clear that most of these migrants are productive people employed in activities in the commerce-service sector (national and state) and agriculture (municipality), or are employees, self-employed workers, or agricultural laborers. This last occupation accentuates the conditions of employment irregularity and insecurity among agricultural workers in the municipality of Coatepec Harinas, since most of these

Table 2.3 Occupational characteristics of the return migrant population of 12 years of age and older in the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010

Variable	1995–2000			2005–2010		
	Mexico	State of Mexico	Coatepec Harinas	Mexico	State of Mexico	Coatepec Harinas
	<i>n</i> = 145,225	<i>n</i> = 7,780	<i>n</i> = 194	<i>n</i> = 530,496	<i>n</i> = 32,495	<i>n</i> = 601
	Percentage			Percentage		
Sector of activity	20.9	10.1	80.9	23.3	11.2	72.2
Primary						
Secondary	30.1	25.9	10.8	27.6	26.6	7.2
Tertiary	49	64.1	8.2	50.1	62.2	20.6
Employment status	51.4	54.7	10.8	45.9	48.6	17.8
Employee or worker	9.3	3.9	10.9	11.2	5.7	43.9
Day-laborer or peon						
Helper	–	–	–	6.6	6.7	7.2
Employer	5	3.7	–	3.8	4.5	1.7
Self-employed workers	28.4	33.7	53.6	27.8	31.3	21.1
Unpaid domestic worker	6	4.1	16.5	4.7	3.3	8.3

Source Elaborated by the author based on the 2000 and 2010 Population Census

people are workers who take jobs in the fields where they receive none of the employment benefits established by the law, and earn wages that fluctuate from 8 to 10 dollars a day.

2.3.3 Monetary Remittances: From Continuous Growth to a Slow Down

Monetary remittances have been identified as one of the principal benefits of migrant labor because they represent important sources of income for migrant-sending countries, especially those with developing economies where these earnings constitute a particularly significant concept for their balance of payments, not to mention their role in the familial economy of migrant households (Rodríguez 2002; Awad 2009; Dadush/Falcao 2009). It is for this reason that the behavior patterns of remittances in times of economic recession have been a central concern of studies that examine the impacts of changes in international migratory processes, especially in economies that export cheap, mostly unskilled labor, where the effects of the deceleration of those resources have been most severe for migrants and their families.

In relation to economic conjunctures, studies by the World Bank signal that remittances have registered a counter-cyclical behavior in times of economic recession in migrant-sending countries, and symptoms of recovery when a host country experiences economic instability (SRE 2009). However, the crisis that ravaged the economies of both developed and undeveloped nations in 2008 triggered a deceleration of remittances on a global scale (Ruiz/Vargas 2010), the impacts of which differed profoundly from one region or country to another (Awad 2009). Among the factors that contributed to the reduction in the scale of monetary remittances, those of particular importance were: high levels of unemployment, reduced wages, raids on workplaces by immigration officials, increased vigilance of migration, more frequent deportations, and in general, the spread of anti-immigrant sentiments (Ruiz/Vargas 2010; Papademetriou/Terrazas 2009; Tamar 2009; Orozco 2009).

In Mexico, the volume of monetary remittances registered a steady growth from the early years of the 21st century (reaching 26 billion dollars in 2007), but since then the scenario has changed drastically. For example, the absolute increase in remittances sent by Mexicans living in the U.S. from 2006 to 2007 was barely significant—just 1.6 %—while in 2008 and 2009 the amount actually shrank by -3.6 and -15.7 %, respectively, to magnitudes of just 25.145 and 21.181 billion dollars, respectively (Fig. 2.6).

Estimates for the 2007–2010 period indicate that family remittances showed a negative growth in all the 31 states and Federal District. The severest reductions compared to the amounts captured in previous years occurred in Tabasco (-39.1 %), Chiapas (-37.6 %), and Hidalgo (-34.5 %), while the behavior of

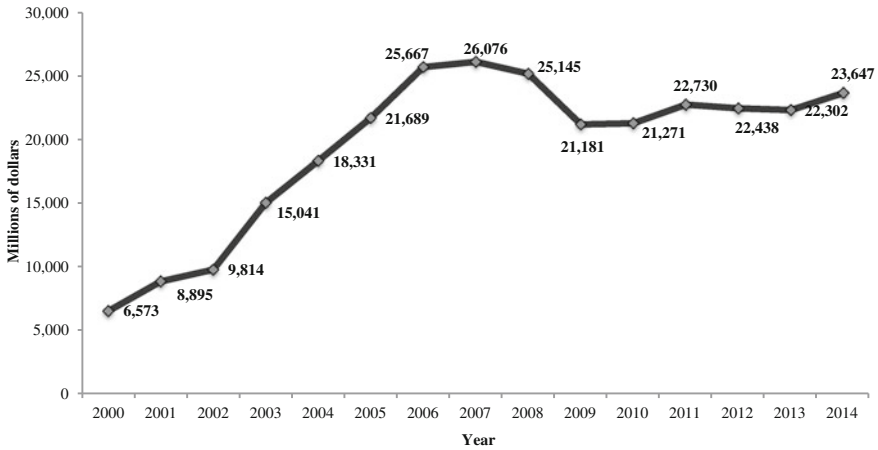


Fig. 2.6 Volume of monetary remittances that entered Mexico 2000–2014. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on data from *Banco de México*

remittances in more traditional migratory states was similar, though somewhat less intense, with Aguascalientes (−21.2 %) and San Luis Potosí (−19.1 %) being the most gravely affected. It is important to note that even the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco and Michoacán experienced significant downturns, despite their long migratory traditions and heavy concentrations of remittances (Fig. 2.7).

The 2007–2011 period—which ended with the most recent year in which a recovery of remittances was recorded—reflects a similar tendency, as the volume of remittances that entered from the U.S. continued to be below the quantities registered in previous years. The only exception was Federal District, as all other states in Mexico suffered decelerations in the amounts of these resources.

Even if in 2010 there was a slight upturn with 21.308, from 2011 this flow was kept at levels of approximately 22 billion, it is in 2014 when they reach a peak of 23.647 billion dollars, which in spite of still being below the levels estimated before the crisis, represent a higher income, because the American dollar-Mexican peso exchange rate reached 14 MXN per 1 USD, and even 18 MXN by the turn of 2016.

Turning now to the specific case of the State of Mexico, statistics show that remittances registered a marked growth from 1995-to-2007, and even approached the levels seen in more traditional migratory states; from 161 to 2.167 billion dollars. However, in the ensuing years, the aforementioned tendency at national level was also reflected in this state, as the volume of remittances fell to levels of 1.637 and 1.658 billion dollars in 2010 and 2011, respectively, and 1.563 and 1.462 billion USD in 2012 and 2014. In response to this situation, the state government has recognized that the drop in the amount of remittances is causing reversals in the levels of poverty and marginalization in at least 60 municipalities, because the communities there had developed systems of dependency on the monies sent home by their relatives in the U.S. The most severely affected municipalities in the State of

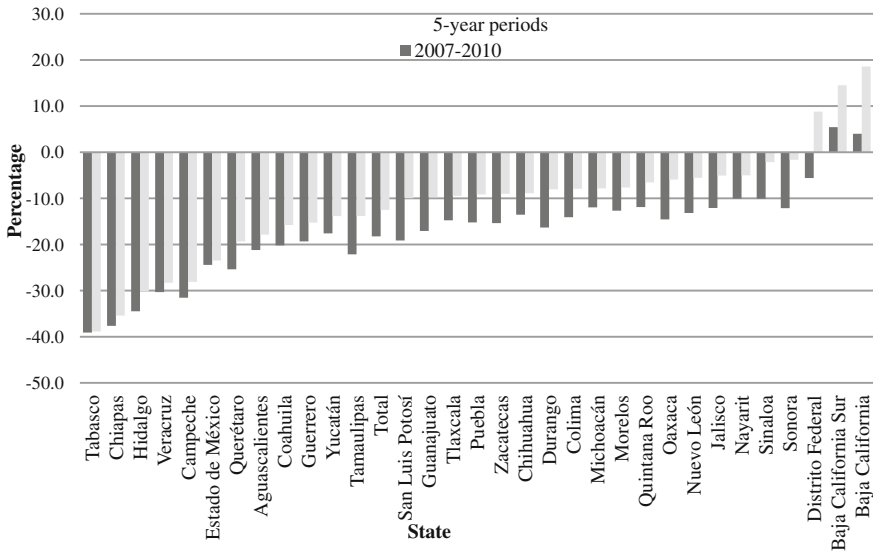


Fig. 2.7 Percentage variation of remittances by state for the 2007–2010 and 2007–2011 periods. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on data from *Banco de México*

Mexico include Coatepec Harinas, Villa Guerrero, Ixtapan de la Sal, Tonicato, and Tlatlaya (*Milenio*, 13 July 2010).

At a macro level, the repercussions of this reduction have been somewhat attenuated in certain states, while in other states they have proven more susceptible to the fall in the volume of remittances, according to the proportion they represent in their respective gross internal products (GIP). In this sense, the economies of Campeche and the State of Mexico, which were in fifth and sixth place, respectively, on the scale of states with reduced remittances, may experience a less severe impact than a state like Michoacán, due to the degree of dependency that exists there, which is reflected in the substantially different percentages of remittances in the GIPs of these three states: Campeche, 1.0 %; the State of Mexico, 3.8 %; but Michoacán 20.3 %. This proportionality could intensify or reduce the degree of dependence on this source of economic income, because while households in Michoacán have a very high degree of dependence, in the State of Mexico and Campeche the relations of dependence are low and very low, respectively (SRE 2009; BBVA 2011).

2.3.4 Redefining the Index of Migratory Intensity

The changes and rearrangements in migratory flows (to and from the U.S.) and the capture of monetary remittances are also reflected in modifications in the indicators

Table 2.4 Change in the averages of the indicators of the Index of Migratory Intensity at the national, state and municipal levels, 2000 and 2010

Level of aggregation	Year	Households			
		that receive remittances	with migrants in the U.S. in the previous 5-year period	with circular migrants	with return migrants
National average	2000	4.4	3.9	0.9	0.8
	2010	3.6	1.9	0.9	2.1
State average	2000	4.9	4.1	1	1
	2010	4	2	1	2.4
Municipal average	2000	6.6	6	1.2	1.1
	2010	6.5	3.8	1.2	3.4

Source CONAPO 2012

used to compile the Index of Migratory Intensity (IMI) in 2000 and 2010. According to *Consejo Nacional de Población* (National Council of Population, CONAPO 2012: 28) three of the four indicators involved changed significantly between 1995–2000 and 2005–2010. For example, the percentage of households in the country as a whole that received remittances declined—from 4.4 to 3.6 %—as did the percentage of households with migrants in the U.S.: 3.9–1.9 %. These figures contrast with the marked increase in the percentage of households with return migrants: from just 0.8 to 2.1 % (Table 2.4). The variations in the percentages of these three indicators were most marked in relation to the percentage of households with migrants in the U.S., which decreased by 48.7 % from one 5-year period to the next.

To continue with this analysis of the indicators of the IMI, estimates by CONAPO (2012) reveal the same tendency in the averages at state and municipal levels, as the indicators that recorded slightly less pronounced changes were those related to the households that received remittances and had circular migrants. However, as it occurred at national level, there is a marked reduction in the percentage of households with migrants in the U.S., coupled with a significant increase in the proportion of households with return migrants (Table 2.5).

According to CONAPO (2012), the indicator of households that receive remittances at state level recorded its largest reduction in Durango, falling from 9.9 to 6.5 %. This state was followed by states in the traditional migratory region; i.e., Jalisco, Michoacán, Colima, and Zacatecas, while the State of Mexico experienced a reduction from 2.2 to 1.5 %, a fall of 0.7 % points.

In relation to recent migration to the U.S., Zacatecas suffered a reduction of 7.1 % points in terms of the households with migrants, as the index there fell from 11.6 % in 1995–2000 to just 4.5 % in 2005–2010. Michoacán was in second place with a reduction of 5.8 %; while the other states comprised in the traditional migratory region experienced reductions that varied from 3 to 5 % points. The State of Mexico followed this same tendency. Despite the figures for the range of values in this state differed from those mentioned above, it also experienced a fall in the

Table 2.5 Percentage variation in the indicators of the Index of Migratory Intensity in the State of Mexico and the municipality of Coatepec Harinas, 2000 and 2010

Level of aggregation		Households				Degree of migratory intensity	Position in the state
		that receive remittances	with migrants in the U.S.	with circular migrants	with return migrants		
		in the previous 5-year period					
State of Mexico	2000	2.2	2.5	0.6	0.3	Low	–
	2010	1.5	1	0.6	1.1	Low	–
	Percentage variation	–0.7	–1.5	0	0.8	–	–
Coatepec Harinas	2000	13.9	19.7	8	3.7	Very high	1
	2010	7.4	8.9	4.6	8.4	High	2
	Percentage variation	–6.4	–10.8	–3.3	4.8	–	–

Source CONAPO 2012

percentage of households with migrants, from 2.5 to 1.0 % between the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010 (CONAPO 2012: 30).

Finally, the increased presence of return migrants was recorded in all states, with variations from 0.2 % (Federal District) to 3.1 % (Hidalgo) from one 5-year period to the next. The State of Hidalgo suffered a pronounced increase in the value of this indicator: from 0.9 % in 1995–2000 to 4.0 % in 2005–2010, while in the State of Mexico the change was from 0.3 to 1.1 %. In this respect, while the details and magnitude of the changes varied from one state to another, what clearly stands out is the repositioning of migratory processes at national level. However, as indicative and diagnostic as they may be, these impersonal figures and calculations do not tell the whole story; indeed, doing so requires complementing statistical approaches and interpretation with the voices and perspectives of the subjects and migrant households that confront these patterns of transformation.

This numerical repositioning has also propitiated new migratory dynamics and intensities in municipalities in the State of Mexico. The specific case that interests us here is that of Coatepec Harinas because, according to the behavior of the IMI in 2000, it was classified as the only one of the 125 municipalities in the state with a ‘very high’ degree of migratory intensity. However, the IMI for 2010 indicates that this municipality underwent significant changes, as the percentage of households receiving monetary remittances fell from 13.9 to 7.4 % (Table 2.5), a decline of –6.4 % with respect to the 5-year period 1995–2000.

In this same vein, the proportion of households with migrants in the U.S. and with circular migrants saw very high negative percentage variations, of –10.8 and –3.3 %, respectively; while the percentage of households with return migrants increased from 3.7 to 8.4 %. Taken together, these transformations have repercussions for the repositioning of Coatepec Harinas as a migrant-sending municipality, due to the fact that the IMI for this municipality fell from ‘very high’ to just ‘high’.

According to these new tendencies, Coatepec Harinas actually ceased to be the main space and territory for departures from the State of Mexico, falling to second place behind the municipality of Luvianos. Finally, the findings presented up to this point indicate and confirm the importance of analyzing the impacts of these transformations on the town of Las Vueltas, which just a few years ago was the principal geographical sending area of this municipal population.

2.3.5 Apprehensions at the Border and Deportations from the U.S.

The intensification of anti-immigrant attitudes, sentiments and measures has begun to make itself felt concretely in two ways: (1) a systematic increase in the number of deportations; and, (2) fewer migrants being detained at the U.S. border. These two facts provide additional evidence of the deceleration of the migratory flow of Mexicans toward the southern U.S. border. In the 2000–2011 period, the index of detainees at the border experienced a significant reduction: from approximately 1,636,000 to just 286,000 cases (Passel et al. 2012: 28; USBP 2011). In 2013 and 2014 this tendency remained, even reaching a historical minimum with 257 thousand and 229 thousand detained Mexicans (Krogstad/Passel 2014). Paradoxically, this tendency has emerged despite the fourfold increase in the number of agents patrolling the border, from 5,000 in 1995 to 21,000 in 2011 (BBVA 2012: 9).

Clearly, the lower frequency of detentions is a direct reflection of the reduced migratory flow, as fewer and fewer Mexicans attempt to cross the border into the U.S., in part because the growing securitization of the border area has become a structural barrier to the flow of migrants and a factor that has changed the dimensions of international migration in Mexico.

Similarly, BBVA (2012: 9) argues that the number of Mexicans apprehended by the border patrol is related to the growth of the GNP in the U.S., because when that country's economy expands and employment grows, the number of detained Mexicans increases, while precisely the contrary occurs when the U.S. economy begins to contract. This is because the economic cycle is the most important motor of Mexican migration to the U.S. However, it is important to notice that with respect to the economic recovery in the U.S. in 2010–2011, figures from BBVA show that the predicted impact of an increase in the number of apprehensions effectuated did not occur. According to this institution, one possible explanation of this lies in the so-called "Arizona effect";⁴ i.e., the expansion of the anti-immigrant wave that affects employment opportunities for Mexican migrants and the dynamic of their migratory flows.

⁴The "Arizona effect" refers to the series of anti-immigrant laws that began with the promulgation of the so-called "Arizona Law" and later spread to at least five other U.S. states (Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina and Tennessee; BBVA 2012: 2).

In addition to the increase in return migration, statistics on the number of forced or involuntary returns also reflect changes, as the number of migrants deported from the U.S. rose markedly. Estimates for the year 2003 speak of approximately 156,000 deportations, but in 2008 this figure increased to around 247,000, and surpassed 307,000 in 2012 (Meza 2014). In 2013, according to the National Institute of Migration (*Instituto Nacional de Migración*, INM), some 332,614 Mexicans were deported from the U.S. through the repatriation points located in Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila and Sonora (INM 2014).

Because of this, it may be said that the changes observed in the Mexico-U.S. migratory system respond to an interweaving of economic changes with modifications of the U.S. migratory policies that, on the one hand foster xenophobic feelings and attitudes that have crystallized in the criminalization of migration and increase the costs and risks involved in clandestine border crossings, and on the other, constitute a whole series of measures that the U.S. government has implemented to protect national workers in a time of crisis.

2.3.6 *Mexican Migrants in the U.S.*

Together, the deceleration in the flow of Mexican migrants to the U.S., the steady increase in the numbers of return migrants, and the rise in the volume of deportations, have acted to dramatically reduce the population of Mexican migrants in “the North”; the largest non-native group in the U.S. Estimates indicate that the number of Mexicans living in the U.S. registered an accelerated and uninterrupted growth up to April 2008, rising from approximately 800,000 people in the 1970s to 10,200,000 in 2005, and 11.2 million in 2007 (Corona/Huerta 2009). This means that the presence of Mexicans multiplied approximately fourteen times over such period. However, recent estimations point out that Mexican population in the U.S. has stopped growing at the rates it used to before the crisis, for over the 2007–2014 period it remained at an average between 11.8 and 11.7 million (González-Barrera 2015).

In general terms, the transformations elucidated here allow us to argue that, at a macro level, these new migratory dynamics respond to conditions in U.S. labor markets, declining demand for unskilled workers, the resurgence of anti-immigrant behaviors and feelings, the securitization of the border, and the record numbers of deportations of undocumented migrants (Papademetriou/Terrazas 2009: 11).

This way, the transformation processes here established reveal that Mexican international migration is moving to the configuration of a migratory phase characterized by its deceleration, as well as the strengthening of anti-immigrant stances that stress the vulnerability, poverty and marginality of the Mexican migrant in the U.S. Albeit, it is important to remember that they are transformations and rearrangements that in spite of configuring *a new migratory moment*, demand continuity in their dynamics, however in a different economic and political context than that which defined the patterns of migratory behavior and the sending of monetary remittances.

Chapter 3

Changes and Continuities in the International Migratory Dynamics of Las Vueltas: Transition Toward a New Migratory Phase?

It's been a lot harder this year, cause they crossed more or less okay every year, but this time [2010] they found it more difficult, almost nobody has crossed; here, right here [referring to young people in Huizcatepec], almost all these [guys] used to go, several of them are here, and now all of them are here, working in whatever they can; last year [2009] almost nobody came back, everybody who tried got across, but now everybody who returned in November and December... well, they couldn't go back (Erasto, 70 years old).

3.1 Stages of Mexico-U.S. Migration

Historicity, massiveness, and [geographic] vicinity are the three main characteristics that have made Mexican international migration a particular social phenomenon, different from other displacements heading for the U.S. (Durand 2000: 19), because the conjugation of these three components defines the Mexican migratory flow as a massive and centennial social process, which in a context of vicinity has instituted a dynamical and changing phenomena, which nevertheless at the same time has been permanent, constant and historical (ibid p. 32).

Historically, the migration of Mexicans to the United States can be divided into phases that have been distinguished by the characteristics of the crossing, and by the legal [economic and cultural] conditions in which they took place (Massey et al. 2009b). A brief review of the Mexico-U.S. migratory history supposes the presence of five stages. The first, known as the 'hooking' phase, occurred between 1900 and 1929. In this period, the 'hooking' consisted in putting down a determinate amount of money accounting for future work, as a 'hook' to establish the labor relation between those recruited by the 'hook' and the American employers; however, after receiving this down payment the workers became indebted with lodging, transport and catering expenses, as these services were provided until their arrival to the workplace in the United States; where they discovered that wages were lower than those promised, besides the labor conditions were worse than expected and the interest rates higher than what they thought.

The ‘hook’ and ‘rope’ as regulation mechanisms arose from the need of cheap, young and industrious labor force the U.S. had, but also because of the transformation experienced by Mexican rural zones as a consequence of the mechanization of the countryside, the change to commercial cultivations and the Mexican Revolution as a long and ruthless conflict, in which the U.S. turned into the first shelter option for Mexican emigrants (Durand 2000: 21; Durand/Arias 2000: 29; Massey et al. 2009b: 103).

The 1929–1941 period, the second phase, known as ‘deportations’, had as a particular characteristic mass expatriations and limited international movement, because with the 1930 economic depression, the attitudes toward Mexicans hardened and became hostile, moreover unemployment increased to reach unseen levels in the U.S., being Mexican migrants those affected by mass dismissals and budget insufficiency. In this scenario, there was a concurrence of mass deportations, voluntary returns, motivated by economic difficulties, the hostility and repressive forces which migrants had to face in the U.S. and which apparently were successful as they managed to reduce the size of Mexican population in the United States (Massey et al. 2009a: 41).

A third moment in the Mexico-U.S. migratory history unfolded from 1942 to 1964, it was the “Temporary Wartime Emergency—Bracero Program”, when the mobilization of the American industry around WWII exposed grave lack of labor force in its agricultural sector (Martin/Teitelbaum 2001: 122). Even if the first years of the Bracero Program the amount of recruited workers was modest, 500 braceros accepted in California and Texas in September 1942. In 1954, admissions had increased to 400–450 thousand a year (Massey et al. 2009a: 43; Martin/Teitelbaum 2001; Massey/Liang 1989: 200). Over this period, workers were recruited by the Mexican government and sent to American agricultural fields, where employment, wages, transport and lodging were organized by U.S. government agencies (Massey/Liang 1989: 203). The braceros’ contracts were seasonal and sectoral, aimed only at agriculture and only available for men, especially young peasants; this strengthened the masculine, temporary and return bias of international migration, particularly in three states of the historic region: Guanajuato, Jalisco and Michoacan (Arias 2009: 120).

After 22 years of history, during which between 4.5 and 5 million Mexicans entered the U.S., the Bracero Program started to be considered an exploitation system, seeing the unfavorable labor conditions in which the field workers lived. As of 1960, visas for braceros had decreased (from 438 thousand in 1959 to 178 thousand in 1964) and in 1965 the end of Bracero Program began, because of civil pressure and the corruption system related to the assignation of labor contracts, which made it easier for the owners to hire undocumented workers, instead of filing costly bureaucratic processes (Massey et al. 2009a: 49; Espenshade 1995: 198).

The fourth period, known as “the age of the undocumented” (1965–1986), begins when the United States ceases the bracero agreements and opts for controlling the migratory flow (Durand 2000: 21). Even if along the bracero period undocumented migration did not grow in an accelerated manner [23 thousand in 1959 and 55 thousand in 1963], it is noticed that this program became a platform

for migratory mobility to become massive (Martin/Teitelbaum 2001: 123); while braceros [maybe because of the labor experience they already had] strengthened the historic processes of undocumented migration (Espenshade 1995: 198), both because of the local and national situations that forced them to emigrate (devaluations, deterioration of agricultural activities and scarce employment opportunities in the communities) and the social organization of the American labor markets that created a structural demand for migrant workers (Arias 2009: 121; Piore 1979 in Massey et al. 2009a: 50). According to Massey/Singer (1995: 210), undocumented migration grew year by year during the 1970s decade: from 87 thousand in 1965 to 544 thousand in 1970, 1 million 80 thousand in 1976, 2 million 820 thousand in 1983 and 3 million 822 thousand in 1986, with a total estimation of about 28 million undocumented migrants over the 1965–1986 period.

All in all, migration continued being a basically labor phenomenon (Arias 2009: 121), as it was a temporary mobility process, of unskilled young men, of a low social stratum [even though not necessarily the poorest], from Mexican rural zones, whose displacements responded to economic motivations (Jones 1982: 77). According to this profile, the practice of migration turned into a familial strategy with recognizable codes, since the definitive return of the father marked the departure of the oldest children and later of the youngest (Massey 1991 in Arias 2009: 122).

The fifth phase, known as the ‘rodinos’ stage, started in 1987, with the setting into motion of Immigration and Reform Control Act (IRCA) (Durand 2000: 22), which had as a main objective to decrease the number of irregular migrants who arrived and lived in the U.S. (White et al. 1990). An objective which according to Jones (1995: 717) was accomplished, as the number of undocumented Mexicans who crossed the American border decreased due to the difficulty to cross the border and become employed, facing the sanctions IRCA imposed the employers. In this respect, Massey/Singer (1995: 210) estimate that between 1986 and 1989 undocumented migration changed from 3 million 822 thousand to 2 million 851 thousand; while the apprehensions dropped about 700 thousand events between November 1986 and September 1988 (White et al. 1990: 110).

