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The Remittance Landscape: Space, Architecture, and Society in Emigrant Mexico

By

Sarah Lynn Lopez

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Philosophy

in

Architecture

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Paul Groth, Chair
Professor Nezar AlSayyad
Professor Ananya Roy
Emeritus Professor William Taylor

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Abstract

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Across the United States migrants work in service sector jobs and live in cramped apartments while in their home countries their newly built houses stand empty. Remittances—funds sent from economic migrants abroad to family members who remain in the home country—have radically altered everyday built environments throughout the developing world. In rural Jalisco, Mexico, remittance construction, which once meant building a dream house for oneself and one’s family, has evolved into a community-wide project of rebuilding entire hometowns. Such construction has been formalized and institutionalized by the Mexican government’s Tres Por Uno (3x1) program, which triples dollars dedicated to development projects with federal, state, and municipal funds. I argue that migrant use of remittance dollars to improve and develop their hometowns, encouraged by the 3x1 program, simultaneously demonstrates a newfound independence and agency for the rural poor and results in a host of unanticipated consequences for migrants and their communities, including familial fragmentation, the financialization of traditional society, and emerging conflict between migrants and villagers.

A disjuncture between migrant aspirations and project outcomes is revealed through analysis of what I call “remittance space”—the sum of individual migrants’ and their communities’ construction practices and narratives, as well as the macro-scale political and economic processes, and symbolic and spatial transformations that are collectively shaped by and shaping remitting as a way of life. Focusing on a series of villages in the south of Jalisco, I begin my analysis by tracking the evolution of the “remittance house” as both a site of architectural hybridity and domestic change. Next, I explore the Tres Por Uno development discourse as it interfaces with the spatial legacy of rural Mexico, formalizing remittance construction. The heart of my research consists of “building ethnographies”—my term for fine-grained ethnographic research of the envisioning, construction, and use of building projects—on three Tres Por Uno projects that identify the social and spatial consequences of what I term the Remittance Development Model (RDM). The rodeo arena produces a spectacle of traditional culture and gendered expectations amid the commercialization and financialization of the jaripeo or bull-riding event; the cultural center imports U.S. norms of public space and participation that
destabilize the traditional social hierarchy based on compadrazgo or extended familial networks; meanwhile, the old age home, an attempt by migrants to prepare for aging and death, raises questions about the lack of public services for rural constituents, and the relation between social capital and societal obligations. These projects contribute to understanding the RDM and its implications.

*The Remittance Landscape* brings a material analysis of migration to Latina/o scholarship and a perspective of mobility and transnationalism to the study of architecture and place. Anthropological and sociological studies on migrant subjectivities often overlook the built environment as a medium through which individual and group identities are formed and contested. Urban and architectural historians who address ethnic and immigrant neighborhoods do not theorize migration itself, nor do they address the places immigrants come from as constitutive of the places where they arrive. Similarly, a material analysis of migrants’ here-there connections contributes to migration scholarship both methodologically and epistemologically. North American migrant urbanism cannot be understood without addressing migrant hometowns that have become, in a sense, the distant hinterlands of American cities.
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Chapter 1

*Bienvenidos Hijos!* Building the Global Spectacle of Migration in Rural Mexico

Figure 1.1. A remittance house courtyard, Pegueros, Jalisco, 2008.
The fact that North American capital, despite our nationalist legislation, is increasingly more powerful in the vital centers of our economy is even more decisive. . . . How do we create a society, a culture, that will not deny our humanity but will also not change it into an empty abstraction?

Octavio Paz

I had the Statue of Liberty made with the face of my mother. The book she is holding has my birth date on it. I was in New York, eating a hotdog, looking at the Statue of Liberty and I couldn’t believe how lucky I was—how good the United States has been to me.