Although IRCA contained restrictive and liberal dispositions, it enabled the legalization of 2.3 million undocumented Mexicans (Massey et al. 2009a: 58), besides it included an especial amnesty program for agricultural workers, by means of which about 750 thousand agricultural workers of Mexican origin were able to legalize their migratory status (Arias 2009: 132). The impacts of IRCA on the organization of the Mexico-U.S. Migratory pattern moved to what Massey et al. (2009a: 57) called a “new age of migration” that modified the composition and functioning of the migratory system, as before IRCA it was a circular migratory, masculine and regional phenomenon to later become established, familial and nationwide migration in both sending and recipient countries (Massey et al. 2009b: 102).

According to Durand (2000: 22), changes from one stage to another suggest that migration is a swinging movement, with border opening and recruiting of workers, but also with partial closures, border control and deportation, as the United States

opens or closes the door according to the international context, economic moment (apogee or crisis) and the prevailing national political environment (elections, xenophobia). Following this conclusion, what is the current migratory moment we nowadays witness? Is it possible to incorporate into this historical outline a sixth migratory stage? And if so, how would be called this period of migratory deceleration that has emerged in a context of economic crisis and xenophobia?

3.2 Dynamics of *Vuelteños*' Migrations Toward the United States

3.2.1 *Flow of Emigrants*

In the reading of the new tendencies or rearrangements that Mexican international migrations experience, it is important to remember that it is a historic and mass phenomenon, with changes and continuities that have proven that migration is a phenomenon both complex and dynamical, subject to economic peaks and crises and the prevailing national political environment.

Is it possible today to speak of a reduction in the number of migrations by *Vuelteños* to the U.S.? Estimates based on the 2011-ESF, the distribution of the most recent movements shows that of the 132 *Vuelteños* who migrated to the U.S. for the last time and have returned home, the majority (40.9 %) did so recently, especially in the 2007–2011 period (Fig. 3.1). According to this behavior, it appears that the number of departures to the U.S. by *Vuelteños* contradicts the supposed loss of dynamism in migratory flows mentioned above.

However, when we differentiate this distribution according to legal status it becomes clear that out of the 54 people who left between 2007 and 2011, 63.0 % had their legal papers, while only 37.0 % migrated irregularly. Especially noteworthy is the fact that while international mobility did not cease in this period, it took place under clearly marked limitations on the flow of undocumented workers, since the number of departures by migrants who travel to the U.S. annually “without papers” declined significantly in that interval (Fig. 3.2).

Thus, we notice that in 2010 and 2011, most of the departures recorded in *Vuelteños* households involved individuals who went to the U.S. with some type of migratory document (Fig. 3.2). It is important to point out that of the 34 individuals who went with documents 14.7 % had tourist visas, 50.0 % had Green Cards, and 35.3 % had humanitarian visas obtained through the “Family Reunion” policy.¹

Based on in-depth interviews, we were able to determine that Las Vueltas seems to have experienced a modification of the dynamics of temporary undocumented

¹Humanitarian visas were first granted under the “Grandparents’ Program” (now called “Family Reunion”). The objective of this policy was to allow adults over 50 years of age to obtain one stay in the U.S. that could last for 30 days, or 3 or 6 months.

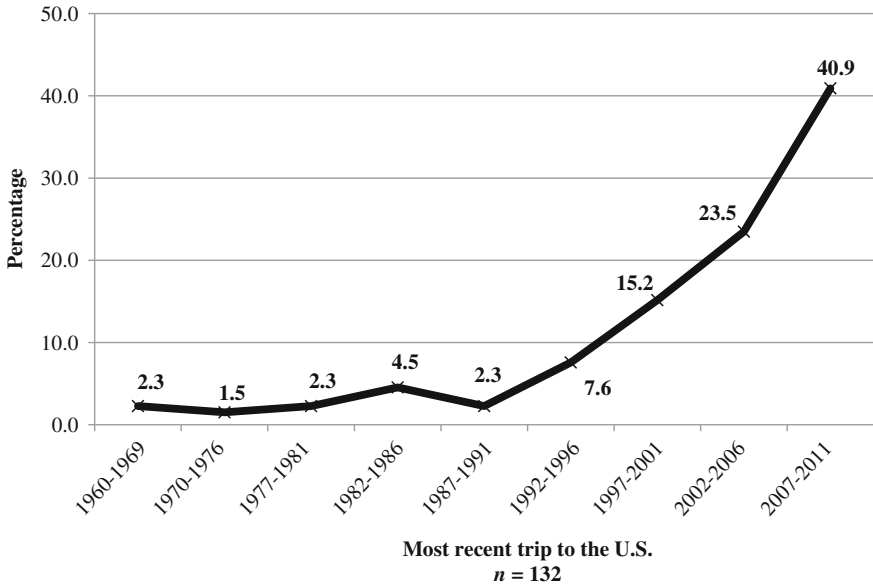


Fig. 3.1 Period of most recent trip by *Vuelteños* that migrated to the U.S. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

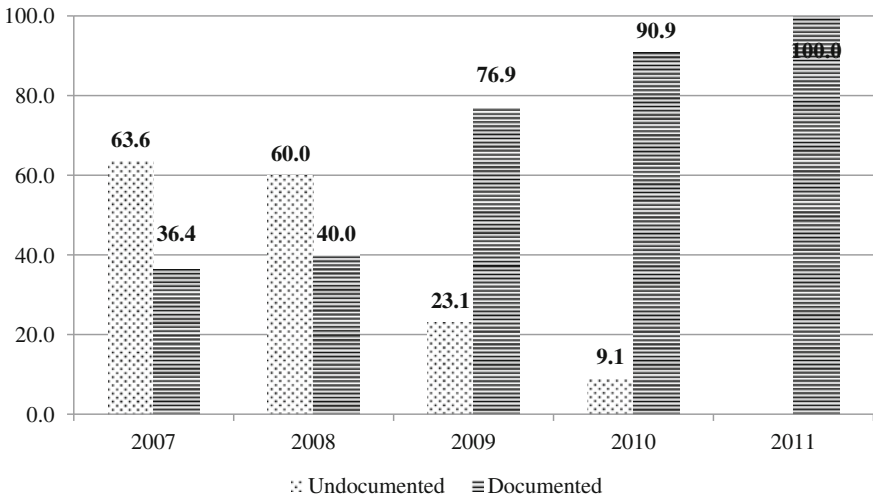


Fig. 3.2 Percentage of *Vuelteños* who traveled to the U.S. between 2007 and 2011 by legal status in the most recent trip. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

migration at neighborhood level, particularly between the populations of the sectors called Huizcatepec and El Plan, where young household heads who were accustomed to migrating annually to participate in the agricultural labor markets of

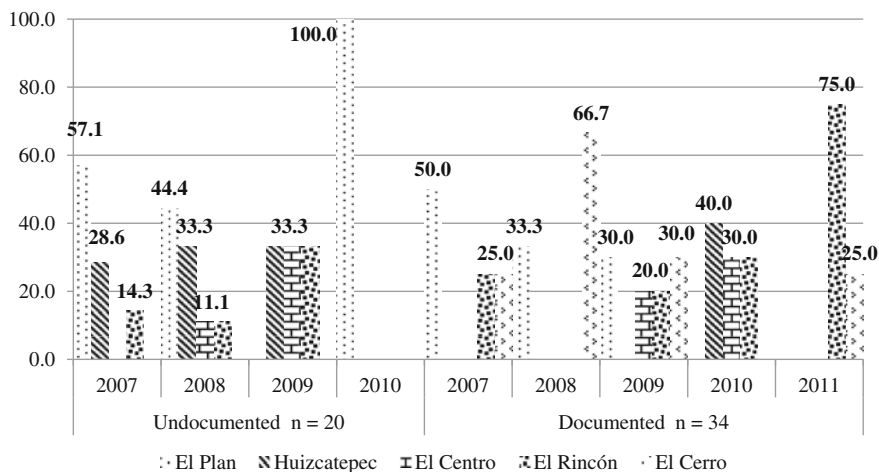


Fig. 3.3 Departures of *Vuelteños* to the U.S. by neighborhood and legal status, 2007–2011. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

Illinois, New Jersey and Pennsylvania “were unable to cross” after returning to spend the winter in their community of origin.

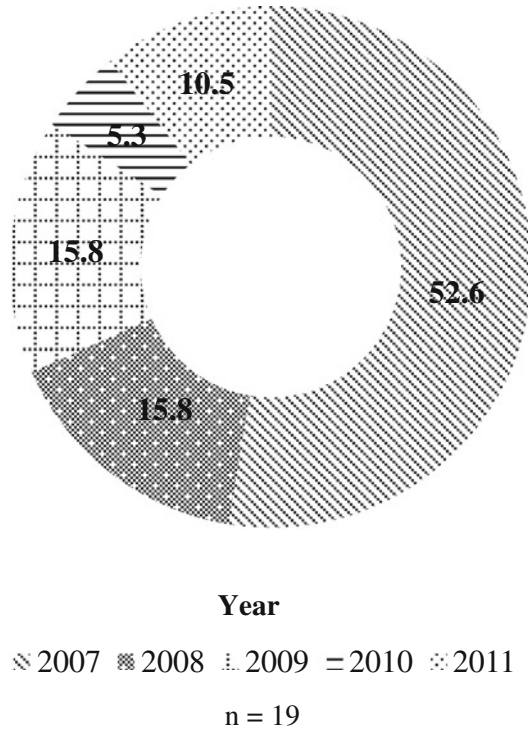
As Fig. 3.3 shows, the incorporation of undocumented migrants from *Vuelteño* households decreased significantly: while in 2010 households in El Plan stood out because of the number of undocumented migrants who departed for the U.S., figures for 2011 reveal only processes of documented (legal) migration from two other neighborhoods: El Rincón and El Cerro. This way, we can affirm that the undocumented modality of international migration is undergoing a period of deceleration and stagnation, especially in households that once depended on temporary migration to the U.S. as an effective strategy of income generation.

In this respect, the epigraph of the chapter defines the changes that the undocumented temporary migration processes have been experiencing in recent years. Moreover, it allows learning that in the contexts of crisis and political hostility, the continuity of labor mobility constructed as a come and go between the origin and destination is very unlikely.

When interpreting these findings it is important to consider that the decreased frequency of departures to the U.S. by members of *Vuelteño* households may be a consequence of the recession and employment crisis in *el norte*, the intensified border control, and the increasing emergence of anti-immigrant postures; though it may also be a response to the fact that many individuals who migrated recently have decided not to try to return home because they realize that this is not a convenient moment to do so.

On this issue, the 2011-ESF indicates that during the 5-year period 2007–2011, 18 (14.8 %) of the 121 households surveyed in Las Vueltas had recent migrants who were still in the U.S. Of the 19 people who departed from these households, 52.6 % did so in 2007 and 15.8 % in both 2008 and 2009, while the proportion of

Fig. 3.4 Percentage of recent migrants to the U.S. by year of departure, 2007–2011.
Source Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF



migrants in 2010 and 2011 fell below 10.0 %. These figures on the migratory activity of the absent population indicate that while households in Las Vueltas still send migrants to the U.S. despite the crisis, their numbers are significantly lower (Fig. 3.4).

Upon examining these data on migration in greater detail we found that of the 19 people who migrated between 2007 and 2011, 36.8 % (7) entered the U.S. without legal papers, while 63.2 % (12) had legal documents. But when we broke the data down according to the number of recent undocumented migrants (n = 12) per year, the figures were as follows: 75.0 % migrated in 2007, 16.2 % in 2008, and only 8.3 % in 2010. Clearly, the highest number of recent departures occurred *before* 2008, when in all likelihood the effects of the economic crisis and border control measures were not yet being felt so severely.

In summary, it is clear that undocumented migration from households in Las Vueltas declined significantly from 2007 to 2011, a 5-year period in which only 19 individuals migrated, while data for the year 2006 alone identified 11 migrants from Las Vueltas. Interestingly, as of today, none of them have returned to their community of origin.

When interviewed, the migrants’ regional representative indicated that the decreased mobility in *Vuelteño* households has been particularly visible as of 2007, since observations show that “many young men have settled here [i.e., not

migrated] because of job shortages in the North”. The version offered by this political figure seems to suggest that the employment crisis in the U.S. constitutes the principal factor that affects the migratory dynamics of potential *Vuelteño* migrants, although this is a complex phenomenon that involves a whole range of economic, political and social factors.

Migration in Las Vueltas has only been affected for the last two years [since 2008], but it was when the employment problems began in the U.S.; so it was when the employment problem began there that Las Vueltas and the municipality started to be affected (Migrants’ Regional Representative).

Information collected through in-depth interviews reaffirms the reduced frequency of undocumented migration and clearly suggests that current conditions have de-structured the once common pattern of mobility marked by a coming-and-going between the countries of origin and destination as a strategy of working life in the U.S. and the permanence of feelings of attachment to Las Vueltas. It is important to point out that this phenomenon has been constructed progressively in the context of the experiences of *Vuelteños* who failed in their most recent attempt to enter the U.S. and experienced suffering first-hand when they were detained and returned to the border. According to the findings, these changes in migratory dynamics are associated with the spread of a behavior constructed in a scenario where it was no longer convenient or profitable to risk crossing the border because the costs are greater than the probability of “fooling the *migra*” (i.e., the Border Patrol).

3.2.2 *Detentions at the Border*

In relation to detentions at the border, the results of 2011-ESF revealed that from 2008 to the present, 21.5 % (26) of the 121 households surveyed indicated that at least one of their members had failed in their attempts to cross the U.S. border ‘illegally’. At neighborhood level, such events were reported more frequently in Huizcatepec (38.5 %) and El Plan (30.8 %), but to a significantly lower degree in El Centro (11.1 %) and El Rincón (6.9 %).

The profiles of the 26 aspiring migrants who failed in their quest to cross the border between 2008 and 2011 show that 42.3 % were sons of household heads, and 34.6 % heads, while the proportions for other population sectors are markedly lower: i.e., other family member (11.5 %), sibling (7.7 %), and spouse (3.8 %). Also, we found that 88.5 % were men with an average age of 29 years and previous migratory experience.

In relation to the most recent attempt to cross, it is estimated that 80.8 % tried to enter the U.S. through Agua Prieta and 11.5 % through Nogales. Of these, 69.3 % tried to cross in 2008–2009, but only 30.7 % in 2010–2011. This distribution clearly suggests the effects of the economic crisis and intensified border control, which lead ever fewer people to decide to take the risk of such an uncertain result.

We also found that 92.3 % of this population had paid a *coyote* or *pollero* to guide them during their migratory journey, and that 53.8 % had gone into debt to cover the costs of the trip to the border and back.

The causes of these failed attempts to cross the border that we identified are as follows: apprehension and return by migration authorities (61.5 %); excessive surveillance at the border (19.2 %); accidents, injuries or other incidents that reduced the possibility of making another attempt (11.5 %); and the decision to simply give up and return to the community of origin (7.7 %). These results confirm our data on failed attempts to cross and emphasize the growing importance of the intensified control and surveillance programs along the border.

Although the members of 23.1 % of migrant households who failed to cross the border reported that this experience “had no consequences”, it is clear that in other households the decision of not migrating has brought a whole series of repercussions that include the following: fewer resources available to satisfy daily needs (34.6 %); indebtedness (19.2 %); unemployment (3.8 %); and feelings of anxiety or worry (3.8 %). Among other things, this means that migration has become a process that involves a whole series of emotional costs for both migrants and their families, and that leads people to search for alternative ways of satisfying their diverse material needs (Fig. 3.5).

Finally, in relation to the situations of dependence that result from adopting international migration as a family survival strategy, we found that people in 69.2 % (18) of the 26 households with members who failed in their most recent attempt to enter the U.S. consider that mobility and incorporation into labor markets

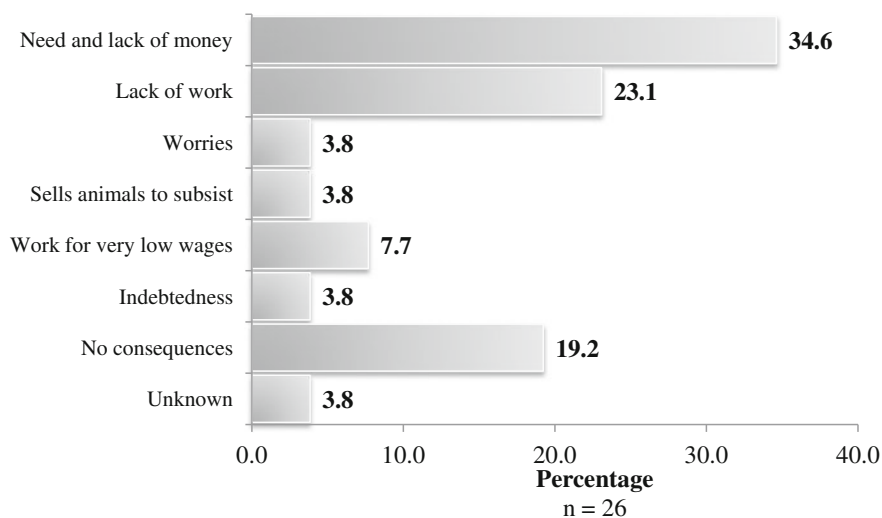


Fig. 3.5 Consequences related to unsuccessful attempts to cross into the U.S. by members of *Vuelteño* households that sought to do so in the 2008–2011 period. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

there are one of the principal options to generate monetary income, since the wages they earn when in *el norte* are used to assure daily subsistence (66.7 %), finance agricultural activities, and complement the low wages earned by agricultural workers (22.2 %).

Parallel to these processes of reduced mobility generated by intensified border control measures, there emerge other situations that suggest the configuration of what we will call “forced temporary stays” in the U.S. by undocumented migrants who opt to remain there and only risk returning to their home community for festive occasions and vacations; however, they realize that crossing the border back may well be problematical.

According to the 2011-ESF, it is estimated that 2.4 % (3) of the 121 households surveyed in Las Vueltas had a *temporary member* who returned for a visit and was unable to return to the U.S. Some of the consequences of this process—which we will call “involuntary immobility”—are the temporary separation from one’s spouse, children or other members of the immediate family who stayed in the U.S., losing one’s job due to abandonment, and the financial inability to continue paying one’s bills.

This grim scenario becomes blatantly bleak in cases like that of Jaime, an undocumented migrant who chose to return to Las Vueltas in December 2009, leaving his wife and three children in the U.S. When he tried to return in January 2010, he failed on four occasions over a 3-month period, a point at which he decided not to run any further risk because the measures currently in force to control undocumented migration stipulate that recidivism (i.e., repeat attempts to cross) is a felony punishable by deportation that precludes any return to the U.S. for a certain number of years. Clearly, the fear of being caught, deported and punished has led migrants like Jaime to stay in their home community even though their families remain in the U.S.

On this issue, Berumen et al. (2011: 8) have proposed a configuration that consists in two moments. The first, from 1995 to 2000, was a time when, far from impeding undocumented migration, border security controls actually generated conditions that encouraged potential migrants to persist in their attempts to cross the border until they succeeded. The second moment, in contrast, occurred between 2000 and 2010, when the intensification of migratory controls, the application of sanctions to reoffenders, and the increasingly high risks and costs of attempting to migrate, combined to dramatically reduce the number of attempts. According to Berumen et al. (2011), this two-stage scheme accurately reflects the changes that oblige potential migrants to: (1) encounter more effective border-crossing strategies that will allow them to cross on their first or second attempt; or, (2) decide to abandon their intention to cross the border to avoid repeated detentions and the extremely unpleasant experiences they may entail, as our research findings seem to suggest.

3.2.3 *Migratory Decisions in a Context of Crisis in the Recipient Society*

Postpone migrating or desist completely? What are the changes that decision-making on migration is undergoing in this context of crisis and political vulnerability? According to Camarota (2010: 14), among the many factors that may intervene in the decision to migrate, there are components that do not change even during a recession—e.g., the desire to reunite with one's family—allowing the migration process to continue. In addition, the wages and employment opportunities available in the U.S. even during periods of low economic growth are significantly more attractive than what potential migrants find in their countries of origin.

Nonetheless, our findings reveal that in 15.7 % (19) of the 121 households surveyed, at least one member that used to migrate annually had decided to remain in the community or delay for an indefinite time any attempt to return. Of this group, 68.4 % (13) have desisted or postponed their intention to migrate because “*you just can't cross anymore*”, while another 21.1 % (4) have lost interest because “*the U.S. isn't what it used to be*”. The remaining 10.6 % (2) mention the lack of employment opportunities in Mexico's northern neighbor.

Comments like these reflect this population's perceptions regarding how the contraction of labor markets in the U.S. and the intensification of border security constitute two factors that, on the one hand, had negative repercussions on undocumented migrants' attempts to seek entry into the U.S. between 2008 and 2011 and, on the other, dissuaded potential undocumented migrants from embarking on the journey, and thus functioned to *contain* migration, as shown by the clear signs of deceleration registered for this phenomenon among the inhabitants of Las Vueltas. The causes that underlie this reorientation of migratory decisions are intimately related to the rationality of the members of these households, but this is not the rationality of neoclassical economics which assumes that people make objective assessments of costs, or risks, and benefits. Rather, as Escobar (2007: 10) explains, it is a rationality that these individuals incorporate as agents who are fully capable of distinguishing the processes and effects that arise from the segmentation of labor markets, the structure of opportunities in the societies of origin and destination, and the dynamic, differentiated role of the social networks to which they have access.

In this setting, one often hears perceptions like: “*There's lots of migra*”, “*It's really tough to cross if you have to spend money you don't have*”, “*There's no work anymore*”, “*You can't make as much as before*” and “*They don't want undocumented [workers] anymore*” predominate; or, as Arcadio put it succinctly, “*With all these difficulties, people are thinking twice about it*”. And to this problem we must add the experience—or fear—of being detained by migratory authorities, or of becoming a burden for one's relatives in the U.S., who may be unemployed as well, or lack the financial resources needed to send home so-called ‘systemic’ remittances; i.e., the money that historically has allowed the undocumented migratory system to function. Obviously, if the relatives who were once the primary providers

of the economic resources required to pay for the costs of the trip to the border and entry into the U.S. can no longer do so, then migration will be *paralyzed, contained or decelerated* due to the lack of available financing, especially now that “*the price you have to pay to cross is so high*”. In addition to this process, Ernesto narrates a hypothetical scenario in which the undocumented migrant does finally succeed in crossing the border, only to find that the next obstacle he confronts is finding work, because if she/he cannot obtain a job soon and may be able to count on the support of relatives in the U.S., the risk is that the debts incurred to enter the U.S. will continue to grow.

This is not to say, however, that these behavioral patterns mean that migration has been discarded as an option for finding gainful employment, but only that it seems to have been placed in a kind of *holding pattern*, because these people have opted to wait for an economic recovery, greater stability in employment, a higher demand for labor, and greater flexibility at the border, because the lack of progress they perceive in their home community points to an equally bleak future.

People who haven't studied and don't have work are just waiting for the chance to go to the U.S., for the border to open again. Why? 'Cause they've seen there's no future here, no progress for them... here the government only shows up when there are elections (Alberto, 28).

To give but one example, early in 2011 the temporary return of some *norteños* (i.e., migrants to the U.S.) spurred the circulation of “good news”: i.e., renewed hopes of the opportunity to migrate, at least for three young men from Huizcatepec who decided to plan the trip to the border with the firm expectation that “*It was opening up*”, “*That they're letting people through now*”, and “*That the economy is recovering*”. So, on January 11th that year, Leo, Iván and Edgar packed their belongings and became ready to set off. However, when the big day came, it turned out that only Leo was willing to take the risk. Eleven days later, he informed the others that he had succeeded in reaching his destination. This was all the motivation Iván and five other young men needed to travel to Agua Prieta. But on February 16th, Elisa (Iván's wife) received the news that her husband was on his way back and that the other men were in a temporary detention center waiting to be deported.

Many just can't make it there anymore; for example, we used to hear that [so-and-so] made it; that so many had arrived; but no more. In contrast, you hear that so many have been jailed at the border, held there for two or three months and then sent back here, and if they catch you again why they'll jail you six months or more, depending on how many times you've been caught (Iván, 25).

In general, this behavior makes it clear that undocumented migration has been slowed, not only by the contraction of U.S. labor markets and the strengthening of border security, but also because the decision to leave has entered a stage on the migratory path in which it is now necessary to evaluate the structure of opportunities in the recipient country and the potential return on the risk of making the trip when there are no guarantees because of economic uncertainty and political hostility. Is it better to stay in one's place of origin or migrate to the U.S. in a time of

economic crisis, unemployment and greater insecurity? this is the dilemma that now surrounds the decision to join the process of international migration.

3.2.4 Return Migration

While, as we have seen, return migration in the whole municipality of Coatepec Harinas increased markedly between the 5-year periods 1995–2000 and 2005–2010, in Las Vueltas this phenomenon was barely visible. However, cases of returns—both forced and voluntary—by people who failed in their attempt to cross the border are becoming more common, and constitute another signal of change in the patterns of international migration. This is reflected in the fact that 72.7 % (88) of the 121 households surveyed in Las Vueltas mentioned that in recent years they have seen a greater presence of people who return from the U.S. due to the lack of job opportunities there, because they were deported, because they were caught in a workplace raid by the *migra*, because of the application of new anti-immigrant laws, and/or because of the scarce opportunities for undocumented migrants (Fig. 3.6).

Returning to the 2011-ESF, it is estimated that 4.9 % (6) of the 121 households surveyed had a migrant who returned voluntarily between 2008 and 2011. Some of the principal causes behind the decision to return are: conditions of instability and uncertainty in employment associated with irregular legal status, and the inability to speak English.

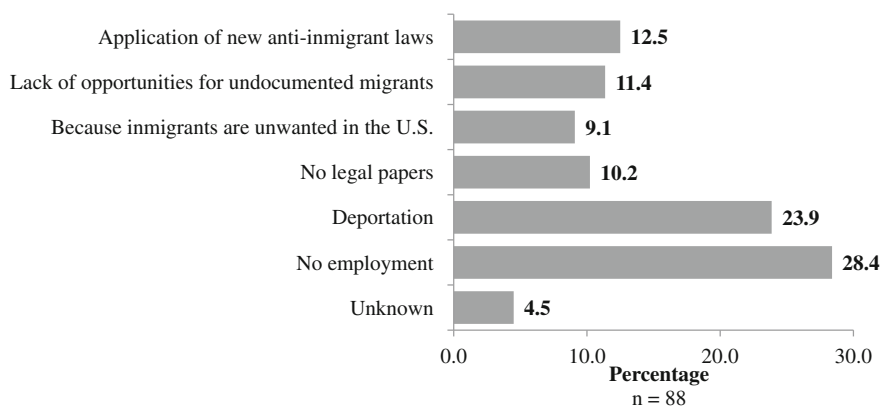


Fig. 3.6 Reasons for which it is thought that migrants returned from the U.S. in the period 2008–2011. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

I felt like all the doors were closed. I came back 'cause there was no work, I don't speak English [and] don't have papers. I was working at a nursery and they told me there was no more work, that they could only keep me for two months; and after those two months of work it was really hard 'cause everywhere people ask for your papers and if you speak English. It's not like it used to be; today it's really tough. I decided to return last year (2009) when things got so hard, I just decided to come back. I said 'I've got my parents here, and they're all alone'. In fact, Fabián came back with me, 'cause both of us got laid off in June so there was no way to pay the rent and food and, I mean, you can't stay there mooching off your relatives, 'cause the people you live with, well they get fed up with seeing you there doing nothing (Ramiro, 37).

Thus, upon inquiring into the role of social networks as a *buffer* in the face of unemployment and work instability, we discovered situations where migrants decided to return voluntarily even though they had the support of relatives or friends in the U.S., especially because there is a high concentration of *Vuelteños* in Woodstock. Alternatively, they could have opted for the strategy of looking for jobs in another city or state where other migrants from Las Vueltas or *paisanos* from nearby places live and work. Despite these options, some migrants simply decided to go back home because in a crisis where work is in short supply and one soon runs out of money, the temporary—or, in some instances, medium or long-term—support of family members and friends who are likely confronting their own difficulties and need to cover their own expenses and those of their families most definitely has limits. In such conditions, it may no longer be feasible to add the extra costs of maintaining an unemployed migrant, and such situations can easily leave migrants with feelings of guilt and shame because “*they're being maintained*”. They feel uncomfortable because they realize that they have become “a burden” for their relatives in the U.S. Hence, although social networks are maintained even during crises, they become weaker and more vulnerable in times of recession. Just as the deceleration of systemic remittances leads to a contraction of migration, the maturity of these migrants' social networks influences decisions to return.

In such settings, opting to return home may seem absurd because migrants are well aware that the economy—and their opportunities—in Las Vueltas and nearby municipalities “*are even worse*” than in the U.S. But returning does relieve the pressures of having to pay rent, buy food, and perhaps borrow money to pay other expenses. Of course, when they arrive back home there are new pressures to be faced, but living in one's hometown somehow eases those challenges. This shows that migrants may still establish ties of dependence with their families in Las Vueltas who can offer them a house where they can eat and sleep and a family support structure.

The place where I worked [a nursery] had around twenty workers, and five of us were from Las Vueltas. They laid us all off! But we didn't all come back 'cause things are worse here and, no matter what, you live better over there than here, and also 'cause they're used to earning pretty good money and would feel bad if they had to come back. I was there for eight years there and felt really, really bad when I came back... instead of making 350 dollars a week I only get around 55 dollars. But even so... I don't know... I don't really want to go back 'cause it's so hard to cross the border. When I crossed the first time we suffered a lot and now it's even worse (Ramiro, 37).

In order to contextualize and thus better understand these returns, which seem to be conditioned by individuals' socioeconomic and family integration in the U.S., it is important to identify with greater precision who these migrants are. As previous sections have established, we know that we are dealing with two principal types of migrants: (1) single men who have the possibility to return and live with their parents in Las Vueltas; and, (2) married men whose wives live in Las Vueltas. José, for example, is an undocumented migrant who lost his job in 2009, but decided to stay in the U.S. because his wife and children have jobs there and are able to sustain the family. Gerardo, meanwhile, is a documented migrant who was dismissed, but his legal status allows his wife and children greater mobility. These cases seem to indicate that the migrant's legal status and the presence of his wife and children in the U.S. are two of the principal components that influence the decision of whether or not to return to La Vueltas when confronting the vulnerability caused by the economic crisis and the emergence of anti-immigrant postures.

But involuntary or forced returns have increased among this migrant population, as it is estimated that 7.4 % (9) of the 121 households surveyed had a member who was deported between 2008 and today, victims of the persecution, harassment and intolerance to which undocumented migrants are subjected in the U.S. Servando, a migrant deported in August 2011, stated that the causes cited never used to lead to detention and deportation, but do now because "*there's no work, so they don't want so many people*".

When I got the deportation order my first thought was to try to maximize the time I had left. I knew this moment might come, but never thought it would take so long [around 10 years]. They got me at work and said I had to go with them, leave the company's property and just take my own stuff. We left and they took me to a detention center where they let me make one phone call after two hours. Two days later they took me to Chicago, where the Migration [offices] are. That's where they take all your information, fingerprints, and photographs, and tell you your options. Because I didn't obey the deportation order they said I lost all my rights; no right to see a judge, no right to pay a bond and get out of jail. They said all I could do was wait til my name came up on the list for a flight; that it could take a week, or two or three. And when you get on the plane to go is that they tell you the punishment. They can expel you from the country for 10 years, 20, or for life. They gave me ten years, but that depends on the person too, on how you left the country (Servando, 33).

In addition to the mistreatment and verbal aggression that undocumented migrants receive in detention centers, deportation is a process that has multiple consequences: feelings of fear, desperation and anxiety, and the sudden, unexpected separation from the family when the migrant has no other option than to make a phone call to say he was arrested. Another concern is that the family might lose all the material belongings they accumulated in the U.S., whether many or just a few. It is in this sense that deportation puts an end to the famous 'American dream' in a setting filled with tension and consternation for the family.

But there may be more repercussions, for deportation may mean the break-up of the family unit if they decide that the wife and children should remain in the U.S. In other cases, forced returns lead to family reunification in the community of origin and, as in Servando's case, the presence of new students in the local primary school,

which has received several new pupils who arrived in Las Vueltas after their fathers' were deported.

Every school cycle around 8 or 10 families used to leave, so now the classes [in primary school] have 12, 13 or maybe 15 children, but in the nineties more or less, there were groups of 30 or 35. Now we have around 120 students in the whole school, when before there were over 300. There was a time when it wasn't so difficult to enter the U.S. and the economy made it easy to get work; that's why they went so often, they couldn't make a living here [but] some of them are starting to come back now; some who didn't get papers are already back. They've returned over the past few years [so] now we have kids in first, second, third, fourth... well... every grade; just this past year seven children came back and registered in the school (Naomi, 44).

Finally, with respect to the issue of voluntary, forced and festive returns, the evidence presented up to this point clearly reveals a new configuration of tendencies that contrast strongly to the migratory behavior observed during other phases, where migration was typically a continuous, cyclical process characterized, on the one hand, by the seasonal presence of undocumented workers who would leave and return following the agricultural cycle in the U.S., and, on the other, by a more permanent, large-scale circulation of documented and undocumented migrants who were established in the U.S. Also during that phase, deportations and voluntary returns were minimal.

Today, in stark contrast to this scenario of continuous mobility between Mexico and the U.S., evidence points to the configuration of new tendencies in the dynamics and intensity of back-and-forth migratory flows. The new patterns differ greatly from the earlier form of sustained migration with regular returns by temporary migrant workers living in the U.S. and a high degree of mobility regardless of legal status—documented or undocumented—because, as people said, “*Everyone who went could come back*”. The current situation and processes with their new patterns and behaviors are associated with economic recession, strict border control, and the implementation of anti-immigrant measures, and this has produced results like the following: significantly fewer departures to the U.S. by undocumented migrants; an increase in temporary returns to Las Vueltas; the *temporary abandonment*² of migration as a work-related resource in conditions of economic involution and migratory repression that leads people to postpone or reconsider the decision to migrate, or desist altogether; and new modalities of permanence for both migrants that return and find that they are obliged to remain in the community of origin because they cannot go back across the border, and for the so-called circular migrants who prolong their residence in the U.S. because of the costs and reduced possibility of crossing the border.

²The concept of temporary disengagement from migration is posited on the basis of findings obtained through in-depth interviews. The aim is to suggest that international migration as a life strategy has not been discarded by households in Las Vueltas, but that migratory flows and decisions to migrate have shifted to a kind of “holding pattern”. Potential migrants now evaluate the risks, costs, and insecurity involved in venturing to cross the border and enter the U.S. without legal papers in a time of economic crisis and anti-migrant hostility.

3.3 The Impact of Reduction in the Volume of Family Remittances

In addition to the changes in migratory flows outlined above, the deceleration in the volume of remittances sent home by migrants is also critical to this analysis, since speculations abound as to the real impacts of this phenomenon on the households and communities that depend on exporting workers and receiving the monetary resources they remit. In this respect, some hypotheses have been put forward on the increase in the levels of poverty or the presence of a phenomenon that might be possibly configured as a return to poverty (Mercado/Palmerin 2009), in which the agency and capabilities of households to act and respond to catastrophes will determine the depth of the impacts related to the deceleration of these resources.

The 2011-ESF estimates that 18.5 % (69) of the people of 12 years of age and older (372) receive remittances from the U.S., but the majority reside in just two neighborhoods: El Rincón (30.4 %) and El Plan (30.4 %). The sociodemographic profile of this population shows that 59.4 % (41) are women and 40.6 % (28) men; a distribution that differs from that registered in the EMMEU-2009 (where 81.3 % of receivers are listed as women). This divergence can be explained by the kinship relations of remittance receivers and senders, since most of the people in this group are male household heads who receive support from their children who live in *el norte*. This relationship makes sense because the average age of the receiving population is 59; that is, the sector of elderly adults who receive economic support from family members in the U.S.

According to kinship relations, it is estimated that 47.8 % (33) of the 69 receivers are male heads of household (72.7 % men, 27.3 % women), while 37.7 % (26) and 7.2 % (5), respectively, are spouses and/or their father or mother. These sources also show that of this receiving population 73.9 % (51) obtain remittances from a child in the U.S., 17.4 % (12) from another relative, 5.8 % from a spouse (4), and 2.9 % (2) from their father or mother.

Specifically, the kinship relation between sender and receptor reveals a tendency towards greater participation by children, since figures show that 72.7 % of those who are heads of household receive remittances from a child in the U.S., but this ratio increases to 76.9 % and 100 % among spouses when the recipient is the household head's father or mother. Finally, the simple act of making these transferences reflects the intention of many individuals who may be permanent migrants to maintain and intensify affective links with their mother or father in Las Vueltas.

In comparison, the characteristics of the remittance-receiving population in the localities of Acuitlapilco and Chiltepec (also in the municipality of Coatepec Harinas) is similar, as Sandoval (2009: 203) found that participation as receivers was concentrated among heads of household. In other words, following Corona/Santibáñez (2004: 61), this distribution shows that the majority of remittances reach households at a stage in their life cycle in which the children have

separated to form their own families and the original couple is over 50 years of age. In contrast, figures reveal a lower perception of remittances in households at the beginning of their developmental cycle, characterized by spouses in their economically-productive years with small children.

Turning to the marital status of those who receive remittances, the 2011-ESF estimates that 72.5 % (50) are married, 18.8 % widow/ers (13), and 8.6 % unmarried (6). The married population has similar proportions for gender (around 50.0 %), but this differs for the widow/ers, 69.2 % of whom are women.

The next factor to be considered is schooling. Here we find that remittance-receivers typically completed only a few years of primary education (average = 3.0 grades passed), or never went to school: 55.1 % (38) and 39.1 % (27), respectively. According to González (2012: 241), this is congruent with patterns at state level, since many *Mexiquenses* (demonym for inhabitants of the State of Mexico) who live in rural zones who receive remittances never attended school.

Data on occupation, meanwhile, show that 46.4 % (32) of receivers are home-makers, 42.0 % (29) have jobs, and the other 11.6 % (8) either do not work, are disabled and cannot work, or have been looking for a job. According to these figures, a proportion of around 56.5 % (39) of the remittance-receiving population is economically inactive. Of these 82.1 % are women whose average age is 61. While this places most women who receive remittances in the economically inactive population, it must be noted that while they may not receive any formal income for their labors, they perform multiple tasks in the home and fields.

With regards to the economically active, employed sector, it is clear that the vast majority of workers—86.2 % (25)—have a job as agricultural workers. Finally, the ESF survey obtained an average of 4 persons per household who share only one income to satisfy the physical and material needs of all members. This means that the remittances received in those households are used for the joint sustenance of the family nucleus.

In light of this profile, we can see that most of the people in Las Vueltas who receive remittances are married women and male heads aged 50–60. Approximately 7 out of 10 are married, and slightly over a half are economically inactive. Also, the data reflect low educational levels, especially among women. Hence, we are dealing with a population that is not forced by age to search for alternative options to generate income, but that does develop a higher degree of dependence than younger households in a process of formation.

3.3.1 Family Remittances in the Household Economy

In analyzing the deceleration of remittances and its varied impacts, we must first determine the precise importance of monetary remittances in household incomes in Las Vueltas because the effects of the deceleration, or suspension, of remittances

depends on the proportion of family income they represent. Once again, 2011-ESF estimates that 50.4 % (61) of the 121 households surveyed receive remittances: 86.9 % [53] reported one sole receiver, while 13.1 % [8] mentioned two. Most of these people reside in the El Rincón (29.5 %), El Plan (27.9 %) and El Cerro (19.7 %) neighborhoods, while Huizcatepec (11.5 %) and El Centro (11.5 %) have the lowest proportions of recipient households.

While the proportion of remittance-receiving households varies from the total included in the sample, establishing a hierarchy requires relating these resources to each source of income while differentiating between households that receive remittances and those that do not. The 2011-ESF shows that the roughly 60 households in Las Vueltas that do not receive remittances have total economic incomes that derive from one or more sources; i.e., no households lacked any source of monetary income. Of these 60 units, 66.7 % (40) receive wages and other types of income, such as social assistance from government programs, pensions and internal remittances; 28.3 % (17) subsist on the irregular wages earned by agricultural laborers; and 5.0 % (3) survive only on the bimonthly income provided by government assistance (Table 3.1).

In contrast, remittance-receiving households reflect greater economic diversification, as at least 73.8 % (45) combine remittances with wages and other income, so their economic umbrella is supported by at least three sources that generate monetary income. Another 11.5 % (7) of these households depend for their subsistence on economic support from the U.S. and income from wages, and 9.8 % (6) derive their main income from remittances and other types of earnings, including government assistance. Finally, among remittance-receiving households there is a somewhat lower percentage (4.9 %) that fully depends on the resources sent by family members in the U.S.

In these circumstances, it is clear that in addition to the wider range of economic options characteristic of remittance-receiving households, they have a higher mean total income (\$280 dollars). In non-receiving households we found lower incomes from work, government support and pensions from the U.S., but a higher mean

Table 3.1 Number of remittance-receiving and non-receiving *Vuelteño* households according to different sources of monetary income, 2011

Type of monetary income	Absolute	Percentage
<i>Households that receive remittances</i>	<i>n</i> = 61	100
Remittances plus other income (including work)	45	73.8
Remittances plus income from work	7	11.5
Remittances plus other income (not work-related)	6	9.8
Only remittances	3	4.9
<i>Households that do not receive remittances</i>	<i>n</i> = 60	100
Income from work plus other source(s)	40	66.7
Income from work only	17	28.3
Only income from government programs	3	5

Source Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

Table 3.2 Means of different income sources received in *Vuelteño* households, 2011

Condition of reception	External remittances	Internal remittances	Work	Government support	Pensions	Other income	Total income
Receiving households	80	–	200	30	280	25	280
Non-receiving households	–	35	170	22	250	80	210
Total	80	35	185	25	260	50	230

Source Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

income derived from other concepts that contribute to the family economy in the amount of \$80 dollars per month, equivalent to what accrues to the households that receive these resources as family remittances (Table 3.2).

In other words, it appears that non-receiving households try to compensate this income disadvantage by generating other income; a finding that leads to the hypothesis that the non-receiving condition entails the need to look for and obtain additional sources of income, at least in households that depend solely on income from agricultural work, which is noticeably variable and irregular. In contrast, receiving households show a type of organization that is not inclined to depend on other resources and that may propitiate behaviors that discourage involvement in other activities that could provide economic income. In this scenario, except for the households whose only source of income is monetary transfers from family members in the U.S., we can affirm that remittances participate as a complement that can improve household income.

In synthesis, it was found that for most recipient households remittances function as a complement to the total of other income, for while we recorded some households that depend and subsist exclusively on these cash remittances, it is important to notice that in most cases remittances do not represent more than 50.0 % of total income and work-related income. Finally, this assessment of the importance of remittances in the household economy suggests an interpretation that approaches the impacts associated with the deceleration and reduction in the amounts of family remittances, since it could be argued that in households where remittances complement other income, the decelerated reception of these resources will be felt less intensely than in households where they are the only form of economic income.

3.3.2 *The Heterogeneous Impacts of Reduced Remittances*

If remittances are a complement to other income, could their deceleration or interruption generate situations of vulnerability and poverty? Although poverty is only one possible consequence, we must recall that the heterogeneity in the impacts

of this process depends on (1) the specific socioeconomic profile of each recipient household; (2) on who sends the remittances; and, (3) the uses given to these resources.

In this regard, as it has been argued, we can perceive changes among households in Las Vueltas in terms of the behavior and patterns of remittance-sending in cases that reveal interruptions, irregularity, or a reduced frequency. This way, of the 61 (50.4 %) remittance-receiving households in Las Vueltas, 40 (65.5 %) said that the economic recession in the U.S. had modified the amount and frequency of remittances. Of these, 40.0 % (16) had recorded a reduction in the average amount sent, with decreases on the order of \$150 to \$250 dollars during the period 2008–2011, while 25.0 % (10) stated that they received fewer remittances more irregularly, and 35.0 % (14) had seen an interruption in the reception of these resources. Also, it is estimated that a higher proportion of the 40 affected households saw changes in the amounts and frequency of remittances in 2009 (35.0 %); a percentage that decreased in 2010 (22.5 %) and 2011 (20.0 %), perhaps due to the modest recovery registered in 2010 and the incipient generation of jobs in the U.S.

At neighborhood level, El Plan had the most households affected by interruptions or reductions of remittances (47.5 %), followed by Huizcatepec (20.0 %), El Rincón (15.0 %), El Cerro (10.0 %), and El Centro (7.5 %). Thus, the distribution of mean remittances seems to show that the households that receive the lowest amounts are also those most sensitive to changes in sending patterns. However, when we examine the type of affectation, it is clear that most households in El Plan experienced a reduction in the amounts of received remittances, but in Huizcatepec and El Cerro the response to changes in the U.S. was a suspension of remittances that in the short and medium terms may have more intense effects than a reduction, due to the loss of one option for obtaining income (Fig. 3.7).

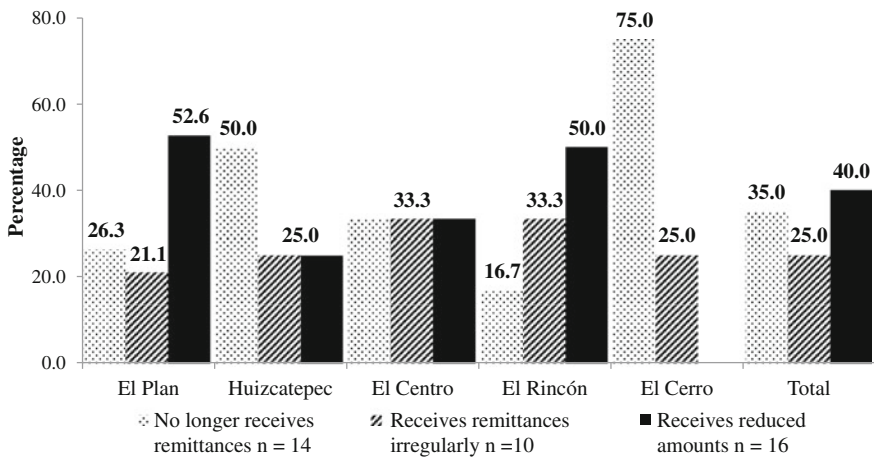


Fig. 3.7 Changes in family remittance sending patterns in households by neighborhood, Las Vueltas. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

So, what is the sociodemographic profile of the households that felt reductions, irregularity or interruptions in remittances? The 2011-ESF indicates that of the 40 households that registered changes in sending patterns, 85.0 % (34) were led by men and 15.0 % (6) by women. Other important features are a mean number of 4 people per household, and a greater presence of nuclear households (70.0 %) than extended ones (27.5 %).

Upon analyzing the life cycle of these 40 households we found a higher presence of family nuclei in a stage of fission (40.0 %), where the household head (man or woman) or her/his spouse were aged 45–64, followed by units with life cycles characterized by replacement (27.5 %) or expansion (27.5 %); i.e., those with a head or spouse over 65, and nuclei with couples aged 24–44. Finally, the proportion of households in process of formation that were affected by the new patterns of remittances was only 5.0 %.

This distribution of families' life trajectories is related to the previous findings, which ascertained that most remittances arrive in households at a stage of the life cycle in which children have left to form their own families, and the original couple is over 50. When, in contrast, this distribution pattern appears in non-receiving households it is associated with a higher number of families in a process of expansion (45.0 %) with young couples still in reproductive age. Once again, this highlights the tendency towards a focalized sending of remittances in households in more advanced stages of development.

In terms of schooling, we estimate that in around 50.0 % (20) of the 40 households that recorded decreases in remittances, the maximum level of schooling of members is primary school, since only 30.0 % (12) of these families have members who reached secondary school, and 5.0 % (2) had individuals who attended high school. The other 10.0 % (4) are households with members who have no years of formal education. Although this distribution is similar to that of the 60 non-receiving households, the proportion of nuclei with members that have no formal schooling was lower (1.7 %), but the percentage of individuals with high school education was higher (11.7 %). A possible explanation of this pattern could be a link to the life cycle of those households, since most remittance-receiving households are going through an aging process that distinguishes their composition from that of non-receiving households, which still have school-age children.

With regards to the socioeconomic organization of these households, it is evident that the number of people that work differs between non-receiving households and families that have felt changes in sending patterns. While the former had an average of 2 workers per household, in those affected by deceleration we found that only one worker provides the income to maintain the family nucleus; a condition that surely exacerbates dependence on this resource.

In relation to poverty thresholds,³ we found that the proportion of households classified as *not* poor is similar between receivers and non-receivers. However, in households classified as poor, the study found less favorable conditions in those that were feeling the negative effects of the job crisis that affected family members in the U.S., because while 37.5 % (15) of these suffered alimentary poverty and shrinking capacities, the proportion in non-receiving households was just 26.7 % (16). This supports the hypothesis that in their search to generate income these households will encourage the participation of more family members in wages, because the failure to do so would result in downward mobility.

3.3.3 *Some Examples of Heterogeneity*

3.3.3.1 **Teresa**

Teresa is a 50-year-old woman who considers herself the head of her household, even though she lives with her husband; a man she characterizes as “irresponsible and negligent”. As Teresa never went to school and has no fields of her own to cultivate, her standard of living while she received remittances would qualify as patrimonial poverty because hers is an extended household where she is a mother, grandmother and provider. Today, Teresa works as a casual agricultural worker but is responsible for the care of her two daughters, aged 12 and 15, and two grandchildren (aged 5 and 6) left behind when her son Roberto and daughter-in-law Patricia migrated to the U.S. together in 2007.

After Roberto and Patricia left, Teresa began to receive \$250 dollars per month to maintain her daughters and grandchildren. Due to the virtually negligible economic support she receives from her husband (perhaps 30 dollars per week or fortnight), she considers that the remittances from her son are a fundamental resource for maintaining her household.

Unfortunately, in July 2010, Teresa’s remittances were cut-off for about a year and three months because Roberto, an undocumented migrant, lost his job when the factory where he was working closed down. That was followed by a period of employment instability as he took a series of jobs that lasted an average of just two months and barely provided enough income to survive in the U.S.

The interruption in Roberto’s remittances meant downward socioeconomic mobility for Teresa, because even with the \$250 dollars per month this household

³According to CONEVAL (2010), income-related poverty is classified by the following three thresholds: (A) *Alimentary poverty*, which includes households with a *per capita* income that is insufficient to satisfy the alimentary needs established in the so-called “food basket” (*canasta alimentaria*); (B) *Poverty of capacities*, those households with a *per capita* income below what is required to satisfy the basic consumption pattern for food, health care and education; and, (C) *Patrimonial poverty*, those households with a *per capita* income below that necessary to cover the basic consumption pattern food, clothing and shoes, dwelling, health care, and transport.

lived in conditions of patrimonial poverty. But when the remittances stopped, *per capita* income in her household fell from 59 to 48 dollars per month, and that pushed her over the threshold of poverty of capacities.