Ramon Dominguez, California, 2008

In December of 2007, I traveled to Los Guajes, Jalisco, a village approximately thirty miles from the state capital, Guadalajara, to see the parade of the *hijos ausentes* or absent sons and daughters (fig. 1.2). The rural community of approximately nine hundred inhabitants is geographically isolated from the only highway that connects Guadalajara to the south of the state. Bright December sunlight illuminated the gravel roads and modest homes of Los Guajes. Standing by, as the guest of a prominent *northeast* named José Ochoa, I watched as a group of about one hundred people who identified as *northeast*, *paisanos*, *migrantes*, and *hijos* prepared to march from the outskirts of the village to the town’s church. Musicians tuned their saxophones, drums, and trumpets in preparation for the procession. Old friends and family who had not seen each other in years or decades chatted gaily. Some American-born children who accompanied middle-aged men and women chose to stand by and watch rather than join their parents in the march. When the crowd had gathered, with cameras ready, the hijos ausentes commenced their procession along Calle Hidalgo. At that moment, the spirited gathering became silent. Individuals wore solemn expressions. For roughly thirty minutes, the participants marched from the eastern side of the village, past Los Guajes’s first adobe houses built in the 1800s, right to the main plaza. Filling the narrow street and continuing for at least two blocks, the marchers were framed by a crowd of onlookers who identified as Guajeños or *mexicanos* rather than migrantes or paisanos. The movement of the hijos ausentes against the stasis of the Guajeños mirrored the life trajectories of these two categories. Migration has created social categories that have become spatial categories enacted in rural villages (fig. 1.3).

The townspeople treated the hijos as if they were soldiers back from a foreign war. During the march, they acknowledged them with respect. The northeños marched in silence like a platoon. These were the sons and daughters who returned, gave money to the church, and continually fought to improve the livelihoods of family members who had never left. While called *ausente* (absent), today they were *presente* (present). The march ended in the church, the traditional center of social life in Los Guajes. In the church, the priest publicly thanked the northeños for their “service,” for being, in effect, pillars of the community. In the church, the hijos were recognized for their sacrifice. After the march and church event, townspeople also prepared a large fiesta for the northeños.
The formality of Los Guajes’s parade can be contrasted to the festive recognition of hijos ausentes as cultural trendsetters in the nearby town of El Grullo. Located in a sugarcane valley south of Los Guajes, El Grullo has a population of approximately twenty-five thousand. Grullenses estimate that another twenty-five thousand people from the town live in the United States. In December, El Grullo is converted into an exuberant spectacle of apparent material abundance and activity for the fiestas patronales or patron saint festivals. Music roars from waxed SUVs and trucks that circle the church plaza. Booths that occupy the downtown streets sell liquor and food, and play music until 4:00 a.m. El Grullo’s youth sport cutting-edge fashions. Ringlet curls cascade down girls’ backs. Boys’ short haircuts are slicked back with gel. Skinny jeans hug hips; other jeans hang stylishly loose from waists.

During the 2008 festivals, one booth—the booth that made explicit connections between El Grullo and the USA—particularly commanded the attendees’ attention. That booth, called “GruYork,” was named after the migration corridor between New York and El Grullo—not the largest migration stream between the two countries but one of the farthest geographic distances traveled by Grullenses who go to the United States (fig. 1.4). GruYork was a DJ booth showcasing contemporary electronic and hip-hop music. A construction paper cutout of the New York cityscape provided an iconic backdrop for the large speakers and mixing tables. The music drowned out the other music booths lining the block, which played classical Mexican music or contemporary banda. In a street packed with migrants and locals, by far the most crowded space was immediately in front of the booth where the GruYork DJ played. The DJ engaged the crowd: “Bienvenidos hijos! Bienvenidos a tu tierra natal!” (Welcome, sons! Welcome to your native land!) The crowd roared. The DJ shouted, “Where are you from, hijos? How many of you are from New York?” The crowd roared. Whether you were from New York or had never left El Grullo was not important: GruYork allowed everybody in attendance to identify with the idea of New York. In contrast to Los Guajes’s somber hijos ausentes parade, GruYork did not reinforce spatial and social binaries; rather, it broke them down. And it did so even while recognizing the migrants’ journey and subsequent return.