When the flow of remittances was interrupted, Teresa had to support her family with only the approximately 50 dollars she received bimonthly from the government's *Oportunidades* Program, plus the 20 dollars she could earn by working as a day-laborer or selling the blackberries she gathers on nearby hillsides. In her search to generate income Teresa—who considers herself an ‘older’ woman—has had recourse to such options as washing and ironing for other families, curing people's ills and massaging muscular lesions. When “there's nothing left to eat”, she borrows money or sells a live sheep by weight.

Teresa's narrative provides insight into the role of women as mothers, bread-winners and administrators at home, and illustrates the capacity of agency in pursuing activities that can generate the cash income required to assure at least a minimal sustenance for her family.

I have a son there [in the U.S.] [who] sends \$250 dollars a month. I go to Coatepec for it, but –my God!– it's been a while since he sent anything, and there's no money to send the kids [Mariana, her youngest daughter and two grandchildren] to school, for utensils, clothes, or to go to the store to buy food. I have a few little sheep and, y'know, when I don't have a peso I have to sell them to the [men] here who sell barbacoa on Sundays. I sell them by the kilo and they pay me one dollar and fifty cents, but now there are hardly any left, so I need to look for ways to get money for my children. I also cure people, like when someone hurts their foot, I give them a massage and that helps out a bit, but sometimes whole weeks go by when nothing comes my way, so I have to ask someone to lend me money. I tell them I'll pay them back on Sunday, and if they lend me money, they know I need it and help me (Teresa, 50).

Remittances finally began to arrive in Teresa's household in November 2011, but in line with the new patterns, they now come bimonthly (not monthly) and the amounts fluctuate between \$100 and \$150 dollars (not \$250 like before).

3.3.3.2 Concepción and Erasto

Concepción is 64 and Erasto 70. They form a 2-member nuclear household: the head and his wife. They are married and completed two years of primary school. Socioeconomically, they are classified as ‘not poor’, since their *per capita* monthly income is around 500 dollars. They are American citizens who reside in Las Vueltas but travel frequently to the U.S. because of Concepción's medical condition.

Up to March 2010, Concepción received \$150–\$200 per month from her daughter Adela, a legal migrant in the U.S. However, Adela stopped sending money home when her working hours and earnings were substantially reduced. But losing this source of income from Adela “had no repercussions” for Concepción and Erasto because the remittances they received represented additional income to their other sources of earnings; i.e., Erasto's U.S. pension and the income from their

avocado and peach trees and the corn they grow in their own fields, which Erasto administers.

3.3.3.3 Ana and Sebastián

Ana is a 77-year-old woman who lives with her husband Sebastián (76) and their daughter María (30). They form a nuclear household in the stage of life cycle that we have characterized as ‘replacement’. Sebastián is of advanced age and suffers from an illness that has left him permanently disabled. He cannot work and requires special care. Although María is of productive age, she is a homemaker.

Up to October 2009, this household depended economically on remittances from Ana and Sebastián’s son Rodrigo, who migrated in 2002 and began to send them \$300–\$400/month to maintain his parents and cover his father’s medical bills. However, when the unemployment crisis hit in the U.S., Rodrigo—an irregular migrant—was “laid off” in the first round of personnel dismissals at the company where he was working.

Now unemployed, Rodrigo could no longer send remittances to his parents, an event that had grave consequences for Sebastián’s medical treatment, because without that cash income it became extremely difficult for the family to purchase the medications he needs to control his illness. That circumstance put enormous economic pressure on Manuel, their youngest son, because the possibility that other members of the household could generate income to make up the difference was remote at best. He works as a trader in the city of Toluca and assumed the burden of maintaining his parents. Rodrigo recently found work in Woodstock as a gardener and began to send remittances again. However, while he sends money with the same frequency as before, the amount he can spare fell to around \$200, and most of that is spent on Sebastián’s medical expenses.

Today, Ana and Sebastián qualify for social assistance under the government’s *70-and-over Program* and continue to receive support from their son Manuel in Toluca, who visits his parents “now and then” to leave them some money and pay some of Sebastián’s medical expenses. All of this means that Ana’s household lives in the condition called alimentary poverty, with a monthly *per capita* income of approximately 18 dollars.

In summary, the situations of deceleration, reduction, irregularity and interruption that have affected remittances in heterogeneous ways have had varying consequences for the economic capacities of Las Vueltas households that experienced changes in sending patterns. The profiles and capacities of the households examined here show that the depth of the conditions of poverty can change as a result of the disappearance of remittances, particularly when the family lacks opportunities to diversify its income sources, as in the case of Teresa, whose only son migrated but later lost his job in the U.S. Her situation contrasts to the case of Concepción and Erasto, where the interruption in remittances had no dire consequences, because they had the capacity to generate other forms of monetary earnings, and the remittances functioned as a complementary income. This way, due to their different

socioeconomic capitals, the changes in the patterns of remittances experienced by the households led by Teresa, Concepción and Erasto, and Ana and Sebastián have had heterogeneous impacts that reflect processes which involve agency and access to different kinds of capital.

Based on these examples, it can be said that the depth (or lack of depth) of the impacts of the deceleration in remittances is closely related to both the proportion of total household income they represent, and the use given to them. The severity of impact will be more adverse in affected households that utilize remittances for basic consumption, alimentation and health expenses, while in contrast, they will be less harsh, for example, in households where the deceleration only interrupted house construction projects or similar initiatives.

Finally, in the households that stopped receiving remittances or declared that the amount received had decreased, the deceleration has had economic and social consequences that include insufficient resources to sustain the household and pay for education and healthcare. Also, we detected job-related problems that, on the one hand, were reflected in scarce employment opportunities to generate income and, on the other, the economic participation of peasant women and other household members (Fig. 3.8).

The deceleration of remittances reveals both the hierarchy of these resources in different family economies and the dependence created in some *Vuelteño* households that in recent years have experienced situations of vulnerability due to the instability of a strategy that for over three decades was consolidated as their main economic resource. However, as it is shown in the next chapter, despite certain

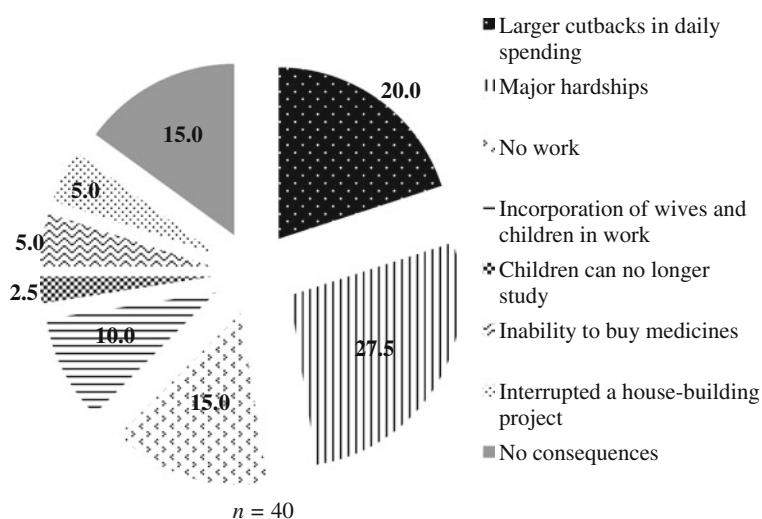


Fig. 3.8 Consequences related to the deceleration of remittances in Las Vueltas households affected in 2008–2011. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

households are perceived as economically vulnerable they respond by implementing multiple strategies to make adjustments and reorganize themselves as a result of those changes. Their aim is to generate options, improve their living conditions and achieve a certain level of security (De Haas 2010; Ellis 2000; De Haan 1999).

3.4 Situations of Vulnerability Among *Vuelteños* in the U.S. Economy and Unemployment

A process intrinsically associated with the deceleration of remittances and migrations is the emergence of situations of vulnerability among migrant populations in the U.S. On this issue the press and academics have constructed a debate that centers on the atmosphere of persecution, harassment, repression, racism and xenophobia that is now victimizing migrants from Mexico and other countries in the U.S.

According to Massey et al. (2009b: 102), the result is worsening conditions for migrants both legal and irregular who, despite their attachment to American soil, find themselves being excluded and marginalized. According to these analysts, this scenario has introduced a period of growing marginalization; an era in which many Mexican migrants have been forced to break ties with their communities of origin due to the intensified securitization of the border that impedes their return and accentuates the feeling that they are now strangers in a society that requires them as a cheap labor force, but refuses to accept them. Rather, it discriminates against them and represses them as human beings and potential U.S. citizens.

This way, as a risk condition, the economic crisis stressed the social vulnerability of *Vuelteño* migrants. Data from the 2011-ESF indicate that 47.9 % (58) of the 121 households surveyed had at least one direct family member who had experienced unemployment, job instability, reduced wages or fewer workdays and, as a result, much more precarious living conditions, due to the contraction of labor markets and the intensification of anti-immigrant postures.

These opinions obtained during interviews held at households in Las Vueltas construct and support this same scenario, but through the eyes and daily experiences of return migrants, for some of whom the changed economic conditions in the U.S. meant being fired or dismissed from their jobs, great difficulty in finding new employment, and variable, unstable wages and working conditions.

Some of the principal consequences that arise from these new conditions of unemployment and work instability that *Vuelteños* in the U.S. are experiencing include losing their residence, cutting back on daily expenses, difficulties in sending money to their families in Las Vueltas, and postponing returns to visit their homes in the community, among other aspects that severely impact the living conditions of this population in the U.S. and have significant repercussions for the community of origin as well, due to decreased remittances and the reduced circulation of

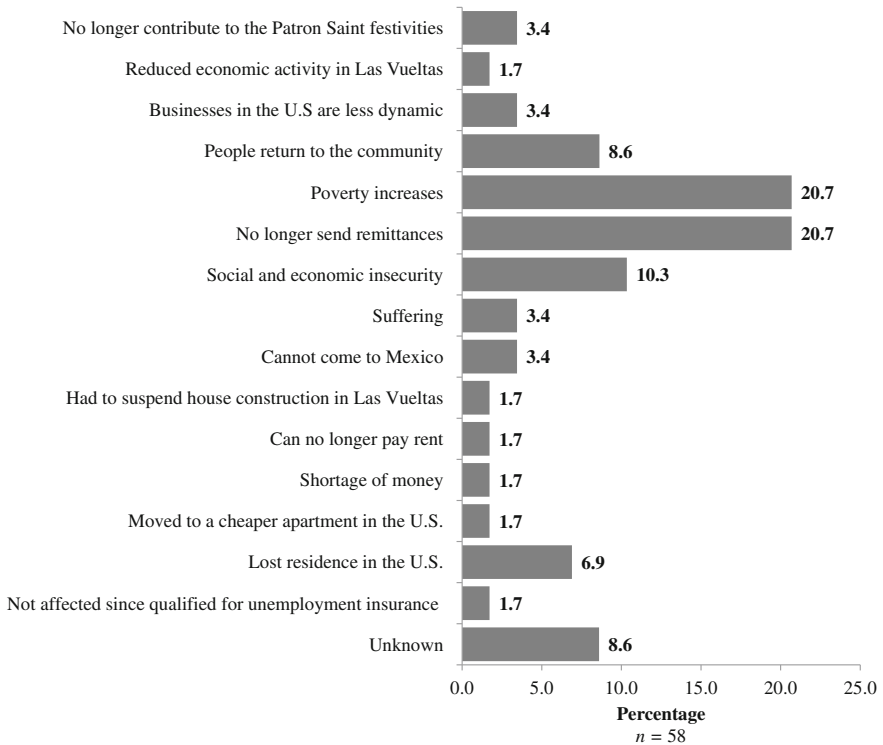


Fig. 3.9 Consequences of job instability among *Vuelteños* in the U.S., 2011. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

documented migrants. Of course, these repercussions are felt at the level of the dynamics of local businesses as well, which suffer a marked decline in the consumption of food products and other commercial articles during the December holidays (Fig. 3.9).

Therefore, in the period of marginality that Massey et al. discuss (2009b), the situation of being an undocumented, unemployed migrant “who has planted roots” in the U.S. entails multiple costs that can be covered, at least to some extent, through the temporary support that other family members may offer. However, we have also demonstrated the heterogeneous nature of the impacts of the economic recession and employment crisis, since the contraction of U.S. work markets left some migrants unemployed and vulnerable, while others felt “no consequences”, and some reported reductions of their workday and fewer opportunities to work overtime and earn extra income. De Haan (1999: 12) holds that these differences can be explained by the availability and diversity of migrants’ economic, social and

cultural capitals, which in the specific case of the migrant population from Las Vueltas has much to do with central elements such as seniority in the workplace, English language command, legal status, and schooling level. Let us now examine some examples of these differences.

3.4.1 *The García Family*

Luis (the head of the family), Ernestina (his wife), and Luisa and José (their children) form a four-member family, all of whom were born in Las Vueltas but now reside in Woodstock, California. In 1988, the ‘amnesty’ allowed Luis to ‘arrange’ his legal papers, and he later legalized his wife and their two children. In 1999, Ernestina, Luisa and José received the documents that allow them to migrate legally to the U.S. and a year later they did so, when Luisa and José (now American citizens) were just 8 and 9 years old.

Luis, who is 62 and recognized as the head of the household, was unemployed for a time and then earned very little in 2009 and 2010, because the nursery where he worked was only able to keep him on for three months a year. The nursery owners said that “*the company was going under and had no money to pay more people*”.

Although Luis’ job was severely affected by the U.S. economic crisis, the impact on his family’s household economy were not so drastic because while Luis was out of work he received Unemployment Insurance to help pay their rent. Then, when his unemployment benefits ran out in 2011, he filed for retirement. Today, he is retired and receives a monthly pension that allows him to satisfy his needs and those of his wife, Ernestina.

Meanwhile, Luisa and José, both of whom are of working age, obtained jobs in the service sector where they receive incomes that they use to sustain the family and cover their personal needs and expenses. In the case of José, while the economic crisis also cost him his job and left him in conditions of work instability from 2008 to late 2010, the fact that he is an American citizen who speaks English well meant that he felt less pressure and was more likely to find the opportunity to re-insert himself into the labor force. Luisa, finally, is a restaurant manager who works 40–43 h a week at a wage of 10 dollars per hour. Although she does not have a contract, she feels secure in her job, which she affirms is stable despite the shortage of work opportunities in the country.

This way, the combination of the incomes that Luis, Luisa and José bring home constitute the resources that have allowed this family to cope with job instability and lost income, because a nuclear family with working-age children does have the capacity to make up for the temporary inability of one of its members to generate earnings. This family is sustained thanks to the cooperative behavior and support of its members, a condition that precludes to a large degree the kinds of tensions that arise in compound or extended households where, for example, a documented but unemployed migrant lives with a sibling, uncle, or other relative.

It's been two years now that the economy in the U.S. is really bad, 'cause right now a lot of people have been laid off [though] they've worked in the same company for 30 years... especially if they were undocumented. I have a brother who had over 20 years in the same company and they laid him off because there wasn't much work, so, yeah, a lot of people are out of work. At that plastics factory, well, my wife used to work there and they hired lots of employees, but now, well, they're left with just 20 people for all three shifts; there's very little work because they used to have 20 for each shift, around 60 in all (Luis, 62).

I lost my job when the economy started to go under, that was in summer 2008 when they began to cut back on personnel all over. That's when I came back here [Las Vueltas] for around three weeks, but I had unemployment [insurance] so I wasn't too worried, but when the benefits came to an end I got work at an agency, but it only lasted about two months, I guess we're talking about September 2009 to December of that year. Later, in March 2010, that agency found work for me in another place and I was there from March to September, when they laid me off, and I was out of work for another three weeks, until I found the job where I am now (José, 27).

Luis' and José's narratives reveal, on the one hand, that the economic crisis materialized in the loss of jobs and a period of work instability that many migrants experienced. It seems clear that this phenomenon affects both documented and undocumented migrants, and while the negative repercussions appear to be more adverse for the latter, it is important to emphasize migrants' ability to adapt to changes. As José put it, "*you have to struggle, but there's always a way to get ahead*". In this regard, it is important to underline the role of migrants as active social subjects with a real, though limited, capacity to reconfigure the socio-economic structures in which they act.

3.4.2 Polo and His Family

Like so many other migrants, in 1984 Polo went to the U.S. as a 'wetback' "*looking for a better life*". In 1988, he applied for the amnesty to legalize his status, and in 1991 he obtained his migratory documents. Today, he is 48 and a U.S. resident living in Woodstock. He is married with six children, all below the age of majority and all born in the U.S. In March 2011, Polo lost his job as a machine operator in a company where he had worked for around twenty years because the new owners decided to cut back its personnel. Though Polo could have exercised his right to sue for "unjustified dismissal", he preferred not to do so; instead, he accepted the indemnification offered, which was equivalent to 20 weeks' wages.

Despite the fact that he is still of working age and could rejoin the labor force, Polo experienced feelings of anxiety and worry because his sudden firing left his wife Paola with the sole responsibility to maintain the children and himself, at least temporarily. But at the same time, the reality of being unemployed and having to take temporary jobs that paid only minimum wage has had implications for Polo, including his limited ability to make his mortgage payments. In the weeks of desperation that followed his dismissal, Polo thought he would lose his house because he could not make those monthly payments, but by tightening the family's

belt considerably, Polo and Paola have managed to afford their house payments by means of their combined incomes.

It's been about 6 weeks since I lost my job, but [...] nothing bad's gonna happen, 'cause God gives us health and food to eat... everything's okay, that's what's most important. I don't get unemployment [insurance] now... the company's gonna pay me 20 weeks. I was in charge of a machine at a printing company... responsible to make sure that it operated well, repair it, and get it ready for when the operators came. Then one day they told me that my position was gonna be eliminated. I thought I'd be all right, but here we are, doing all we can. I have 6 children, my wife, and I still have to take care of them (Polo, 48).

When examining the cases of Polo and the García family it is important to emphasize the role of the nuclear family (i.e., spouse and children) as sources of support that permit the unit to ‘cope’ with its new circumstances and the diverse situations of vulnerability that migrants face in contexts of crisis and hostile policies; since when all is said and done, the presence of the entire family in the destination country offers moral and economic support that creates networks of trust and mutual dependence.

3.4.3 *Rosa and Her Children*

Rosa is a 36-year-old woman who migrated irregularly to the U.S. in 1993. While her objective was to “*find a better future*” her migration involved a process of “*accompanying and following*”, since after her civil wedding (she is not married in the Church), her husband took “*her with him to the U.S.*” and then applied to legalize her migratory status. But 12 years after submitting their application, Rosa has received only a work permit, not residency. In 2005, she separated from her husband and hired a lawyer to press ahead with her application to legalize her status. Today, Rosa is separated, head of her household, and the mother of four children, all born in the U.S.

In contrast to other *Vuelteños*, Rosa settled in Orlando (Florida), where she works as a housekeeper in a hotel earning a wage that allows her to survive and satisfy her children’s basic needs. In her case, the economic crisis did not affect her employment or working day, but did reduce her opportunities to earn extra income by working overtime; a source of earning that after separating from her husband represented an important option or resource that she required to live more decorously and be able to send remittances to her parents in Las Vueltas. For Rosa, losing those overtime hours has meant, among other effects, having to limit her daily expenses and a certain irregularity in sending remittances, as she can only provide her parents with money “*when she has a little left over*”. In spite of it all, Rosa, like Polo and the García family, has maintained her links with her community of origin through temporary returns for festive occasions and remittances, though only irregularly. She also continues to make the obligatory contribution to support the patron saint festivities at home.

Though I have a steady job [where I've been for 6 years], the crisis affected me because all the prices go up and money doesn't go as far as it used to. You want to work overtime, but it's not like before, 'cause tourism also decreased, so there's not the same amount of work, 'cause people don't have money to spend or try to save as much as they can. And if I don't have work, I can't help my family, right? Unfortunately, my parents depend on the little [money] that we [Rosa and her sister] send from here, so if we don't have work then what are we going to send to the family and how are we going to maintain our families there? (Rosa, 36).

3.4.4 Soledad

Soledad, 53, migrated without papers in 1981 with her husband and newborn daughter. Like all migrants, her illusion was to “*to get ahead and have a better life*”. This couple legalized their migratory status during the amnesty and today both are American citizens, as are their four children. Soledad could be an example of a successful migrant, since not only she managed to purchase her own house, but also established a convenience store and two restaurants that serve Mexican food through a partnership she formed with three siblings who also reside in Woodstock.

Soledad is responsible for administering these businesses. As the owner, she has not experienced unemployment; but has reduced her travels because the consumption of the products and services she offers has declined; indeed, more markedly and for a longer period of time than she has experienced since she began her business ventures. While she has not faced economic shortages, her income no longer leaves much room to increase her savings because, as she says, they are going through a time when they are working just to get by. This case shows that the notions of survival and family strategies are social constructions that can vary even among different *Vuelteño* families in Mexico and the U.S.

Though her migratory status is secure, Soledad perceives that the economic crisis has affected the migrant population in general, as unemployment and the lack of job openings have worsened conditions not only for undocumented *Vuelteños*, but also for migrants with legal papers who suffer reductions in their purchasing power. This is reflected in the loss of material goods, economic pressures, and reductions in the monetary support they used to send regularly to their families in the community of origin.

I think the economic situation in the U.S. is really difficult, especially for migrants without papers, 'cause every place now asks for your [social security number] and, well, those people are finding it really hard to stay. Obviously, the economy is very bad, even for those who have papers. We're affected because we have a corner store and a Mexican food restaurant and, y'know, sales are way down. We've seen a real downturn in our businesses because people don't have work and so don't have money to spend. I send money to my Dad now and then, the crisis has really hit hard here, in Las Vueltas, and all over Mexico. For example, people who used to send \$400, now only send \$100, and if they used to send every month, now two months can go by and they don't send anything. Because of the crisis people don't have money to send to folks [back home]. There's lots of people from Las

Vueltas over there, and a lot of them have lost their homes because the payments are so high, and that's happening to people with and without papers. What happened is the economy went down and took everything else with it. Here you see the effects because some people don't send money anymore; if things get better [in the U.S.], they'll get better here too (Soledad, 53).

Despite conditions of unemployment and job instability it is clear that people are willing to adapt to the changes in an ongoing search to improve their lives and family economies, and have a certain flexibility and ability to do so. According to the New Economy of Labor Migration (NELM), this reflects human agency and the capabilities and resources on which households base their decisions to try to improve their living conditions (De Haas 2010). In other words, we can say that despite the conditions of vulnerability in which this population lives, some people refuse to see themselves as victims and consider that they are active, thinking subjects who can respond to the changes and catastrophes that alter their family economy and dynamics. Nonetheless, I found that the presence of the family in the U.S. and people's legal status as documented migrants are key resources to cope with the damaging effects of the employment crisis and anti-immigrant violence by providing support, security, and benefits that lessen the pressures to survive in a society that may tolerate, marginalize, or exclude them, according to the economic conditions of the moment.

3.5 Vulnerability and the Anti-immigrant Movement

The current period of marginalization is characterized not only by the securitization of the border, but also by a war on immigration and an ideology that sees Mexicans as a threat to the U.S. security; developments manifested in deprivations and denial of access to services and benefits, especially in the areas of education and healthcare (Massey et al. 2009b). Durán (2011) argues that this political strategy—one that would be described as a combination of pressure, repression and scare tactics combined with exclusion and discrimination—is one that migrants conceive as an intent to wear them down by harping on their irregular status as a justification for 'legal' deportations. This is already spreading a negative image of Mexicans in the American society, as ever greater attention in the political scenario of Mexico's northern neighbor comes to focus on issues related to immigration and border security.

But, how has this anti-immigrant wave impacted the population of *Vuelteños* living in the U.S.? Among other consequences that we could mention in relation to this atmosphere of hostility towards migrants are the fear of being deported, the increasing difficulty of finding jobs, and the configuration of temporary job openings for undefined time periods that affect primarily undocumented migrants who are afraid to go back to Mexico because it is now so difficult, risky and expensive to cross the border. In this regard, the immobility of undocumented *Vuelteños* in the U.S. has emerged as a constant, because the impediments on temporary returns by

documented migrants “*who have not been hit as hard by the crisis*” show that the combination of economic recession with anti-immigrant violence has come to change the conditions of mobility (at least in the study area) by producing patterns of return to the community of origin marked by fewer trips and the circulation of news—like, “*the illegals that used to come to visit couldn’t get across*”—that infuse people with fear, prolong their stays, and create scenarios of immobility, because for people who have built a life and family in the U.S. returning without papers is simply no longer viable in this context of inflexibility, hostility and repression towards the migrant population; nor is it attractive for more recent migrants who went into debt to cross the border and enter the U.S. with the expectation (realistic or not) of achieving the American dream they yearn to experience.

In this scenario, it is not possible to speak broadly of a forced breaking of ties with the migrants’ home communities because what the empirical findings of this research reveal is a weakening of such connections since undocumented migrants rarely return now, while the population affected by unemployment and irregular work have suspended, interrupted or spaced out the remittances they send, and perhaps reduced the amount they can contribute to the patron saint festival.

Thus, for example, for 14.8 % (18) of the 121 households surveyed with recent migrants (2007–2011) who have not returned, we estimate that in approximately 63.2 % (12) of the cases the person or persons that left home to enter the U.S. did so irregularly, and of these, 26.3 % did not return to the community between 2007 and 2011 due to economic problems associated with unemployment and money shortages. Meanwhile, 68.1 % have not come back due to fear, insecurity or the minimal probability of making a successful return to the U.S. (Fig. 3.10). In this regard, it is clear that anti-immigrant violence is functioning to *contain* the return flow to the origin community and clearly has brought some undocumented migrants to the realization that it is in their best interests to break off the ties that connect them to family and community and act accordingly.

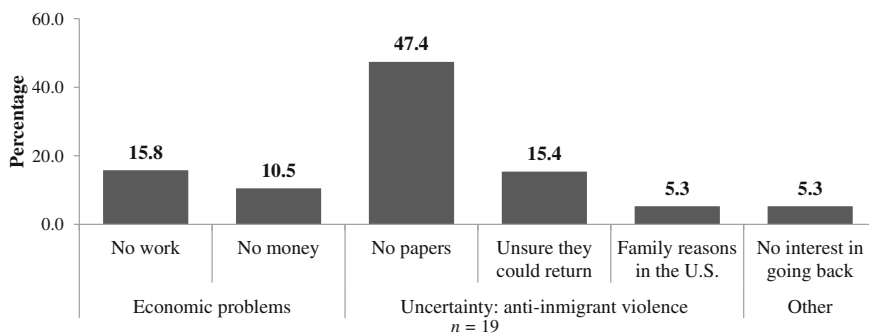


Fig. 3.10 Causes of immobility among the undocumented *Vuelteño* population in the U.S. that migrated in the 2007–2011 period and have not returned to Las Vultas. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

Other findings suggest that the wave of anti-immigrant sentiment and the implementation of hostile measures more greatly affect the undocumented migrant population, since the sanctions imposed on employers who hire migrants without legal working papers means that it is becoming ever more difficult to find jobs. Also, the employment offices or agencies which undocumented migrants used to visit to apply for work are less and less inclined to receive them because they require all applicants to give legitimate Social Security Numbers before ‘registering’ for employment, when in years past it was relatively easy to give a “false number” because checks were rare.

Although incorporation into work markets is more difficult and limited, it is still a viable resource despite the conditions of instability, irregularity, insecurity and scarce benefits. In summary, what is being recreated today is a scenario that makes the life of the undocumented migrant in the U.S. much more complicated and difficult, for it unfolds in an environment marked by increased tensions and a greater fear of being arrested by the migratory authorities due to the more frequent and aggressive raids on work centers, and the milieu of intolerance propitiated by a government that in its search to fully comply with the norms of social order and security discriminates against this population. Taken together, these factors constitute a scenario in which the U.S. is increasingly seen as a partially closed door that threatens to paralyze the fulfilment of the American dream for these migrants. Clearly, their distinct migratory conditions and differential access to human and social capital mean that “some workers suffer more than others” in situations of crisis and hostility towards this sector.

This is happening since migration increased, the migra got more aggressive, little-by-little since the attack on the twin towers. But since the economy started to go down there are lots of raids, so for example you're working in a factory and the migra comes in and carries off a bunch of people; we're seeing that a lot, that the migra goes to factories and arrests everybody that doesn't have Social Security, and carts them off in buses to the court to be deported (Gaspar, 51).

The documented migrant population expresses its inconformity and disagreement with the mistreatment that undocumented migrants receive at the hands of the authorities, because their relatives and friends live in a constant state of tension and anxiety, afraid that they may be detained and taken away at any time. This has given rise to proposals that support the long-hoped-for program of migratory reform, the implementation of another amnesty, or the issuing of temporary work permits for undocumented migrants with a history of work in the country that would allow their incorporation into labor markets with fewer difficulties or obstacles, and assure them certain guarantees and benefits.

Finally, anti-immigrant violence emerges as a process with grave implications for the socioeconomic organization of households of undocumented migrants and for those of mixed legal status, since the possible deportation or forced return of some members entails not only situations of family separation, but also new forms of organization and family arrangements in households that live in a constant state of uncertainty and emotional angst.

3.5.1 *Despite Everything They Stay in the U.S.*

Immersed in a world of violence, repression, harassment, discrimination, insecurity, unemployment and job instability, how is the permanence of documented and undocumented Mexican migrants in the U.S. to be explained? The immediate responses refer to family integration and the perception that “*things are worse in Mexico*”; that is, on the one hand, the asymmetries of development in the two countries dissuade migrants from returning (Martínez et al. 2010: 8), since that decision is more closely linked to the level of development in the country of origin and the ease of circulation, than to economic conditions in the destination country (Papademetriou/Terrazas 2009: 13). On the other, there is the factor of the consolidation of families in the U.S., since the massive pattern of family and individual migration among some *Vuelteños* led to the establishment of a population that has firmly taken root in the U.S.

Therefore, although it has been argued that the economic recession has clearly increased the number of cases of voluntary and forced returns, we must also recognize the continuity of stays and the establishment of migrants “to the Mexican” in the U.S., particularly among the documented and undocumented migrant population that “has taken root” and formed families organized in accordance with the norms of, and with closer ties to, the U.S. In 1998, Espinoza wrote that in the heart of this family organization the decision to continue or remain in the U.S. is one that involves women as mothers and breadwinners for the household because, in general, they are the members of the family that tend to support the option of remaining in *el norte*.

To give but one example, Soledad, who has achieved full economic and family integration into the U.S., but has also gone through difficult economic times, points out that even in the potential scenario of increasing economic weakness in the U.S., it is virtually inconceivable for her to structure a life based on a return to Las Vueltas because such a move would mean that she “closes the doors for [her] children” to a better future and greater educational aspirations. In this regard, it can be affirmed that children and the need to maintain family cohesion are factors that motivate the behaviors leading these migrants to confront and cope with the vulnerability, the tension and the emotional wear discussed in this chapter. In this context, it is also important to consider the influence of women migrants in the decision-making process related to the question of returning *vs.* staying. Referring to the example of the García family, when the four members were asked if they thought about returning to Las Vueltas and settle there permanently, Luis immediately responded “*Yes, because I’ve retired*”, but Ernestina said, “*No, because my kids, my daughter and son are over there and, y’know, you want to be with your kids*”. For their children, although they were all born in Las Vueltas, a return to their hometown simply is not part of their life project, because their existence revolves around a different reality and another culture, one so very different from that into which they would be inserted if they were to return.

In addition to family integration, economic factors in the destination country are a determining element in decisions to stay in the U.S. despite recent economic conditions and anti-immigrant policies because, as Camarota expressed it (2010), migrants recognize that even in times of low growth in the recipient society, the wages and job opportunities that the U.S. offers are much more attractive than those in their country of origin.

For better or worse, these are the perceptions that dissuade most migrants—especially undocumented ones—from returning to their hometowns, and lead them to remain in the U.S. until the conditions of border security allow greater mobility. This is to say, it is a well-known fact that “*over there [in the U.S.] you earn in an hour what here [in Las Vueltas] you earn for a whole day of work*”. And this constructs enormous economic and wage-related disadvantages that lead most migrants established in the U.S. to reject the possibility of returning even though they have mixed feelings fostered by the nostalgia they feel for their hometowns; but the fact is that they have built a life for themselves and their families in a country that incorporates or relegates them according to the prevailing economic conditions.

3.6 Final Comments

Along this chapter it has been demonstrated by means of a case study that the dynamic of international migratory processes is moving toward a new migratory stage, not only characterized by the marginalization of Mexican migrants in the U.S., but also by the change of historic migratory patterns of massiveness, establishment and migratory circularity.

The empirical findings of this study notice changes in the dynamic of the migratory flows that come and go, as well as the forced and voluntary returns, transcending not in the severance of the bonds between sending and recipient societies, but in a weakened presence of these bonds, which at least in this phase of the process have hindered and modified the organization of a phenomenon that had become massive and cultural.

On the one hand, the flows of people from Las Vueltas to the U.S. are experiencing a moment of deceleration and contention, in which potential undocumented migrants are waiting for a process of economic recovery, greater employment stability, higher demand for labor, more flexibility at the border, and a migratory reform, but, above all, for the recovery and increased circulation of systemic remittances. In this setting, it was found that the decision to leave Las Vueltas has advanced towards a stage in the migratory career that surpasses factors of economic rationality and involves an evaluation of both the structure of opportunities in the destination country and the potential benefits of risking migration when there are no guarantees in a context of economic uncertainty and political hostility. In this regard, we also observe behaviors that involve the temporary suspension of

migration as a resource for finding work in conditions of economic involution and migratory repression.

Parallel to these immobility processes, the new scenarios in the social organization of migration point towards what we have called the configuration of forced, temporary stays in those cases in which the periodic returns of undocumented migrants ended in unsuccessful attempts to cross the border and, therefore, the obligation to stay behind due to the fear of being apprehended and punished by deportation in accordance with recently-introduced measures of migratory control. Also, we recorded changes with respect to the temporary return of migrants—both documented and undocumented—that reveal processes of lessened mobility back to the community of origin.

In relation to the new patterns of remittances, this research found clear evidence of the deceleration, reduction, irregularity and temporary suspension that have affected in varying ways the purchasing power of *Vuelteño* households according to their individual profiles, their agency, and their access to different kinds of capital. Also, the wave of anti-immigrant sentiments has had consequences that include propagating the fear of being deported, increasing difficulty to enter labor markets, and the configuration of temporary employment opportunities of undefined duration. All of this constructs a scenario that gives rise to an image of the U.S. as a country that has partially closed its doors in these times of economic crisis, and a transformation of the notion of the “American dream” and the culture of Mexican migration.

The combination of these factors reveals that we are facing a process marked by new patterns and behaviors associated with the economic recession, the implementation of more intense measures of border control, and anti-immigrant violence. In summary, this constitutes a fabric of changes and continuities that, according to the empirical findings of this study, allow making an original contribution to the analyses of the historical conformation of migratory stages involving Mexicans in the U.S., in the sense that the current conditions are leading to the configuration of a new migratory stage; one characterized, as we have seen, by the deceleration and contraction of migratory flows and monetary remittances.

Finally, to the degree that this new phase conjugates diverse processes of change in the dynamics of international migration, these findings make us call this the era of “contraction and disengagement”, since not only is it the case that the flow of migrants to Mexico’s northern neighbor and the flow of remittances back from the U.S. have contracted, but also that the intensification of xenophobic attitudes has fostered a certain socioeconomic, political and cultural disengagement between these migrants in the U.S. and their towns of origin, and among undocumented migrants who had found in migration a strategy of life, but today have had to stop migrating to ‘await’ an economic recovery, greater work stability, increased demand for labor, and border flexibility. Clearly, what we are dealing with is a

complex process that entails dynamics of both continuity and change; one that, according to Camarota (2010: 14) and Durand (2000: 22), responds not only to the conditions of labor markets, but also to the openness of borders, the recruitment of workers, and the partial closure of the U.S. border, increased border controls, and more frequent deportations.

Chapter 4

Transformation Processes in International Migration as a Strategy of Family Life and Community Organization

Now it is not like before, it wasn't so complicated and because of it we think seriously to go, but now I think it is because of two things, no longer if I'm crossing or not, but also in the mentality of getting a job, because it used to be planning to go, crossing, and it was a sure thing to find a job. Then it is different now, you don't only think whether you're crossing or not, but if you're finding a job. I have thought about it, because of it (Roberto, 26).

4.1 Notions on the Strategies of Family Life

In the studies on life strategies (livelihoods) underlies the intention to analyze, how does the population that cannot receive a sufficient income to meet their needs materially subsist? Even though this concept has been linked, among others, with that of survival and reproduction strategies, family survival and existence, life strategies refer to the set of actions that families set to meet their needs for food, housing, education, healthcare, clothing and others (Hintze 2004). This is to say, life strategies incorporate the set of [socially determined] behaviors that secure biological reproduction and optimize the material and non-material conditions of the social agents' existence [according to their social position] (Torrado 1981: 212). This is why, they represent a pattern of reproduction activities that comes from the coordination between actors and is determined according to the processes of social differentiation and power relations (De Haan/Zoomers 2005: 45).

Because of this, speaking of life strategies implied taking into account some suppositions referred to familial nuclei, such as (Barsotti 1981: 181):

- a. *The resources of households are diverse [heterogeneous] and vary according to the local, regional or national context. Resources here are understood as the number of people per household, time availability, incomes, labor, material goods and others.*
- b. *The strategies of family nuclei can only be understood if they are related to the environment in which they act, particularly with income and occupation sources, social class they belong to, the circuits of need satisfaction they have access to and familial motivations and expectations.*

- c. *The objectives pursued are the central aspect of life strategies, therefore, it is important to identify what they are and how they are determined.*
- d. *Finally, the rationality implicit in every strategy supposes that the actions which are set into motion, given the resources and the environment, tend to accomplish the objectives of familial groups.*

To these suppositions we would have to add that life strategies are in a continual process of change and adaptation, either to increase the levels of life and income or try to decrease vulnerability and poverty (Davies/Hossain 1997: 5).

In our analysis, incorporating such suppositions allows establishing some relations: first, the strategies are part of the social organization, as in them concur numberless actions and various forms of cooperation to accomplish determinate objectives at individual, familial and even community level. Second, life strategies are heterogeneous, both because of the capabilities of the households [resources] and the constant change process of the structure that limit their opportunity window. Third, the multiplicity of strategies then explains the heterogeneity of impacts that the changes in the international migratory dynamic have on the socioeconomic organization processes of households and communities.

Theoretically, the concept of life strategies is inserted in the trend of New Economy of Labor Migration (NELM) and the livelihoods approach. In NELM, the behavior of individuals is positioned in a social context, in which the families [not exclusively the individual] participate and formulate their migratory decisions taking into consideration feelings and various elements of human behavior (De Haas 2010), which make of migrations a more complex process than that related to the knowledge of market conditions; since the decision, costs and benefits are shared and imply a strategy for the family group (Stark/Bloom 1985), by means of which they aspire to obtain an economic and social development level that cannot be easily found in the environment of their communities (López 2002).

The main argumentation of this theory is that households are capable of maximizing their income, for they are agents capable of diversifying resources such as labor, in views of minimizing risks (such as unemployment or harvest losses) and generating answers to improve their life standards, in spite of the conditions they face (De Haas 2010). In these diversification processes, international migration represents only an alternative of the multiple options that families can promote to shorten income instability (Massey 1990), as households, particularly those in the rural sphere, activate multiple income generating sources. Albeit, it is important to consider that the possible life options of the households are not static, as they are in continuous adaptation with the purpose of dealing with vulnerability situations accompanied by a change (Davies/Hossain 1997), such as the restructuring of labor markets, to give an example.

In parallel to NELM statements, the livelihood approach underscores the role of human agency, capabilities and resources upon which households support to best select their life conditions (De Haas 2010). From this approach, following

De Haas (2010), Roberts (1994), Snel/Staring (2001) and Ellis (2000), family life strategies are:

The mechanisms and decisions promoted by the households and communities out of necessity and choice to face structural problems, generate alternative options, improve their life conditions and maintain a certain level of economic security; this is to say, family strategies are the principles that guide households in the search for wellbeing, subsistence and social mobility, according to their social class and the possibilities which it brings along.

The literature that has stressed economic plurality or diversification establishes that households adopt multiple life strategies out of necessity or choice. Even though there are important differences between both types, as the former refers to desperate actions to generate incomes in the face of catastrophes or transformations that affect the household economy and force subsistence measures still more precarious (*ex post* change or crisis strategies); whilst diversification by choice includes voluntary and proactive actions to obtain additional resources (*ex ante* change or crisis strategies) (Ellis 2000). This is to say, the measures spurred by the need are *ex post* strategies that respond to specific crises and demand new subsistence pattern, while initiatives from choice are *ex ante* strategies that foresee risks and imply planning.

The economic diversification processes at rural households respond to different situations, however the main one has to do with the cyclical activity of agricultural markets, because seasonality generates variability in the income levels. Diversification is also related with the prevention of risks and insecurity associated with each income source, which literally makes room for the perception of “not placing all eggs in only one basket” at times of uncertainty that might modify the liquidity of the main economic resource. In the diversification of familial life strategies factors such as scarcity of agricultural loans and the differenced opportunities according to the abilities and capabilities of each individual also concur (Ellis 2000); here, despite we may say there is no dependence on migration and remittances, since from the beginning households would take alternative income sources in order to decrease possible risks, it is necessary to study how this relation is expressed in the origin communities and identify if there is *ex ante* or *ex post* diversification before the changes that the generation of the main economic resource can experience.

These questions are important considering that international migration has established among the main life strategies used at rural community households to diversify, secure and improve their life conditions (McDowell/De Haan 1997). In this respect, De Haas (2010) states that according to empirical evidence from a number of researches, international migration is more than a short-term strategy, as it represents a decision upon which the expectations of how to improve life conditions, potentiate investment and reduce fluctuations in familial income are supported. This is why the transition to a new migratory phase marked by deceleration reaffirms the need to enquire on the strategies that are being adopted by households in communities where migrations have consolidated as an economic practice.

This way, in a scenario where migration as a resource for diversification or multiple activities does not seem to stand any more, which are the strategies at rural households? Can it be said that international migrations are still a familial life strategy in a context of prolonged crisis, of harsh migratory control and anti-immigrant stances?

4.2 Local Subsistence Pattern and Regional Economic Insertion

In the subsistence pattern of *Vuelteño* families a number of life strategies have intervened as mechanisms or ways to adapt to the changing socioeconomic conditions; or else, as options to generate monetary incomes or assuage vulnerability and poverty processes. In the early years of growth and formation of the town, the main economic activity of *Vuelteños* was working with ixtle, a textile fiber they obtained from maguey to produce ropes, sacks and ayates, which they sold or interchanged in the markets in Sultepec and Texcaltilán. This is to say, it is noticed that the survival of the households has always been partly based on the exploitation of forest resources and the commercial relationships with some localities in the region.

Even though the population states that in those years “there was no work on the fields”, a traditional agricultural system began, with family work aimed at growing bean, quelite and chilacayote (squash), as well as oath, barley and flax in seasonal lands for self-consumption. At the same time, by the end of the 1920s, the local caciques, mostly settled in the central neighborhood, hired day-laborers from Huizcatepec and El Plan to work in the field with a salary of approximately 50 cents or 4 *cuartillos* for men, and 35 cents for women. Here it is important to notice that women have incorporated into remunerated labor in the countryside as of 1920, however in those years and up to the present, have done it in uneven conditions in relation to the salary of men.

Up to the end of the 1970s, the inhabitants of Las Vueltas acquired corn in neighbor localities and municipalities, as the one grown in the town did not have a suitable vegetative development and growth, because sowing was carried out with silt or mount soil and lack fertilization. Corn started to develop in the 1950s, when manure allowed improving cultivation lands, however the harvesting of corn, as that of bean, was for self-consumption and on occasions the surplus was sold to other families in the town.

In the same decade, some men from El Cerro, El Centro and El Rincón started their participation as agricultural merchants, buying and selling livestock they purchased in Zacatecas and the Tierra Caliente region of the State of Guerrero. Although this activity was only developed by individuals with economic means and

knowledge to establish commercial relationships in other places. Albeit, the subsistence and socioeconomic mobility of *Vuelteños* was related to the inter-municipal and interstate migratory processes, as the incursion in this sort of mobilities propitiated a differentiated access to markets and labor resources (as livestock trading), at the same time that it began configuring heterogeneity patterns in the socioeconomic status of some families in this community.

In relation to the differenced access to labor markets, while a small number of economically less vulnerable families from El Centro, El Rincón and El Cerro supported on seasonal agriculture, livestock rearing and international migrations during the Program period, it is noticed that among the poorest, employment scarcity promoted temporary migratory processes toward the municipality of Tonatico, State of Mexico: this municipality that along the 1960s and the early 1970s for *Vuelteños* symbolized a “small north” and a source of subsistence and monetary incomes.

So far, it is possible to identify that *Vuelteños*’ life strategies have been configuring according to social stratification, class relations and the very capabilities of agricultural laborers; for instance, livestock trading was an activity promoted by individuals with the capital to venture, while the strategy of temporary migration to Tonatico was largely resorted to by peasants and agricultural laborers without land and of low economic profile.

Temporary displacements to Tonatico declined in the 1970s, seemingly because of two processes, which on the one side is the growing of fava bean and pea in Las Vueltas, as two commercial cultivations in which people found an opportunity to do business and a way to generate employment and monetary incomes; and on the other, the massiveness of labor migration to the U.S., as a strategy that according to Jacinto allowed them to “make money, instead of earning *cuartillos* [in the times of the hacienda in Coatepec] and pesos [when the economic perceptions could be in dollars]”.¹

Commercial interchanges of pea and fava bean were made between merchants in Mexico City central market (*central de abastos*), who went to various points in Coatepec to buy the produce from local peasants. In Las Vueltas, the lack of suitable road infrastructure hindered this process, as freight cars could hardly enter the town and the peasants took their produce on horseback to be sold at the hamlet of La Galera.

Hence, among the agricultural workers concerns start to arise, such as the one of Servando, for who “earning some money and getting something was troublesome”, besides on some occasions they lost their investments, when temperature drops

¹Even if the labor link of agricultural workers from La Vueltas with the labor market of the municipality of Tonatico might have been configured as a step to facilitate international migration for people in Las Vueltas, given the early and historic international migration of people from Tonatico, among *Vuelteños* however, undocumented migration to the U.S. appeared as process linked to livestock activities in the State of Zacatecas.

affected the crops. Because of this, according to Ernesto “many people started to go to the U.S.”

Back then [referring to the 1970s] they grew corn, fava bean and pea, then corn was only for personal expenses at home and the fava and pea were like the thing we spent on clothes. They grew corn here, but sometimes I grew potato and it frosted and then I had nothing (Ernesto, 55 years).

By the end of the 1980s, with international migration, construction appeared as “better paid than the field” life strategy, since migrant population (mainly from El Centro and El Rincón) started investment processes for housing construction with modernist materials and finishes. At the same time, their participation in commercial activities became more noticeable.

Because of their rural condition, the principal local economic activity has been irrigated and seasonal agriculture. An activity apparently strengthened by the investment of migrants, who at some time worked in the United States, as well as the ‘*norteños*’ who still send remittances in function of the agricultural cycles of peach, avocado, tomato and manzano pepper, in views of overcoming self-consumption strategies and promote market-oriented production.

In a paradoxical manner, despite the producers recognize that large part of the cultivations are supported with remittances sent by relatives from the U.S., most of them states that occasionally they earn money, however most of the times they lose their investments, for the prices of the produce they offer can or not yield a profit. This way, even though the productive use of remittances seemed to strengthen the migration-development-familial economy relation, here we notice that the interaction with other sort of economic processes distort the potential of such researches, provoking that labor migration and agricultural remittances do not necessarily enable the socioeconomic mobility of *Vuelteño* families. This relation, simplistic nevertheless, has made agriculture a more complex phenomenon, to the extent that growing to survive and maintain the cultivations has causes such as migration and the abandonment of the countryside.

Finally, the changes that the local subsistence pattern has experienced demonstrate a constant transformation and adaption of the productive reorganization processes, which derive from the multiple possibilities and life strategies promoted by *Vuelteño* peasant households. Even if fertility, use and exploitation of the land in this community might be involved in the generation of steady employment, the strengthening of an agricultural market economy and the socioeconomic mobility of the households, we observe that agricultural, economic, political and social conditions so far insufficiently powered will continue promoting internal and international migrations and in some cases the abandonment of the countryside.

This last statement is paradoxical, as in the original migratory context of Coatepec Harinas, Baca (2011: 152) has found that agriculture is the principal productive activity, because it is a modern, dynamic and active agricultural sector that largely directs its production to commercialization. However, this does not

necessarily occur in the various localities of the region, owing to the heterogeneity in the socioeconomic characteristics of the starting context differences the employment dynamics and the patterns of local subsistence.

4.3 International Migration as a Strategy of Family Life: Symptoms of Change or Weakening?

Why do we say that international migration is a family life strategy? In a local context marked by poverty, limited access to education, minimal possibilities or options of employment, and small-scale agricultural production (for subsistence and local markets), we found that the main motivation behind migratory movements among *Vuelteños* was the ongoing process of seeking ways to generate cash income in the hope of achieving a better standard of living, just as occurs in many other rural localities in Mexico.

It was in this context that migration in Las Vueltas emerged in the town's history as a strategy related to processes of survival, but which in time evolved into a socioeconomic and cultural process that interweaves decisions on economic strategies based on need and individual choice. Here, economic need refers to ways to “*make a little money*” in order to satisfy the family's basic needs of alimentation, housing, health, education and clothing; while choice reflects individual decisions taken to satisfy a yearning for adventure, or out of curiosity, or the ego of young men anxious to reproduce the migratory behavior of their parents and close relatives. Finally, there is the impetus to satisfy people's physical and material needs in the light of the subjective feelings of poverty that emerge when they compare their standard of living to that of migrant households.

Hence, this conjugation of economic and cultural elements constitutes the base upon which the processes associated with dependence on international migration as a family life strategy rest, and the platform that allows people to diversify their activities so as to assure, and then improve, their living conditions. In other words, as De Haas (2010) maintains, more than a short-term strategy, international migration represents a whole set of decisions that involve and feed the expectations of mobility and socioeconomic security.

According to the findings of this research, it is possible to argue that during the first and last waves of migration by *Vuelteños* the principal motives that influenced decisions to depart were need and the lack of money. These factors led people to place their hopes for “*obtaining a better life*”, “*accessing better-paid jobs*”, and ‘*satisfying*’ the needs for the daily survival of their households, on migration to the U.S. (Fig. 4.1). According to the data collected, economic motivations and expectations of improvement acquired the greatest weight in the decision to migrate to the U.S., and this is what allows us to sustain that international migration by *Vuelteños* has been configured as a family life strategy fostered by need and/or personal choice.