The rituals in both Los Guajes and El Grullo reflect the importance of recognition and community for migrants, many of whom are returning from tireless work conducted quietly in the shadows of the American economy. During town festivals and national holidays, both migrants and townspeople occupy a space of migration. The hardships and risks associated with returning to one’s hometown are worth it; migrants tell and show their stories to an important audience.

El Grullo and Los Guajes are merely two examples of thousands of towns transformed yearly upon migrants’ return. Such transformations are fueled by a complex pattern of cash transfers.

The Remittance Boom

Remittances—defined by the World Bank as the portion of international migrant workers’ earnings that is sent back to family members in their countries of origin—are at the center of emerging discourses and practices. According to the World Bank, worldwide remittance flows, predominantly to Third World countries, increased from $72.3 billion in 2001 to an estimated $414 billion in 2009. Researchers at institutions
such as the World Bank and the Multilateral Investment Fund (established in 1993) of the Inter-American Development Bank have been investigating the effect of remittances on the development of Third World countries. This research generally focuses on the geographic spread of remittances, the ability of remittances to target the poor directly, and the incorporation of the poor into global financial markets as evidence of the positive impact of remittance development.

Remittances, finance and policy experts explain, are not just an important business opportunity; they are transactions of social and economic justice. The Inter-American Dialogue, a Washington, D.C., research institute, recently argued: "Remittance streams are an important corrective for Latin America’s income inequalities, which are the worst of any of the world’s major regions." To support this argument, government and finance institutions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) fund extensive quantitative research on the size of remittance flows and how these monies are sent and spent. Migration is no longer viewed only as a major social, political, and economic problem; it is also understood to be a powerful economic engine.

Mexico is at the center of debates about the transformative potential of remittance capital for the world’s poor. While Mexico is the third-largest remittance-receiving country after China and India, the U.S.-Mexico remittance corridor is the largest remittance flow in the world. Over eleven million Mexican-born migrants live in the United States. In 2007, Mexico received an estimated $28 billion in remittances. Thus, as a director of the Pew Hispanic Center put it, “Migration is not only an escape valve—it is now also a fuel pump,” surpassing oil exports and other sources of foreign direct investment.

Remittances from the United States to rural Mexico are changing daily life for both remitters and receivers. On average, remitters send from $100 to $300 a month to families (their parents and siblings, their wives and children, or both). In 2007, remittances were a source of family subsistence for 1.6 million Mexican households, allegedly slowing down the growth of poverty and social marginalization. Data show that 42 percent of Mexican remitters are undocumented migrants, and the majority are “men with low incomes and low education levels.” On the receiving end, 60 percent of remittance receivers are female. The state of Jalisco is one of the four Mexican states—alongside Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Mexico—with the highest rates of remittances. Almost two billion dollars of formal transactions were recorded in Jalisco in 2008.

While this massive transfer of wealth is primarily understood as a financial flow, it occurs within the context of human lives and the narratives of those lives.

Anthropologists and sociologists who study transnational migration have been among the first to address the social impact of remitting. Transnational migration refers to migrants’ continuous movement or circular migration between two or more places as a strategy for bettering their own life chances and those of their families. Use of this term challenges the assumption that migrants assimilate into host societies. The anthropologist Jeffery Cohen, who has studied the rural household in Mexico in order to understand the social dynamics of transnational migration and the impact of migration and remitting on rural families, describes how remittances are one component of a larger field of action that constitute a “culture of migration.” Cohen uses this phrase to argue that migration is pervasive, both historically and geographically, and that the decision to migrate and remit is one that people make as part of their everyday experiences. Peggy
Levitt claims that “social remittances”—the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capitals that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities—are a local-level, migration-driven form of cultural diffusion that plays an important role in forming a “transnational collectivity.” Michael Peter Smith and Matt Bakker, who study the politicization of transnational migrants, focus on the politics of “transnational civil societies” or hometown associations, which leverage political power through their collective remitting practices. These studies, however, do not incorporate space and the built environment into their analyses of remitting and migration.