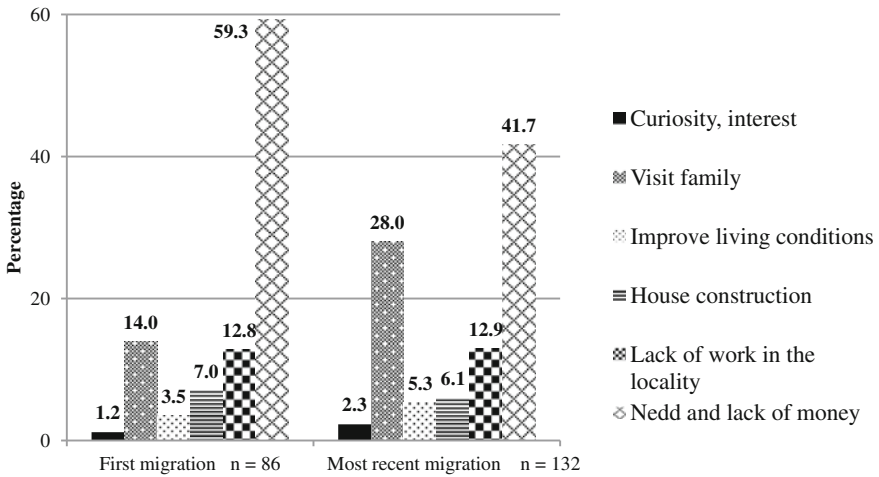


Fig. 4.1 Factors that intervened in the first and last waves of migration by *Vuelteños* to the U.S. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

As it has been mentioned, the difference lies in the context or structure of opportunities in which the decision to migrate is made: is it free choice, or one that arises from the desperate need to generate income? This has been, and still is, the duality in which migration is inserted as a family life strategy for survival or socioeconomic diversification. Two cases are presented to analyze these differences:

4.3.1 The López Family

Ernesto is now a household head—and the son of an *ex-bracero*—who migrated to the U.S. in 1975 when he was single. As the eldest child it was his responsibility to generate income to support his parents and nine siblings. Ernesto and his father cultivated corn, lima beans and chickpeas, but one year they lost their entire harvest because of an untimely ‘frost’ and particularly severe winter weather. Desperate after losing the family’s investment, Ernesto migrated with the help of money provided by an uncle (who was already in the U.S.) with the goal of “*earning money to live on*”.

Ernesto migrated without papers and was soon followed by his father, who was attracted by the illusion of earning dollars and receiving much higher wages than what he could obtain working as an agricultural laborer in Las Vueltas. After migrating, Ernesto and his father began to send back family remittances, first to guarantee the sustenance of the family, and later to finance agricultural activities in their fields. This first incursion in undocumented migration by the López family

established a conjugation between the emergence of processes of need and survival that involved individual decisions, aspirations and elections. It added new connotations to the role of migration as a family life strategy, because while it began as an act of desperation in the family's search to generate sufficient income to assure its survival, Ernesto and his family later found in migration an option that allowed them to advance beyond the level of simple survival by fostering the socioeconomic diversification of their household.

Finally, Ernesto and his father perceive, and emphasize, that the life strategy based on migration to the U.S. was an option for achieving socioeconomic mobility in their household because their incorporation into work markets in *el norte* allowed them to generate economic resources that, over time, provided the financing they required to improve their housing and begin to cultivate avocados and peaches.

4.3.2 *The Beltrán Family*

Carlos, a young (29) head of household, married María in 2000, and they have three children. Carlos, who had previous experience in migration, joined the exodus from Las Vueltas in March 2001 after the birth of their daughter Alexa, because he "*was unable to provide for his family*", since his work as a casual agricultural laborer was irregular and the wages he received very low. Tired of living in poverty, he decided to migrate and work during the agricultural season in the State of New Jersey. Thanks to the financial support of an uncle, Carlos crossed the border and soon found employment in a nursery, where a documented migrant from Las Vueltas worked as a supervisor.

Once Carlos entered the labor market, he began to send María remittances to maintain their household and satisfy her needs and those of their daughter. This helped dispel the feelings of inadequacy and desperation that Carlos experienced when the lack of work in the town limited his role as the family breadwinner. This movement provided Carlos and María a "way out", or 'strategy', which allowed them to obtain the resources they required to satisfy their daily needs. For this reason, between 2001 and 2008, Carlos continued to migrate seasonally to work during the agricultural season in New Jersey and send remittances to sustain his family, before returning to Las Vueltas for the winter.

In this case, migration as a life strategy also emerged from a context of economic insecurity and scarcity. Hence, it was a rational act, but one motivated as well by the feelings and emotions of frustration that Carlos felt as he sank deeper into poverty and found that he was unable to support his family. Having established seasonal international migration as a life strategy for his household, Carlos is sure that his "*destiny is to move from here [Las Vueltas] to there [the U.S.] because poverty and the poorly-paid hard labor he can obtain here force him to go back*". It was on the basis of this perception that Carlos and María constructed and came to depend on the process of international migration as a means of generating the resources required to survive. Although María feels lonely at home when her

husband is away working in the U.S., she affirms that for them [i.e., women in Las Vueltas] “*it’s better that their husbands go north, ‘cause when they’re over there money comes in, and though they’re alone they have enough to live on, because when they [i.e. their husbands] are here doing nothing, well... there’s often nothing to eat*”.

Once I had children, I went to the U.S. [in 2001]. The first time I was already with María; it was because of poverty. María told me and I went so I could send her money ‘cause I felt really, really bad ‘cause we couldn’t even buy milk for the baby. I went to the U.S. for the family; truth is, things are tough here, there’s no way to get regular work... I mean every day. Imagine, the last time I went, and I’m not lying, I walked for 10 straight nights, you only walk at night and, well, thank God, we got across. But imagine, ten nights with almost no food or water. We passed the puddle, as they call it, and then its pure desert, you risk your life to cross, and anything can happen to you. But once you cross you earn so much money you can send some home to the family for expenses; because, truth is, here you can’t do anything. It’s only over there you can get something, working your ass off every day (Carlos, 29).

There are many cases of households like this one that rely on international migration as a life strategy for family survival, and other cases where the goal is socioeconomic diversification. Thus, migration has been constructed as a strategy adopted both to assure survival and generate alternative sources of income. However, according to the structure of opportunities of each household, migration may emerge as a desperate measure in situations of crisis or socioeconomic catastrophe, or perhaps as an option that allows families to prepare for hardships and assure greater solvency.

Despite the maturation of international migration as a life strategy in Las Vueltas, it is clear that the recent changes in the economic milieu and migratory policies of the U.S. are modifying the socioeconomic arrangements in families like Carlos and María’s, where migration has been suspended “*cause you can’t cross anymore*”. At the same time, these new conditions foster behavioral changes and a reorganization of family life and reproduction in these households, to the extent that the new rationality involved in migratory decisions leads people, if not to abandon international movement altogether, at least to postpone it, in view of the current conditions of uncertainty that surrounds both decisions regarding the feasibility of crossing the border and the possibility of finding work in the U.S.

It’s not like before; it didn’t use to be so complicated. That’s why we think twice before going. But I think now there are two questions, it’s not just if you’re gonna cross or not, but also the mentality of whether you’ll get work, ‘cause it used to be you planned to go, get across, and you’d find work. So, yeah, it’s different now; you don’t just think if you’ll be able to cross or not, but if you’re gonna find a job. I’ve thought about it, that’s for sure (Roberto, 26).

These cases clearly show that potential migrants in Las Vueltas confront a dilemma and are questioning if it is better to migrate or stay in the community of origin in these times of crisis and work insecurity. This dilemma, linked to the culture of migration and its configuration as a life strategy, is, at least in part, what produces the expectant condition of these potential migrants, who ‘await’ improved

economic conditions and policies that will once again allow them to participate in this process. This is why the departures of potential migrants are now in a “holding pattern” that does not necessarily mean abandoning migration as a life strategy, but certainly a temporary change or weakening due to the scarce opportunities and insufficient economic progress in the community of origin that continue to make migration a more attractive option than work in the locality.

We're just waiting to go, hopefully things'll change for the better and then we'll go there again. People are waiting to go, 'cause as far as I see there's no progress here; it's really tough, that's why we're waiting for things to get better and see what happens. Most of us who live here are waiting for better times to go, when it's easier to cross and people say there's work, 'cause it's only there that you have a chance to do something for yourself (Emigdio, 23).

Emigdio's perspective suggests strongly that migration will continue to be an option or strategy for survival and diversification, because as long as this socioeconomic resource is not abandoned it will remain a viable strategy for satisfying the needs of families and people's economic aspirations. Other individuals in Las Vueltas offer similar perceptions when they say, “*there's no choice except going to the U.S.*” Carlos holds that migration is the alternative that allows him “*to best maintain his family, have sure income in case of illness, improve housing, save, and even buy toys for the kids*”. In summary, migration emerges as a socioeconomic resource that, according to this population's own sociocultural constructions, offers them a much better quality of life.

This “holding pattern” into which the dynamics of undocumented migration have been inserted notwithstanding, we must consider as well new changes that the social organization of migration might encounter in a possible future context characterized by economic recovery, border flexibility, and reduced persecution and harassment. We should add that the patterns of temporary migration observable in Las Vueltas today have brought changes in the seasonality of work periods, which are increasingly undefined and prolonged due to the fears, dangers, risks and higher costs provoked by the intense anti-immigrant violence in the U.S.

In other words, although in the perception of this population undocumented migration continues to be a life strategy for families, we perceived that the behaviors manifested in this new migratory phase indicate that the patterns of circularity that characterized seasonal undocumented migration may deteriorate even more, given that the stage called “contraction and disengagement” will aggravate the rupture of links with the community of origin as people strive to succeed—“*do all they can*”—before scheduling a voluntary trip home or being forced to return. As a corollary, it is highly probable that these conditions will increase communication by telephone and over the Internet.

A: Do you think that temporary work in the U.S. will continue as an economic strategy?

R: No, not anymore, 'cause now we're waiting to see if things get better in the U.S. and we can cross [but] we won't be coming back every year, like most young guys used to. Now you're gonna have to stay for a good while, try to do all you can, and not come back so often. Now us young guys don't think that way; if we go we'll stay there a lot longer (Roberto, 26).

Then it seems clear that international migration is in a transitory phase that is repositioning its potential to serve as a family life strategy. Although the perceptions of potential migrants still reflect the belief that “*going to the U.S. is the best way to get ahead*”, one also perceives the configuration of new rationalities that question the cost-effectiveness of this process in a context of economic insecurity and scarce guarantees of respect for migrants’ human rights.

4.4 The Migrants of Crisis: How You Suffer When There’s Nothing to Give the Kids

As we have seen, processes of international mobility by *Vuelteños* have been decelerating; however, the fact that some are still willing to run the risk of crossing into the U.S. begs the questions: who are the migrants of the 2008 crisis? And, what motives push them to adopt this strategy in an atmosphere of insecurity and marked hostility? In order to analyze this process of continuity in times of crisis, the cases of Leo, Iván and Edgar will be discussed: three young men from Huizcatepec who, motivated by rumors—“*the border is opening up*”, “*they’re letting people across*”, “*the economy is shaping up*”—decided to migrate urged on by the long-held belief that “*here you can’t do anything*”.

Among the principal sociodemographic characteristics of the family groups to which these three potential migrants belong we can mention that all are led by male heads, have five members on average, and are in the expansion phase of their life cycles. One (Leo’s) is a nuclear family, while the other two (Iván and Edgar) are extended ones. The mean number of workers per household is just one, and *per capita* income ranges from \$27 to 40 dollars/month, right on the threshold between alimentary and patrimonial poverty. These three young men work primarily in agriculture, hiring themselves out as day-laborers in orchards or greenhouses in Las Vueltas and Chiltepec. Though brief, this profile allows suggesting that the ‘migrants of crisis’ are poor young household heads who yearn to extricate themselves from their current predicament by migrating. Their situation is complicated by the fact that they own no agricultural fields to cultivate and so diversify their income. Thus, for these young peasants irregular labor as casual agricultural fieldworkers is their principal work strategy in the locality.

Therefore, the factors that impact the decisions of these ‘migrants of crisis’ include the idea of obtaining work in a setting that “*they’re told*” has improved, plus the urgent need to generate sufficient monetary income in a place—Las Vueltas—where obtaining a steady, decently-paid work is virtually impossible. In general, this combination of economic need, the commitment to provide for one’s family, and the feelings of anxiety and desperation brought on by living in poverty is exemplified in Iván’s lament: “*there’s nothing to give the kids*”. But behind these decisions there are challenges, such as obtaining the money required to enable the person to migrate, which often means turning to local usurers (loan sharks) for a

loan that the aspiring migrant believes he will be able to repay once he accomplishes the primary goals of crossing the border and finding work in the U.S.

Indeed, it seems that the debt taken on to achieve this goal means little to people who think only of raising a family and assuring its wellbeing. This was expressed by Iván, who was moved to depart by the illusion of offering his family a better life, despite the privations and hardships he has experienced, first as a son and now as a household head.

A: Why did you decide to try to go back to the U.S.?

I: Well, Leo said he wanted to try again and see what happens, then he told me. I thought about it, and well we decided to go. Just like that, one day we talked about going because people around here said things were getting better in the U.S., and there's no work here.

A: Why do you want to go?

I: I guess so, my kids have everything they need. As for me, I think, God willing, I'll be able to send them to school and with time maybe a little more, so their life can be different, so they won't have to live what I've gone through. If they know how to take advantage of it, and if God lets me live to see they can take care of themselves; not like me, 'cause I was stuck here where you can't get a thing, 'cause there's nothing here.

A: What other reasons do you have for going to the U.S.?

I: Hmmm, y'see, folks who've been there see a big change, you get more money to support yourself and send home to your family, and here it's really hard to do that, to help them out. That's why we try to cross, 'cause what we earn here, well it's hardly enough to get by on; the wages they pay us are so low; for example, I have my wife and kids and with the family it's even harder to get enough money. I don't know... but it's awful when you can't buy food for your family. That's why I want to go... and I'm going... for my family, my kids, so they won't suffer like I did. 'Cause when someone gets sick or has an accident, when you really need money, you can't get it by planting corn or beans. That's why we go (Iván, 25).

Unfortunately, this most recent attempt by Iván and Edgar to migrate ended in failure; but these two potential migrants still construct migration as an economic 'way out', due to the severe shortage of work and money that accentuates their conditions of poverty. Leo, in contrast, succeeded in crossing the border and finding work, so now his wife Karla and their household are receiving a monthly remittance of around \$300 dollars, which they utilize to cover her own daily needs plus those of their two daughters and her mother-in-law. While these remittances allow Karla and the family to live—at least for now—with a certain level of economic ease, she is well aware that a long time will go by before her husband decides to return to Las Vueltas, since seasonal migration is no longer an option for men like Leo, who are fully aware that “*going to work for a season and then returning to family*” is now an unprofitable migratory pattern because of the high costs, dangers, risks and difficulty involved in crossing the border. For Karla, the remittances she receives do not make up for her husband's long absence, but like María (above), she feels it is better for male heads to migrate and better support their families.

Finally, in a socioeconomic scenario that is as unfavorable as the one these households confront, available options are few. The first one they can choose is reinsertion into local agricultural labor markets, where most potential migrants participate “*against their will*” as they await the opportunity to return to the U.S.

4.5 Family Strategies and Diversification for Survival: From Escape Valve to Overflowing the Local Labor Market

From agricultural activities to diversification is the process that Arias (2009: 65) argues has led people from rural households to seek diverse economic options and access cash income in a context where the deterioration of agriculture, scarce credits for cultivation projects, and their declining political weight now affect peasants’ means of earning a living, and have configured two main work strategies: day-labor in agriculture in the locality or further away, and migration to cities in Mexico or the U.S. So in today’s scenario of transformations in *Vuelteño* households affected by the deceleration of remittances, failed attempts to cross the border, and the new rationality of migratory decisions, we must ask what options or strategies are available to these families to assure their survival? And, what alternatives are emerging to provide an escape from what we have called this migratory “holding pattern”?

This strategy of diversification that centered on international migration simultaneously made it possible to generate cash income for rural households, while it also served as an escape valve that relieved the pressures of unemployment, poverty, marginalization, and the absence of any effective model for promoting development in the countryside, especially with regards to peasant communities in Mexico. Migration as an escape valve apparently constituted one option for rural sectors that found in this process a strategy that, while it may not have always fostered participation in multiple economic activities, did assure the survival of households and the generation of cash income. Today, it is clear that this construction is no longer sustainable, due to current economic conditions and new migratory policies into which Mexicans’ migratory practices are inserted.

In Las Vueltas, the changes in the dynamics of international migration have had consequences for the functioning of the local work market because of the presence of so many young men who used to migrate annually but have been unable to cross the border; of others who have decided not to risk migrating for the time being; and of men who have returned voluntarily or have been deported to find themselves with no other choice than to stay in Las Vueltas. In plain terms, this means there are “*lots of people but little work*”, or, as Luisa phrased it, a process of “*piling up*” of people who need work but are only hired for one, two or maybe three days a week.

I just wish everything would get back to normal; that those who crossed every year could go back and get work instead of piling up here working only two or three days a week in whatever they can. Y'see, my son gets almost no work. I'm a widow and I can't get money anywhere except what my son gives me (Luisa, 61).

The process that has led to an oversupply of labor, Luisa characterizes as “*piling up*”, is one of the principal consequences that affect the economy of these households, since the peasants who strive to generate cash income to complement what they may obtain from their crops—which may be substantial or very little—are finding that even the option of hiring themselves out as day-laborers is hardly feasible amidst the economic crisis that is ravaging both Mexico and the U.S. Among other factors, this situation reflects the oversupply of labor and the irregular reception of remittances that local people require to finance agricultural work. Thus, producers' economic liquidity is limited and they are impeded from hiring laborers. In fact, some employers are finding it difficult to pay the wages of the few permanent workers they need. Clearly, the effects of the crisis and resulting socio-economic instability that migrants in the U.S. are suffering are making themselves felt as well in the dynamics of local work markets.

[Recently] several [guys] have come to ask for work, but I can't give them permanent jobs. I tell some that I have work for them today, but not tomorrow. I say 'hang in there' 'til such-and-such a day. And sometimes they say if I don't have work for them I should tell them so they can look somewhere else. Sometimes they do but mostly they don't. Here the folks that live from the fields, who hire themselves out by the week, well, they have to get by on 28 dollars a week, and with a family of 5, that's a bitch. Y'see there's no money, that's the thing. Some of us, like me with the orchards I work with my brothers who are over there [in the U.S.], well they aren't sending [money] and I have to scrape to pay the permanent workers, so the ones who come to ask for work, I usually can't hire them (Teodoro, 38).

This “*piling up*” process of a semi- or seasonally-occupied economically-active population has propitiated changes in the behavior of both employers and field-workers, as some of the former replace their usual workers with ‘new’ people (youths) who have migratory experience but were unsuccessful in crossing the border, or who have returned to Las Vueltas. Meanwhile, some non-migrant workers are being displaced by others who, in Alberto's words, “*think they're some kind of kings and come to take the jobs from older men and ones who haven't gone north*”. In summary, Las Vueltas is living a process of job scarcity associated with transformations in migratory patterns and the vulnerability of migrants in the U.S. that, added to changes in local work markets, is affecting not only the economy of families and entire communities, but is generating situations of rivalry and competition in a stagnant labor market where, it seems, the older economically-active male population and younger workers with no migratory experience find themselves at a severe disadvantage.

I wish they could cross 'cause the few people here would have more work. I mean there are lots of migrants here that haven't been able to cross or have been deported, 'cause we give work to migrants, and the people we used to hire, well maybe we don't anymore. The guys who come back from the U.S.... how can I put it?... Well, they're rivals for work with the ones who don't like to go to the U.S. (Moisés, 48).

In these circumstances, the work strategy of reinsertion into local agricultural work markets reveals that even in the processes of the new rurality, earlier field activities re-emerge and are reactivated when income generation based on alternative strategies like international migration wanes. In this regard, as it has been argued, family life strategies are undergoing changes associated with the contraction of migration and remittances as socioeconomic resources; though this depends greatly on the availability of capitals, individual capacities, and the agency of the members of migrant households affected by these changes in the social organization of international migration.

4.6 What Are *Vuelteños*'s Life Strategies?

Socioeconomically speaking, rural spaces have been transformed into heterogeneous scenarios because most of the activities that generate income are not necessarily related to agricultural activities but, rather, to a combination of incomes that may be constant or irregular, to individual enterprises and wage-work, and to cash resources and subsidies, either public or private. In response to these transformations, people in the countryside depend on multiple work activities that entail the prolonged and undefined mobility of the income-generating members—both men and women (Arias 2009: 262)—who may migrate to ensure social and family reproduction that require resources to cover the costs of diverse activities and daily needs (Vázquez 2007: 161). However, as mentioned earlier, in a context of economic crisis, increased border control and anti-immigrant sentiments, the new migratory scenarios have configured changes in the economic and social role of this process. “*Making do with less*” is the phrase that characterizes the economic adjustments that Blanc et al. (2011: 84) argue are leading households in Tlacuitapa (Jalisco) to adapt to modifications in migratory patterns while, in contrast, in La Huacana and Villa Morelos (Michoacán) it seems that new alternatives or possible solutions to the crisis and the non-mobility of migrants are emerging (Quitte 2010).

But, returning to Las Vueltas: how are people responding to the changes in the social organization of migration in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis? or, perhaps better, which options have *Vuelteño* households adopted to generate monetary income and confront these transformations? A process that involves reorganizing and diversifying sources of income to meet their needs (survive) or prevent fractures in the family economy (election) is the option which these households have turned to during this transitory phase that has repositioned the potential of international migration as a family life strategy. Let us look at some examples.

The Benítez family created bases of economic dependence on migration. Cirilo, the head of this household, is a farmer who grows corn and beans on his own fields and occasionally hires himself as a casual laborer. His wife, Alma, is a dedicated homemaker who helps out in the fields when necessary. However, because the crops this family harvests are for domestic consumption only, their cash income

came from annual seasonal migration by Pepe and Joel, their sons, who while working in the U.S. used to send between \$150 and 200 dollars a month to support their parents in Las Vueltas. But when the border was virtually closed and surveillance intensified, this form of socioeconomic organization was no longer feasible. The family was forced to enter a process of re-accommodation because Alma had obtained a “no-interest” loan of \$650 dollars to help finance her sons’ journey to the border at Agua Prieta in March 2009. Both Pepe and Joel tried to get across twice, but were unsuccessful, so they decided to give up and return to Las Vueltas. Once back home, they conveniently forgot about the debt their mother had contracted and that Alma still had to pay off. She finally managed to do so in July 2011 by raising animals and offering them in payment to the person who had loaned her the money. Due to the boys’ negligence she was also forced to make food to generate cash income for her household, and her family was forced to live on the approximately \$20 dollars she received per week from this activity plus the \$25 or 30 dollars that Cirilo earned in the fields when he was hired; but that became less and less often because of his age, 61. Also, he was often paid less than the current wage for agricultural workers in Las Vueltas.

Initially, the failure to cross the border left Pepe and Joel despondent due to the informal, poorly-paid job opportunities in Las Vueltas. Pepe decided to migrate to the state of Morelos where—he was told—work was abundant. Joel, meanwhile, used the scarcity of work as an excuse for not contributing to household upkeep, despite the fact that he had entered the labor force as a full-time worker in a greenhouse. Still, he is resentful and yearns to receive the higher wages he was used to earning in the U.S. After this process of socioeconomic reorganization, Cirilo and Alma now receive some support from Pepe, who sends ‘internal’ instead of ‘external’ remittances. Though the amounts are relatively lower than what he remitted when working in the U.S., they are just as important—or perhaps more—for in the current situation of crisis and reorganization they are enough to assure the survival of the family. Joel also now contributes around 60 % of his weekly income to help cover household expenses.

Another manifestation of the changes in the role of international migration as a life strategy comes from the case of the González family, a household made up of a young couple (approximately 25 years old) with three children under the age of 5. In this case, Julián, the head, returned to Las Vueltas from Wisconsin in December 2009 to spend the winter season. But when the time came to go back to the U.S. in 2010, he was unsuccessful, despite *five* attempts. That left him with a debt of \$1,000 dollars that he has been unable to pay because, as he says, “*the economic situation in Las Vueltas is really tough, ‘cause there’s no work and you earn so little*”. To confront the economic difficulties generated by Julián’s unsuccessful attempt to migrate, the González family has sought to complement the income he earned there with occasional work as an agricultural laborer, the money from sales of lima beans and chickpeas to local merchants, and the occasional sales of sodas in a small space they adapted at the entrance to their home.

Fausto provides a third example. He narrated that the economic situation in the U.S. and the lack of jobs in Las Vueltas mean that “*hunger is really screwing*

families and making them suffer". He has found it difficult to secure the economic means to sustain his wife and their four children on a weekly wage of only \$30 dollars. The lack of employment in Las Vueltas and his failed attempt to cross the border forced Fausto and his family to recur to other resources, so they set up a small grocery store that his wife Mariana attends, but that barely generates 15 dollars a week, so they also rely on the money that Fausto obtains from his small peach orchard that in May and June each year provides a little income. While variable, it does represent a capital of equal importance to what they manage to obtain from their other activities. Finally, an additional resource is the approximately \$23 dollars that Mariana receives bimonthly from the government's "Working Women's Program" [*Programa Mujeres Trabajadoras*]. The socioeconomic reorganization of Fausto's family clearly shows strategies designed to generate limited and variable earnings by combining cultivation with other kinds of activities, such as small-scale commerce and state support. For the time being, Fausto has scrapped migration as an economic strategy because he knows that "*it's not just getting across, now it's arriving to find you can't get work*".

So, based on the 2011-ESF, we were able to determine that the economic resources that people do not receive any longer due to the deceleration of migratory flows and remittances are being replaced, at least to some extent, by multiple, diverse family strategies that, far from being mutually exclusive, are complementary. In a scenario of no-migration and reduced or inexistent remittances, people are turning to a combination of agricultural and non-agricultural incomes that depend on each household's composition, ability to innovate, and available resources. In summary, among the multiple strategies adopted to sustain the family and generate resources we can identify the following: (i) reincorporation into local labor markets, especially in greenhouses that have recently begun to offer some—still quite limited—job openings; (ii) searching for employment options in other labor markets, such as in Toluca (State of Mexico) and other states where members of the *Vuelteño* community reside; (iii) selling crops often at prices below market value; (iv) exploiting the internal resources, capacities and abilities of household members; (v) raising and selling animals as a type of "in-kind" insurance; (vi) cutting back on daily expenses; (vii) asking relatives for help; and, (viii) government support.

4.6.1 The Local Labor Market

Perhaps the first option to generate income in the face of the contraction of international migratory movements is reincorporation into local labor markets. Although the amount earned is usually well below what a migrant would receive in the U.S., it is indispensable for family survival. As a work strategy, reinsertion into agriculture occurs under two modalities: (a) hiring oneself as an agricultural day-laborer; and, (b) self-employment in one's own fields that may have lain fallow for several years.



Fig. 4.2 Installation process of a greenhouse for tomatoes in Las Vueltas, Coatepec Harinas, State of Mexico. *Source* Photograph taken by the author during the research carried out in the community

Though opportunities to work as agricultural day-laborers are hardly abundant, they have expanded somewhat thanks to the installation of greenhouses—which produce tomatoes and chili peppers—that offer seasonal employment that varies according to each producer’s economic capacity to hire workers and cultivated surface area. Another option is to work in orchards (peach, avocado), but that is occasional and limited to the periods when the owners prepare the land, transplant trees, do pruning and weeding, or harvest.

According to Roberto, the voluntary and involuntary return of migrants has fostered the recovery of agricultural production on fields that had fallen in disuse. This not only contributes to sustaining returnees’ families but also foments temporary work for casual laborers; circumstances exemplified by cases like that of Fabián, a 60-year-old documented migrant head of household. Fabián opted to “go back-and-forth” between the two countries, working in the U.S. only during the agricultural season. However, when he went in 2009 he found there was no work, so he decided to return and plant chili peppers to earn money that, according to his wife, Irma, “*at least allows them to keep their kids in school*” (Fig. 4.2).

When lots of people used to go [to the U.S.] they’d close off their fields around here. They didn’t cultivate them ‘cause they were away or didn’t need to harvest since they received big remittances from over there. But not anymore; now they’ve started to open those fields

and plant again because, truth is, this was a real big change. People who couldn't migrate are trying to figure out how to work here. Some get jobs in greenhouses in Chiltepec, others started to cultivate fields that were abandoned. They're just trying to adapt to life here 'cause they can't go back there (Roberto, 47).

But the job opportunities that the reactivation of agricultural fields offers are limited. Producers argue that their profits are very low and it is extremely expensive to install greenhouses and pay the wages of the workers required to operate them. For these reasons, most peasant farmers prefer to have family members do most of the work.

One non-agricultural activity—construction work—is another strategy available to *Vuelteños*. In years past, international migration made this a “better-paid” employment option than casual agricultural work because migrants often made substantial investments to build attractive, comfortable, spacious homes for their eventual return. Of course, having one’s own home provides a refuge from unemployment and recurring labor crises while offering a sanctuary which migrants can return to if they are deported, suffer an accident, have family or legal problems, or simply want to rest or return for one of the town’s festive occasions (Arias 2009: 269).

However, with the economic crisis and the resulting social vulnerability that so many migrants are dealing with, construction as an economic activity has also declined in Las Vueltas, because the reduced circulation of remittances to finance house construction has shrunk the potential of this sector as an employment strategy (Fig. 4.3).

In another development, participation in tertiary sector activities is gaining importance, thanks to the opening and operation of several small commercial establishments that offer diverse services: grocery stores, bakeries, a pharmacy, an ironworks, a carpentry workshop, and a locksmith’s shop, among others. In this regard, the service sector seems to be growing as an option for income-generation. Though it may seem contradictory, the deceleration of migration and remittances and the temporary return of many migrants have clearly reduced the dynamism of



Fig. 4.3 The type of houses built by the migrant population in the community of Las Vueltas. *Source* Photograph taken by the author during the research carried out in the community

local businesses and reduced their sales, but this has not dissuaded some families from opting to establish improvised workplaces (called *changarros*) where they may sell food, sodas, candies, or basic groceries.

4.6.2 *Other National Work Markets*

When migration to the U.S. is no longer an attractive or accessible option the alternatives that emerge reflect on the one hand, the urgent need to generate cash income, and on the other, people's inconformity with local work opportunities. In this regard, during fieldwork it was found that in this context of crisis and migratory hostility a process of substitution appears in which international migration may be replaced by internal migration. Cases of young men and women who migrated to other municipalities or states to enter labor markets in Toluca, Mexico City, Morelos and Tijuana were recorded. However, as it occurs with international movements, the selection of internal destinations is not a random process. Internal migrants move to "try their luck" in places where they have contacts, friends or close relatives. According to Durand (2002: 141), decisions regarding internal migration also seem to revolve around each individual's human and social capital.

Thus, for example, Rita, a young (25) single mother failed in her attempt to enter the U.S. in June 2008, so she took a job for around eight months as a cashier in a clothing store in Toluca. But in January 2011 she was anxious to earn more money to support her daughter, so she opted to migrate to Tijuana, where she could count on the help of her *comadre*, Patricia. Today, Rita lives far away from her daughter, but has a job—also as a cashier—in a department store and is studying to finish junior high school (*secundaria*). This migration gave her the opportunity to earn an income that is sufficient to sustain both her daughter in Las Vueltas and herself in Tijuana.

In January [2008], Rita failed to cross into the U.S. First, she worked in Toluca with her cousin, as a cashier; then she said she wanted to go with her comadre in Tijuana 'cause she'd be able to earn more there. So she left her 6-year-old daughter here with me. She calls the child every week, but she's really sad and asks [Rita] why she went so far away. She really wants to see her. We have no idea when she might come back 'cause she got work there and is going to school (Teresa, 54).

In a similar situation, José Eduardo, his wife, Liliana, and their son, migrated to Cuernavaca after Eduardo failed to enter the U.S. in 2010. Among the motives that explain this move are the feelings of discontent and inconformity that he experienced because of the low, irregular income he earned by hiring himself out as an agricultural day-laborer. Now, by participating in the labor market in Cuernavaca, Eduardo and his wife received an average monthly income of around 360 dollars. But Liliana missed life in her hometown, especially because her son had greater freedom there, so the family returned to Las Vueltas. Eduardo, however, as the head of household and breadwinner, is once again pondering internal migration as a work

strategy, because for him working outside Las Vueltas means having a “more stable” job, better remuneration, and some fringe benefits (*prestaciones*) that are virtually impossible to obtain as a casual agricultural laborer or construction worker in his hometown.

When I was in Cuernavaca, we were getting ahead, a lot more than here [in Las Vueltas]. I went to Cuernavaca 'cause there was no work, I'd been out of work for over two months, just a little as a day-laborer in the fields. But no, not for such a low wage. I mean you get spoiled when you earn \$10 dollars an hour, and here it's a measly 7 dollars a day; it's the shits! In Cuernavaca, I got paid better than here... 50 dollars a week. The work isn't heavy, it's easier than in the fields, and they give you a Christmas bonus. I'm thinking about going back [to Cuernavaca] because you can get ahead there [Eduardo, 23].

Internal migration has been revitalized as a work strategy due to the pressing need to obtain resources that allow families to satisfy their daily needs. Although this strategy does not provide an income equivalent to what these workers received in the U.S., it does represent an option for entering work markets through the service sector and earning a regular paycheck that is significantly better than what can be earned in Las Vueltas.

4.6.3 *Underselling Harvests*

Peasant households with sufficient social and economic capital to maintain small peach or avocado orchards, or to cultivate chili peppers, lima beans or chickpeas, constantly complain that selling their products in the market “*sometimes gives a profit, but other times it's only enough to keep planting, and often it only gives you losses*”. “*The peasant's life is a farce [says Moisés], 'cause you never know if you're going to win or lose*”. In *Vuelteño* households these perceptions are stoked by the low prices of agricultural products; for example, the price of a crate of peaches for local producers fluctuates with quality and supply (when supply is high, prices fall). While the nominal cost of a crate is 7 dollars, there are periods when prices fall to just 4 dollars per crate.

“*Underselling the harvest*” is the strategy or option that Servando and Ernestina adopted when the remittances of approximately \$200 dollars per month that their daughter, Carolina, sent to support them and maintain their peach orchards were interrupted. Finding themselves bereft of that cash income, Servando and Ernestina sold their peaches at 7 dollars per crate, but that provided them with barely 133 dollars for almost 19 full crates obtained from the first harvest. This couple also has a chili pepper garden that produces 15–20 kilos a week, which they can sell for anywhere from less than a dollar and up to two dollars a kilo, depending on the season and market conditions.

In similar circumstances we find Serafín, Estela (both 75) and their daughter María (50), for while they receive around 50 dollars bimonthly from the government's “70 and over” program, Serafín considers that the principal source of income that sustains them comes from their agricultural activities, specifically



Fig. 4.4 Family from Las Vueltas engaged in growing peach, picking of the fruit to be sold. *Source* Photograph taken by the author during the research carried out in the community

peach and chili pepper production. But this activity depends on the monthly remittances that Serafín's children send from the U.S. Although the family ceased to receive those monthly infusions of cash in November 2010, the interruption came just after a final transfer of \$800 dollars arrived. Serafín distributed that income between household expenses and the wages he owed his agricultural laborers. In May 2011, Serafín and Estela harvested around 150 crates of peaches, which they were able to sell at 6 dollars each to obtain a total income of 900 dollars, though Serafín does not know if this gave him a profit in relation to his original investment (Fig. 4.4).

Situations like those that Servando's and Serafín's households are living seem to be a constant for peasant families in Las Vueltas that have agricultural land but limited capital. They can assure the sustenance of their families with agricultural production that in some cases is co-financed with remittances from migrants in the U.S. who try to help their families by enabling them to make investments that may generate profits. However, this objective is highly vulnerable to external factors that affect the value of their harvests, such as climate variations and oversupply.

4.6.4 Internal Resources

“Diversifying to survive” is a process that entails adopting strategies that include optimizing the household’s internal resources, capacities and abilities by performing additional activities that allow members to generate cash income to sustain the family. As we have shown in this study, the option of incorporating new activities often means involving the female members of the household. Clearly, women are now participating actively in sewing, embroidery, paid domestic service, cooking, and food preparation. In this regard, it is important to emphasize the role of women homemakers whose domestic work—usually underpaid and undervalued—includes diverse activities performed to satisfy the needs of household members. It is also important to mention that of the 132 homemakers registered in the 2011-ESF, 32.5 % (43) do extra-domestic work, which illustrates the importance of generating resources at household level (Fig. 4.5). In other words, these are women who in their daily routine perform the domestic tasks socially assigned to their gender, but combine them with various income-generating economic activities (Baca 2011: 213).

For example, taking advantage of the local custom of “*eating pozole*” after attending Sunday Mass, some women prepare a variety of tasty dishes in their

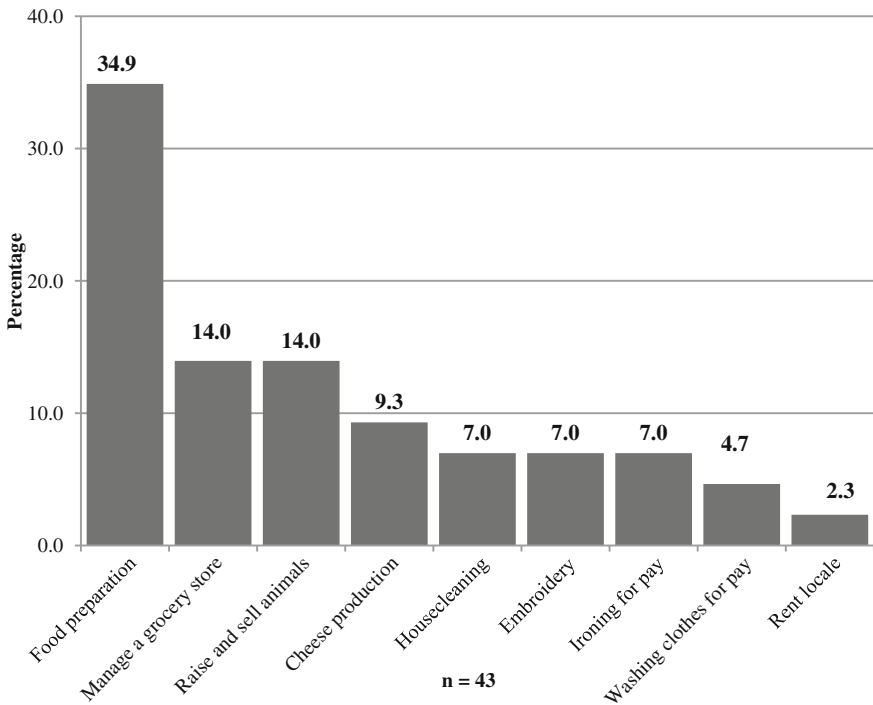


Fig. 4.5 Extra-domestic work performed by female homemakers to generate income in Las Vueltas. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

kitchens that they sell in improvised spaces or even the dining rooms of their homes. Other activities that we documented among women included: elaborating and selling cheese, doing embroidery, sewing, and mending clothes. In addition, some women perform everyday domestic jobs like ironing, housecleaning, or washing clothes for other families in order to earn an income for the household. Finally, we saw cases in which women take care of the uninhabited homes of migrants who are in the U.S. In all such situations, their objective is to contribute with monetary income to enable the family to better afford the basic needs of all members.

In addition to these contributions, certain non-monetary resources may also help satisfy families' alimentary needs. For example, we saw that agricultural production—fruit and vegetable harvests and products derived from animals—provide food that, in Ernesto's words, "*allow you to eat half-decently*". People in Las Vueltas thus "*depend on their own devices*" and exploit internal resources and the capacities of household members as elements of a survival strategy that, on the one hand, allows them to generate cash income, while on the other, satisfies subsistence needs.

4.6.5 Raising and Selling Animals

Raising animals has increased as a life strategy in this context of crisis and migratory immobility, because poverty, lack of work, and limited opportunities in the locality combine to configure scenarios of vulnerability that these rural households must confront by implementing diverse strategies. Under these conditions, having a cow or a few sheep, hens, pigs or other animals represents a kind of guarantee, since they are resources that households can turn to in times of illness, family problems, or inadequate income when economic times are tough and migration is no longer part of their life strategy. These 'assets' are part of a strategy that allows families to obtain cash in situations of emergency. In other words, the availability of animal resources constitutes a kind of 'savings' that can be transformed into money during periods of scarcity, when debts need to be paid, or when cash is required to satisfy some economic need. In this scenario, raising animals and fowl is taking on greater importance as a form of "economic insurance" that allows people to prepare for situations of crisis and economic insecurity.

4.6.6 Limiting Expenses

Even though, theoretically-speaking, "tightening one's belt" or "cutting back" on expenses are not considered strategies that generate cash income, they are components that constrain people's lifestyles and form part of the life strategies adopted for family survival. Here we use the term 'lifestyle' to refer to the day-to-day



Fig. 4.6 Family from Las Vueltas that has migrant population in the United States. *Source* Photograph taken by the author during the research carried out in the community

existence that currently characterizes most *Vuelteño* households. The resources available to satisfy their needs are limited and must be administered carefully. Often, total household income is insufficient to assure social and physical wellbeing. Thus, for the majority of *Vuelteño* families “tightening the belt” is an ongoing strategy that obliges them to apply the resources available to satisfy their most pressing, immediate needs (Fig. 4.6).

The deceleration of migration and remittances has accentuated economic deprivation, forcing people to reduce or limit their daily expenses. In these circumstances, restricting cash outlays is an *ex-post* response to changes or perturbations in people’s main sources of income. More than an additional option that families may elect, this entails adjustments and re-accommodations imposed by the conditions of need and vulnerability that the contraction of international migration has brought in its wake, and that is affecting so many *Vuelteño* households in their search for sustenance and the means to stimulate pluri-activity as a work strategy and the diversification of monetary income.

4.6.7 Help from Relatives

Among other life strategies that have emerged in this context of deceleration and crisis is the search for additional sources of economic support, especially in the

form of internal remittances. While receiving financial aid from relatives opens a window of opportunity to obtain monetary income, as a strategy it is only available to those *Vuelteño* households that have members who live in places like Toluca or Mexico City and have the wherewithal to offer help in times of economic difficulty. For this reason, it could be said that the deceleration of international migration and monetary remittances reactivated internal migratory flows, while simultaneously assigning a particular kind of dynamism to internal remittances. This is because the transfers effectuated under this modality provide some economic security to afford part of a household's daily expenses or, perhaps, to cover especial expenses, such as the costs of attending an illness.

4.6.8 *Other Strategies*

Finally, although it was not the aim of this study to examine social problematics that are emerging with, or being revived by, transformations in the processes of international migration, I must call the readers' attention to the conditions of violence and insecurity that, according to the local people's perceptions, have intensified and become more notorious over the past five years with reports of thievery, burglaries and even kidnappings (*levantones*).² These scenarios of insecurity and violence are another factor that is impacting some *Vuelteño* families' decisions regarding internal migration, as they have opted to leave Las Vueltas because they no longer feel safe in the community. Among other causal factors that have generated this security crisis we can mention scarce job opportunities in Las Vueltas and nearby communities, where robbery and mugging seem to constitute an easy way out for people who feel this is an acceptable way of obtaining income. According to local people, other causes linked to the climate of insecurity in this locality are changes in migratory patterns, especially insofar as they increase the presence of deported migrants who settle in Las Vueltas and neighboring towns.

Now with so many bad guys around it's more dangerous. Insecurity is a real problem these days. Just a few years ago here in Las Vueltas we felt protected, as a community, we felt free, safe. I think that for maybe five years now I don't feel safe, because they're robbing houses and have mugged people over on the highway (Anonymous, July 2011).

A: What do you think has caused this insecurity?

B: So many lazy guys, maybe from here [Las Vueltas] or somewhere nearby [neighboring towns]. We've told the authorities here in Coatepec, but all they say is that if we have proof we should tell them. We've asked them to have plainclothes police come here and patrol, but their visits are few and far between. And I think this has to do with so many guys being deported and then coming here. I mean, all they do is send back the ones who get out of line up there, and then they come here and do all their crap (Anonymous, July 2011).

²A problem identified at municipal level. For more information see, "El crimen organizado llega a Coatepec de Harinas", Foro TV, *Los Reporteros* [<http://tvolucion.esmas.com/foro-tv/the-reporteros/173683/the-crimen-organizado-llega-coatepec-harinas/>].

It is not the intention here to blame deported migrants for this violence and insecurity, but it is necessary to point out that many migrant communities are experiencing serious social fractures as a consequence, at least in part, of transformations in the processes of international migration and, of course, the lack of employment in towns and nearby localities.

Returning to the topic of the life strategies adopted by households in Las Vueltas, it was found that entering or participating in these activities differs according to the modality of change that affects individual households in the community: i.e., reduced remittances, recent failed migratory experiences, temporary abandonment of migration, voluntary or involuntary returns, and forced stays in Las Vueltas. In the cases of households that no longer receive remittances, or that receive much less money, the options implemented to replace that source of monetary income appear to be more diversified, and our observations show that their choices reflect active reactions and responses. However, we also saw forms of economic reorganization of a more passive nature, in the sense that they require only adjustments or re-accommodations, such as reducing daily expenses, adapting to limitations on available resources, and turning to relatives for aid. This behavior pattern is congruent with the profile of these households, which tend to be families with older adults. While these households are not restricted in terms of looking for other economic options, they do tend to show greater dependence on what they have and what they may receive from relatives (Fig. 4.7).

This situation is different from that of households with members who have decided to postpone migration or abandon it temporarily, since most choose to seek work in the local labor market if possible, while others opt to migrate internally by moving to neighboring municipalities or states to look for employment. With respect to households with members that failed to enter the U.S. in 2008–2011, the life strategies implemented to assure family survival during this time of economic crisis include reinsertion into local agricultural activities, asking relatives for assistance, raising animals, exploiting personal resources, abilities or capacities, and participating in job markets in other municipalities or states (Fig. 4.7). The more pronounced diversification seen in these family nuclei relates to their sociodemographic profile, for they are younger households with children and household heads in productive ages who can “struggle along” and turn to diverse alternatives that allow them to provide for their families and diversify the household economy.

In the households that reported the presence of migrants who returned voluntarily, we found people who tend to return to a life strategy that includes agricultural work and raising animals in the locality (a type of self-employment), but requires adjusting or limiting household expenses. This is because the return to the community of origin entails a process of re-adaptation to the local lifestyles and life-ways of Las Vueltas. Finally, both households with deported migrants and those that reported forced temporary stays in Las Vueltas have focused on re-insertion into agricultural activities by exploiting their own fields.

To finalize, it is important to emphasize that the socioeconomic reorganization of these households reflects the adoption of different life strategies to generate income that will compensate for the deceleration of international migration; a process that

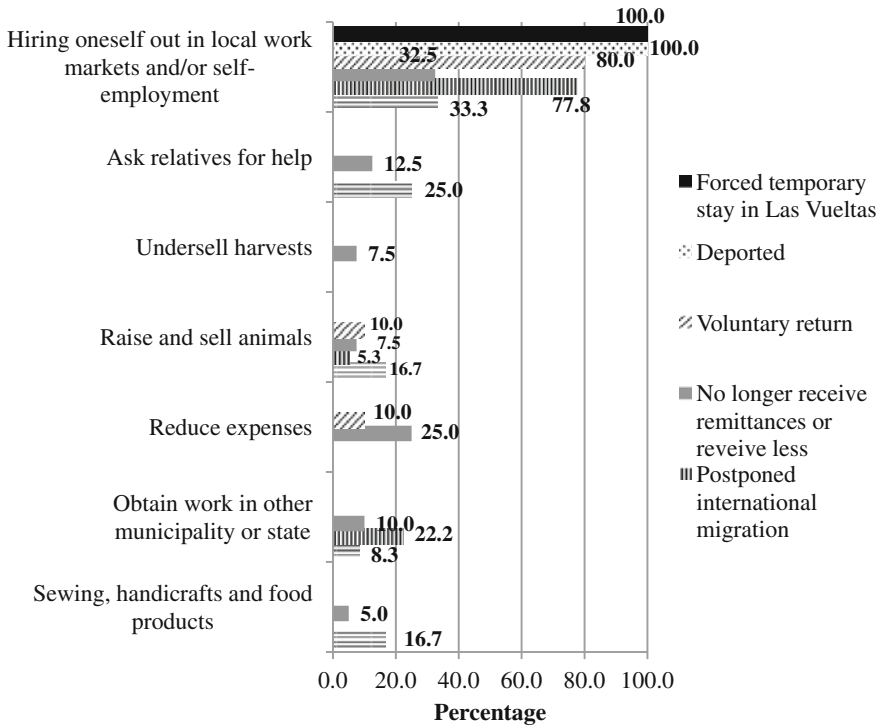


Fig. 4.7 Life strategies implemented according to the modality of change in international migratory processes in *Vuelteño* households, 2011. *Source* Elaborated by the author based on the 2011-ESF

we have characterized as the (re)activation of multiple work activities. This pattern is not new, but has been strengthened in the face of the uncertainty that is affecting the community since “*people can no longer cross*”, “*think twice about going north*”, or “*no longer receive money from the U.S.*”. It is on the basis of these findings that we argue that this case study found scant evidence of the activation of new strategies, but clear indications that the new migratory scenarios are strengthening and intensifying participation in activities that local people performed before international migration became popular: agriculture, animal-raising, commerce and internal migration. Unfortunately, the new or emerging patterns may also involve criminal activity, violence and insecurity that, people say, has increased with the deportations of undocumented migrants. Finally, the rearrangements, readjustments and modified patterns of socioeconomic reorganization in these households generate income from diverse activities for the ultimate goal of finding the means to obtain the economic resources required to assure family survival and satisfy the basic needs of households.

4.7 Community Dynamics and Celebrations

The recent transformation of the international migratory processes, besides affecting the socioeconomic organization of the households has transcended in the activation of new patterns in the community's sociocultural and economic actions, customs and lifestyles; particularly, those that have developed closely to migratory practices, such as the patron saint celebrations and December festivities, whose performance moved to a stage in which these festivities need the migrants and their remittances, but what occurs now with these forms of organization inscribed in a new migratory phase, characterized by the deceleration of migratory flows and the marginalization of migrant in the U.S.?

4.7.1 Family Festivities

As in the majority of towns with long migratory traditions, the Patron Saint festivities are an especial occasion for celebrating sacraments like marriage or baptism. While it cannot be demonstrated that the U.S. economic crisis and its effects on the migrant population in Las Vueltas are the principal factors involved—however they are clearly important—, they do seem to be having repercussions, such as the reduced frequency of family reunions and celebrations in the community of origin. This by no means reflects a complete rupture of such practices, only that celebrations which in years past brought together numerous residents are now much more modest; i.e., there may be no Mariachi, and the variety of food and drinks served is noticeably shorter. Another aspect of this adaptation is the fact that people often cooperate to hold two or more celebrations at the same time. Some festivities are no longer individual, but shared; still they provide spaces to celebrate special family moments, but allow people to reduce the costs involved and thus optimize their resources (Fig. 4.8).

Other occasions that have long provided opportunities for family celebrations are the closing ceremonies at local schools. But with the reduced economic support from the '*norteños*', the scale of the traditional family reunions or parties that followed these events has declined noticeably in recent years; a direct consequence of the deceleration in the economic remittances that once provided the funds needed to organize such community-wide events.

People [in the U.S.] just don't have [the money] to support their relatives in their hometowns. Here, the cash received has really fallen off. You can see it simply in the festivities and reunions. Before, the end-of-year school parties were really big affairs with all kinds of food, but no more. 'Cause if there's no money coming in, there won't be enough food. Some people get together; for example, by combining a kid's First Communion in May with the school closing of another child in July. What I mean is they combine two or three events due to the economic situation, when before they'd hold two or three [separate] parties, and this is clearly because resources have decreased (schoolteacher in Las Vueltas).



Fig. 4.8 A shared family celebration: a wedding together with a *quinceañera*. *Source* Photograph taken by the author during the research carried out in the community

Similarly, the celebrations of Sunday Mass and those held at all these festive events have experienced a decline in the offerings given by *Vuelteño* households. The collection plates return empty because families can no longer contribute to the Church as they did in the earlier scenario when migration and remittances were continuous and stable.

The offerings the Church receives have also felt the effects of the crisis. In the Sunday collections it's clear that people... well, they just don't have money, so we don't collect what we did two or three years ago (the Priest in Las Vueltas).

What these conditions demonstrate is that changes in the social organization of international migration also seem to be impacting the performance of some family and community traditions by transforming or modifying practices that had been established as local customs intimately linked to the economic resources that entered from the U.S.

On the other side, we find that in Las Vueltas, in December it was a time with room for circulation and visits of documented and undocumented migrants; the aim was to enjoy the Christmas festivities with family and friends in the origin community. This sort of mobility imprinted a different dynamic in the life of the town, for instance, of larger interchanges and social meetings, of economic dynamism for

small businesses, of reception of social, familial and in-kind remittances, which the ‘*norteños*’ brought with them, according to the behaviors and skills learnt in the U. S. This is, Christmas for documented and undocumented migrant population had turned into a resource that forged and maintained life according to the sociocultural and economic relations established between the origin and destination *Vuelteño* societies.

Nowadays, this dynamic has changed, since mobility processes have decreased, as did the circulation of familial and in-kind remittances, as the migrants arrive with less money and fewer gifts. To sum up, the community’s December dynamic modified in the face of the economic and labor problems of *Vuelteños* in the United States (which for instance, make it difficult the possibility of buying plane tickets in high season) and the undocumented status of those migrants who know that “it is not so easy to return”.

This year fewer people came back. Truth is, it’s hard to know how many since tickets are so expensive and the government is so hard. It has an effect ‘cause you can’t come back. Even those who do have papers, well, if they know they won’t be able to go back, they say why should I leave? I’d better not risk it, so they stay over there (Ángel, 38).

A lot of people don’t come back anymore ‘cause they can’t return. I remember how before in December lots of people came back, just for a few months, and in March they’d go back. But now hardly anybody comes, only a few, and only those with papers. But people who don’t have papers, they don’t come back anymore (Ramiro, 37).

Even though it is difficult to calculate the diminution in the number of *Vuelteños* that every December visit their hometown, what cannot be obviated is the changes in the mobility processes of this population, which has gone from a process of migratory circularity to another characterized by deceleration.

Finally, it can be said that the situations of violence and insecurity also partake as causes of the changes in this dynamic, as the social crisis that the municipality of Coatepec Harinas currently undergoes can discourage or hold the return migratory flows, particularly in December, when criminal groups take advantage of the migrants to extort and rob the ‘*paisanos*’ that visit their hometowns.

4.7.2 Implications for the Internal Economy: The Functioning of Small-Scale Commerce

As an approximation, the immobility toward the United States, the lesser reception of remittances and the scarce offer of local employment have caused a reduction in the sales of small businesses. Although examples can be many, here we recover four situations that outline the changes in the dynamic or functioning of these small businesses, classifying them in two: those which offer basic products and candies; and those that supply other sort of necessities, perhaps focused on attending to local customs.

With regards to the first type, we discuss the cases of a bakery and a grocery store. We observed that both registered reductions in their average sales such that, for example, the total weekly earnings of the bakery fell from approximately 120–80 dollars between 2007–2008 and 2010–2011. During that period, December sales once reached around 190 dollars per week, but in recent years that amount has decreased considerably. In the case of the grocery store (though this may not reflect a generalized pattern), the dynamics of reduced economic mobility produced a reduction of around 40 % in relation to the level of sales observed between 2007 and 2008.

The family has four or five members and they struggle to get ahead, so you see how people are limiting [outlays]. Before, people walked around with some extra money to buy treats, but not anymore. Now they say it's harder; they don't get [remittances] as often as before, so it's a real struggle for them. For example, even sales of bread have decreased a little, but when people have work or receive money, they spend it pretty good and we do a little better (Merchant 1).

In the case of the informal eateries (*fondas*) that are improvised every week to attend to the people who maintain the custom of “eating *pozole*”, they also register lower sales, probably as a result of the reduced purchasing power that affects local households under the new conditions of international migration. While continuity in the volume of sales at these eateries was observed, some consumption patterns have changed as people strive to maintain their customs but without spending so much money.

Talking about the lack of resources, on Sundays people here go to Mass and many don't go back home, they stay to eat in the central square... tacos, pozole... whatever they want... that's in the morning, in the afternoon they're back in the streets, and at night they go for a sandwich or some enchiladas. On Sundays you might say that the stove was sacred; but, how much did people spend on that? Now the problem is there's not enough money for that, so people buy less. For example, if a family of four or five wants pozole, they only buy a little and take it home to eat there. It's not like before when each person ordered a bowl (Merchant 2).

Finally, the custom of giving children gifts in December has also been affected because “*there's no money to buy treats for the kids*”. The reduced possibility of maintaining this custom can be seen in the decreasing sales of toys, which once took off in December and January. In this regard, while the proprietors of the local pharmacy and gift shop in Las Vueltas affirmed that the level of weekly sales has remained stable in recent years, they reported a significant decline in seasonal toy sales during Christmas and before Three Kings' Day (January 6th).

Though brief, this overview constructed on the basis of the perceptions and estimates of small-scale merchants in Las Vueltas—with all its limitations—provides evidence that the deceleration of migration and remittances is affecting the economic returns of small-scale businesses in the community. But this topic also requires additional study into the new dynamics of processes of terciarization in rural migrant communities, where the commercial and service sectors are beginning to participate in strategies to generate cash income.

4.7.3 *The Functioning of Social Networks*

In the reproduction of the migratory phenomenon, social networks became a socioeconomic supportive resource, to the extent that the links, fluidity and diversity of the activated interchanges, between the ones here and those there, represented economic help that secured the continuity of migrations, and also a resource of information, access and entrance into the labor market, as the migrants arrived in the U.S. sure they “would not have to suffer”, considering the guarantees and ease provided by having a relative or friend that received and supported them to make their arrival and labor insertion less stressing. Let us remember that out of the 89 *Vuelteño* migrants that entered for the first time into the U.S., 98.5 % received some sort of support from relatives or friends living there.

According to Albo and Ordaz, there is clear evidence that migrants tend to settle in the same place as their *paisanos*, where they have social networks that provide moral, economic and job support. In this regard, it is obvious that social networks are a mechanism that positively influences the search for employment and migrants’ eventual working conditions, particularly in contexts of economic crisis, when these networks can act as a resource that helps mitigate the return of some migrants and may help improve the income of others.

Following this construction, we could posit that social networks participate in, or emerge as a resource that helps migrants cope with and reduce the vulnerability associated with the current atmosphere of hostility and economic instability in the U.S. However, in saying this the analysis may be ignoring the dimensions and maturity of the social networks established among the migrant population of Las Vueltas, because it was found that these support networks weaken in contexts of crisis. In addition to the reduced circulation of systemic remittances, it was also noticed that the conditions of insecurity and the scarcity of employment opportunities increased competition for jobs and constrained the circulation of news and shared information on possible openings. Moreover, it was found that in situations of job scarcity even unemployed migrants who have access to a support network come to be seen as a burden and may experience feelings of guilt when signs of inconformity begin to appear among their relatives or friends who, in addition to dealing with their own difficulties, have taken on the added responsibility of supporting a recent arrival. Generally speaking, the behaviors that modify the functioning of social networks in contexts of crisis are as follows:

- Among potential migrants (in the community of origin) we observed continuity in the circulation of information on labor market conditions in the U.S., but a decrease in the systemic remittances that had constituted one of the principal resources that assured the functioning and continuity of the system of international migration.
- Among established migrants in the U.S. (recipient society) we noticed the emergence of rivalries and competition related to job scarcity, evidenced by the reduced circulation of information on job openings. News of employment

opportunities is now rarely shared, and only among family members or close friends.

- Also, we noted that among undocumented migrants who cooperate with relatives or friends to pay for rent and food being unemployed can trigger feelings of resentment and inconformity because they can no longer hold up their end of the bargain.
- In summary, in contexts of crisis, the functioning of social networks and family support appears to weaken, as self-interest emerges and people put personal interests ahead of those of even their closest relatives.

On these dynamics, Menjivar (2000 in Mendoza 2003) states there is a relation between the instability of the networks and the structure of opportunities that migrants find in the recipient countries, because the constitution, transformation and dissolution of these appears as a dynamic process subject both to cultural and ideological factors and to the economic and political context of the destination. This is to say, Menjivar warns that the structural factors in the recipient societies affect the internal dynamic of the networks and limit the generation of cultural capital and social among migrants.

This way, social networks as a resource for the functioning and continuity of migrations are dynamical and differenced according to the changing conditions in the economic, political and cultural structure in which international migrations take place. This way, we notice that in times of crisis, the functioning of networks changes and the mechanisms of circulation, distribution and allotment of socio-economic supports that facilitate mobility toward the U.S. and the stay in such country.

4.8 Final Comments

In developing this chapter, we have elucidated how the changes in the processes of the social organization of migration have impacted the life strategies adopted by *Vuelteño* families. In order to achieve this, we have discussed what seems to be an emerging tension between continuity and the expectation of recurring to international migration as a strategy for generating cash income. On the one hand, this social tension relates to the emergence of changes in the rationality of individuals who now question the feasibility of joining the flow of undocumented migrants in a context of economic insecurity and scarce guarantees of respect for their human rights. On the other, it is associated with a social construction which holds that, “*going to the U.S. is the best way to get ahead*”.

Based on the findings of this research, we have also commented that while the possibility of migrating and entering the U.S. without legal papers has declined markedly, and with it the possibility of assuring its continuity as a life strategy, this does not necessarily mean a total paralysis of movement to Mexico’s northern neighbor, for the hopes that the U.S. economy will improve and that surveillance at

the border will be relaxed, mean that *Vuelteño* migrants will no doubt continue to participate in this process with the ever-present illusion of providing a better life for their families by freeing them from the deprivations and shortages that so many are experiencing.

In addition, I found that households in Las Vueltas have undergone distinct processes of socioeconomic reorganization. While on the surface these are not new in terms of the multiple activities upon which their subsistence patterns now depend, what calls our attention are the actions designed to recover and strengthen earlier strategies, such as internal migration, when the role of international migration as a family- and community-level social resource shrinks or weakens. Although it would be incorrect to speak of a process in which internal mobility is replacing international migration, we were able to determine that some people who failed in their most recent attempts to enter the U.S. have chosen to migrate to other states in Mexico and thus resume the process of sending remittances—now internal—to satisfy at least some of their household needs.

In this context, another finding was that the changes in the social organization of migration have transcended in the sense that the economic activities of *Vuelteño* households now tend to concentrate on strategies of reinsertion into local agricultural job markets, while simultaneously foster the exploitation of long-abandoned fields, whose owners were in the U.S. We also found that the role of women as income-generators has increased, because a significant percentage of female homemakers, peasants and agricultural laborers are performing extra-domestic activities that illustrate the importance of generating resources at the household level, while others have opted for internal migration and insertion into the service sector in their new migration destinations. In general, then, we can say that these new migratory scenarios have not so much activated new strategies as strengthened participation in work by *Vuelteños* in diverse agricultural, animal-raising and commercial activities, as well as in internal migration. But we cannot lose sight of the fact that what is new or emergent is thus inscribed in the increasing occurrence of criminal acts, violence and insecurity inside the community.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

In recent years Mexico has undergone a prolonged economic crisis, which aggravated with the 2008 American recession. In relation to international migration, we have observed that the weakened and slow recovery of the U.S. provoked that Mexican international migratory processes experienced various changes in their organization, magnitude and intensity, with multiple and differenced implications between regions with long migratory tradition and regions of emergent migration.

According to Arango (2003: 22), the theoretical contributions that have come to light in the last 25 years have contributed to a better understanding of the causes of migrations and the mechanisms involved in their self-perpetuation. However, the author states that the contribution of these theories to understand the phenomenon is still limited, since the diversity of forms and processes that the empirical research constantly reveals, as well as the dynamism that displays a reality in constant change, contrast with the limitations of the available theoretical arsenal.

The problem is not in the inexistence of a general theory of human migrations, but in their complexity; because migrations are diverse and multifaceted and the contexts in which they occur so varied that a single theory cannot explain them all. Therefore, Arango (2003) warns that the assessment shall be carried out on the basis of other criteria, such as their contribution to a better comprehension of the facets, dimensions and specific processes. This way, the development of this work is an effort to contribute to the analysis of migrations in the dawn of the transition toward a new phase, characterized by the deceleration of the phenomenon.

The findings here exposed contribute to the studies on continuity and change of migration and the analysis on the historic configuration of international migration, as they make it evident that international migratory processes of Mexicans are moving to the configuration of a new migratory stage, which has left the so-called era of contradiction behind to open a new phase, here called, “contraction and disengagement”; whose connotations, on the one side, are the result of restrictions imposed by the American economic context, but on the other, are the result of valuing and decisions proper to the social actors that intervene in this process.

This way, we have seen that in the studies on migration underlies the intention to analyze why people migrate. Among others, economic, political, social and cultural explanations have been proposed. However, in times of crisis we notice that the economic foundations need to be conjugated with other social components, to the extent that the migrants as thinking individuals revalue the structures of opportunities and then appear, what we have called new rationalities and temporary detachment of migration as a new labor resource.

This is, it can be said that with the transition to a new migratory phase the decision to leave advances to a stage in the migratory trajectory that surpasses the economic rationality and leads to the valuing of both the structure of opportunities in the recipient country, and the profitability to risk with no guarantee to cross the border and become employed.

On the other side, this study has demonstrated that in times of crisis, the theories that have tried to explain international migration as a strategy do not seem to stand, this is because migrant households and communities reconstruct a number of reorganization processes which in spite of not being new, reduce the importance of this strategy, while other strategies to adapt to change processes and transform the structures in which they move are promoted. This way, in the debate on migration and development this work offers a perspective on the heterogeneity of impacts and the strategies that social actors encourage in situations of economic crisis.

By and large, it is noticed that the organization, strategies and practices related to international migration are destabilized, even though they are transformations that neither break nor revert migration as a social process, since migration as labor strategy and the exercise of diverse and widely varied practices activated by this population will observe continuity in the very change processes, i.e., between continuity and change, the most likely is that we notice transformations in the migratory modalities and intensity and the ways that migrants link with their origin societies.

So far we underscore that the theories that explain the migratory phenomenon have contributed greatly to interpret and explain the causes, determinants and impacts of international migration; however, we notice that in contexts of crisis and political hostility these theories do not help fully explain why people migrate or stop migrating, why migrants are linked to their hometowns or why they resort to disengagement processes and why labor migration continues or weakens its role as a labor strategy. With this, it is not meant that theoretical explanations so far produced are useless, but that the complexity, heterogeneity and dynamic of international migrations do not allow grouping their various phases and processes within a single theory.

However, the empirical findings of this research suppose the need to rethink the theories that explain labor migration in times of crisis, in views of producing a theoretical framework that allows understanding the changes and continuities in the organization of this process in relation to the different and changing socioeconomic structures that intervene in its dynamic and the social actions of the individuals that incorporate and participate in the migratory processes.

To sum up, the contributions of the present work indicate we face a process that refers new patterns and behaviors associated with economic recession, border control and the implementation of xenophobic and anti-immigrant measures, which need a new way to understand the phenomenon of international migration, beyond the construction of strict and rigorous theories that do not allow explaining from end to end social processes, both dynamic and complex.

To do so, along this work we have discussed that the 2008 economic-labor crisis and the hardened anti-immigrant migratory policy transcended in the configuration of a new migratory phase in Mexico-U.S. international migratory processes, now with the presence of a phenomenon characterized by diverse and widely varied transformations in the dynamic of emigration, voluntary and involuntary return and the sending of monetary remittances.

By means of an approach to the households and community, the changes observed at macrostructural level demonstrate that the transition toward a new migratory phase is modifying the dynamics of international migration, changing from a massive and cultural phenomenon in Las Vueltas to another in which transformations in the intensity of undocumented displacements, migratory decisions, the ways of the migrants and their ties with their relatives, and the patterns of circulation-sending of familial remittances unfold.

Before this scenario, we find that over the *Vuelteños'* migratory history, the intensity of the phenomenon impacted both on the initial depopulation of the community and the semi-abandonment of the plots, familial separation and the repositioning of feminine participation, who aware or not, became mothers and household heads, but also managers and agricultural workers who participated in many rural tasks, particularly during the undocumented migration period, when remittances started to be important as a resource for the family core, at the same time they cemented the bases for the economic dependence on these incomes.

The accelerated process of migratory evolution of *Vuelteños* was accompanied by various changes in their social organization, for instance: the transition from individual migration (household heads, mainly) to entire families (wife and children), which in some cases made migration a permanent phenomenon and in others, prolonged the stay. In parallel to this process, there were changes that needed the incorporation of migrations with documented legal status, as well as the redefinition of the borders utilized by the undocumented migrants, the dispersion of arrival places in the U.S., the ever increasing importance of familial remittances and the sociocultural, economic and political changes between "those here" and "those who are there".

Nowadays, the empirical findings of this work suggest that the transition to a new migratory phase expresses dynamics such as deceleration and contention of international displacements, temporary disengagement from migration as a labor resource in a context of economic crisis in a context of economic recession and migratory repression, fewer temporary returns and patterns of diminution, irregularity and interruption in the sending of remittances and the configurations of forced temporary stays of migrants who came to visit and failed in their attempt to return to the U.S.

In like manner, among the *Vuelteño* population that lives in the U.S., the situation of economic crisis and the strengthened anti-immigrant violence caused the propagation of fears and concerns to be deported, the increasing difficulty to become employed and the redefinition of seasonal labor stays into indefinite stays. Finally, the conjugation of these factors warns that we are facing new patterns and behaviors before processes of economic recession, border control and implementation of xenophobic measures.

This is to say, in the development of the text it has been stated that dynamics of international migration of *Vuelteños* is moving to a new migratory phase, which here we have called the age of “contraction and disengagement”, as the migratory flows and remittances to and from the United States have witnessed a reduction; besides, the strengthening of xenophobic attitudes transcended in situations of economic, political and cultural disengagement of undocumented labor migrants who had found in migration a livelihood, but have stopped returning to their hometowns and/or migrating ‘waiting’ for the economic recovery, labor stability, labor force demand and border flexibility. In other words, it can be said that the deceleration of flows in either direction is in waiting mode, which now substantially modifies the functioning of undocumented migration.

To sum up, the transition to a new migratory phase is a complex process that conjugates dynamics of continuity and change, which do not necessarily break with the tendencies observed in other migratory phases. This is so to the extent that Mexican migration has become a phenomenon dynamic and continuous, massive and historic that has experienced the configuration of various phases that witness continuity in certain elements and transform into other some components of the Mexicans’ social organizations. Thus, the transition to a new migratory phase with ‘echoes’ of that registered in other stages is an expression of the continuity and change of a phenomenon, which nowadays produces new and large problems for undocumented displacements, particularly when potential migrants who decide to risk in this process do so aware of the circularity between origin and destination is no longer possible; while the processes of undocumented mobility will occur in a search to do “the most they can” before programming a voluntary return or that a forced one takes place.

As a process adjacent to these changes, the deceleration of migration and remittances has caused deep changes and impacts at the migrant households and communities; however, such impacts are as diverse and heterogeneous as the contexts that determine the framework of opportunities, capabilities, motivations, attitudes and responses of the migrant subjects when facing problems, generating alternative options, improving life conditions and maintaining certain economic security in situations of uncertainty and transformation, such as those observed in the international migratory processes between Mexico and the United States.

At community level, the depth of the impacts the transition to a new migratory phase has brought along depends both on the economic and political links of the locality with its own region, as that of social stratification, historic formation of the territory, the local-community organization forms, the historic depth of migration and the presence of social networks, to the extent in which the conjugation of these

elements provides each community with certain peculiarities that make them different from other geographic spaces. Thus explaining the heterogeneity at a structural level, according to economic, social, political and cultural opportunities in each sending context.

In Las Vueltas, for example, the regional links and economic activities have represented an opportunity window for this population; at the same time, however, structural factors related to the localization and historic formation of the territory have made the incorporation into neighbor labor markets difficult. While the political links this community has managed to establish with municipal and state power figures have materialized in tangible benefits for the local population, for instance, in its own constructions of community development, political management of some of its representatives allowed executing and concluding some projects in times of crisis and decreased remittance circulation, which would not be possible in communities with weak political relations.

Social stratification by class and gender is another element that adds to the heterogeneity of impacts, as the greater poverty and marginalization of households could aggravate the negative effects of the deceleration of the migratory process; this does not occur or is not so noticeable in communities with low degrees of poverty, greater education, availability of services and inhabitable houses.

Finally, migratory history also allows explaining the heterogeneity of these impacts, since seniority, maturity and consolidation of migrations as a social and political practice depends, for instance, on the concentration and strengthened presence of social and familial networks that softens and make moments of crisis and socioeconomic vulnerability less tense among *paisanos*, which on the one side guarantees the perpetuation of the migratory phenomenon, and on the other, decelerates or delays the return. This is not so in communities with scarce social capital, as it largely occurs among urban migrants, even though it does not necessarily excludes those of rural origin, even among some return migrants from this community it was found that family and friend support were negatively balanced in times of crisis and labor instability, whereas unemployed migrants become a temporary 'burden', which produces unbalance and tension in the socioeconomic organization of the family unit in the United States.

At household level, heterogeneity is explained by the sociodemographic profile of familial nuclei. We notice, for example, that deceleration of the migratory flow is largely registered in young households, while the diminution in remittances affects to a larger extent to aged households; besides, return migration, in spite of not excluding the return of entire families, corresponds to undocumented single men and married men whose wives live in Las Vueltas. Finally, it is also noticed that temporary entrances solely and exclusively take place among young and adult people with documented legal status.

This way, the patterns of continuity and massiveness that *Vuelteño* migrations had reached started to register significant changes as of the 2008 economic crisis, which stressed the vulnerability of households forcing them to redefine their strategies and life projects, since the role of international migration as a life and work strategy does not seem to support. In the face of this, we notice that the

reorganization and diversification of incomes to survive (necessity) or avoid fractures in the familial economy (choice) is the option which these households are resorting to in this migratory phase, which has repositioned the potential of international migrations as a family life strategy.

This way, the economic resources that are no longer received because of deceleration of the migratory flow and remittances are being replaced by other, widely diversified familial strategies, which are not mutually excluding, but complementing, as in the non-migration and remittance-reduction scenario, the peasant population in Las Vueltas also looks at a combination of agricultural incomes, derived from their own innovation, composition and the resources of households.

The strategies of familial life and resource generation these families are resorting to respond to multiple and diverse alternatives, of which it is important to mention that as a labor strategy, reinsertion into the local agricultural labor market shows that even inside the very processes of the so-called new rurality, countryside activities resurge and reactivate when the generation of non-agricultural incomes, such as international migration, fails. Likewise, it is outstanding that in a context of economic crisis and migratory policy we witness a substitution process: from international migration to internal migration (also reduced to the human and social capital of each individual), which even stimulates the remittance flow that arrives from other municipalities and states to *Vuelteño* households.

As for the use of internal resources, capabilities and abilities to perform 'additional' activities to generate 'extra' monetary incomes, it is stated as an action, even though not exclusive for women, largely feminine indeed. Here it is also outstanding that livestock- and fowl-related activities are configuring as economic insurance, by means of which it is foreseen to afford necessities and face situations of crisis and economic insecurity.

The setting into motion of these and other strategies registers as well a heterogeneous behavior according to the modality of change in the migratory processes, because while the households that stopped receiving remittances have undertaken reorganization measures that only suppose an adjustment or arrangement based on reducing everyday expenses, limitation for available resources and familial help, we notice that, conversely, households with members who decided to delay or temporarily disengage from labor migration to the U.S. are opting for a greater reinsertion in the local labor market and in internal migration processes.

As a closure, we notice that in the socioeconomic reorganization of these households different life strategies intervene, as the deceleration of international migration led to labor pluri-activity, which is not new but has strengthened with the uncertainty created in the community by the facts of "won't be able to cross" and "not receive money from the United States". Because of this, the transition to a new migratory phase has strengthened the labor participation of Las Vueltas population in agricultural, livestock and commercial activities and in internal migration, in which the new or the emergent is inscribed in the presence of delinquency, violence and community insecurity.

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About this Book

This book provides an analysis of the various transformation processes that have occurred in the international migratory dynamic of Mexicans as a consequence of the 2008 international economic crisis and the implementation of an increasingly hardened American migration policy. From a methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative tools, the main findings of this book show that the international migration of Mexicans is moving to a new migratory phase, here called the period of “contraction and disengagement” that is characterized by the configuration of multiple changes with repercussions on the functioning of international migration as a socio-economic strategy at the levels of the family and migrant communities.

This book

- assesses the recent changes in the international migration dynamic of Mexicans
- offers empirical evidence on the transition to a new migration phase
- focuses on the voices and perspectives of those people that were studied in Mexico.

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Continuity and Change: From the Boom to the Slowing Down of International Migration from Mexico to the U.S.
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