Remittances are, however, much more than a social, political, demographic, or economic dimension of so-called transnational migration. They are also a spatial reality financing a construction boom in rural Mexico that affects daily life for migrants and nonmigrants alike. Remittances are changing the cultural landscape of Mexico and the United States. The constructions funded by remittances are powerful evidence of the aims, desires, and fears that drive social change.

**Key Questions**

This dissertation studies the remittance landscape as a crystallization of migrants’ life stories and the macro political, social, economic, and historical forces that shape migration. The relationship between architecture and remittances in the Mexican countryside has not yet been studied, even though the vernacular built environment in rural Mexico is critical for understanding contemporary migration.

Through analysis of the built environment, this dissertation explores the following questions: What building projects are funded by remittances, and to what extent has remittance construction transformed the landscape of rural Mexico? How have these building projects affected the lives of migrants, their families, and their communities? How do remittance projects reveal changing social structures and dynamics? To what extent has the Mexican state used, relied on, or co-opted this resource flow—in other words, how has the Mexican state positioned itself vis-à-vis the remittance economy? Is remittance construction an example of transnationalism “from below” that creates greater autonomy, self-reliance, and agency for poor people, or another example of what Ananya Roy calls “poverty capital,” a subset of development capital that merges migrant remittances with governmental and financial investments, creating new subjects of development?

**Remittance Space Defined**

*Remittance space* is the sum of individual migrants’ and their communities’ construction practices and narratives, as well as the macro processes, institutional regimes, and symbolic and spatial transformations, that are collectively shaped by and shaping remitting as a way of life. With regard to this broad definition of “space,” the built environment is an artifact of the patterns and vectors (temporal, social, political, and institutional) that structure migration and remitting. Remittance space is also the enactment, daily use, and collective meaning of the remittance landscape. I intend the term to equally encompass micro (people’s stories) and macro (systemic change) scales of analysis.
The act of remitting itself has specific implications for the nature of remittance space. Remitting is an economic transaction that links two people (the sender and the receiver) and two places (where money is sent from and where it is received). Senders are sons and daughters, husbands, wives, and lovers who make critical life choices to be able to remit. Recipients are often elderly mothers and fathers, or wives, maintaining the original home. In the urban U.S.-rural Mexico remittance corridor, the “sender” is outside the hometown while the recipient remains “inside” the hometown. “Home” in this case is both a stable reference point for migrants and a locus for investment, a place where migrants can send the fruits of their labor. These basic relationships give remittance space specific formal characteristics. For example, from the position of the migrant, remittance space is dual in nature, since remittance flows involve exchange between “here” and “there.” From the position of the hometown, the world of senders is a dispersed cloud of individuals all relating back to a common point of origin.

Relationships between remittance senders and recipients are personal and intimate. Each remittance transaction—the $100 or $300 sent to Mexico on a random Wednesday or on Mother’s Day—is a relationship formed, strengthened, contested, or dismantled.

While the individual transaction is personal, the aggregate of all remittance transactions constitutes an abstract flow. This “flow” has grown, from an estimated $2.2 billion in 1995 to over $28 billion in 2007. The increase results partly from an increase in the number of people remitting, but also from refined remittance-mapping technologies. Since the early 2000s, Banco de México has been developing ways to track remittances more carefully, including working with Mexican consulates in the United States to issue migrant identification cards that they can use to open American bank accounts. Also, the Inter-American Development Bank’s Multilateral Investment Fund (IDB-MIF) has been the leading agency on regional remittance research. As more and more people remit funds, financial and governmental actors that facilitate flows invent increasingly sophisticated ways to profit from them. Wire transfers impose exorbitant transaction fees. Cement companies allow migrants in the United States to buy cement for pickup in Mexico. Governments create policies that incorporate migrant remittances into government budgets. Remittance flows create international, national, and local markets that further institutionalize remitting as a way of life.

To understand the complexity of this dual nature, it is important to first identify the fundamental components of remitting as a way of life. Distance, aspirations, and ambivalence play out in every remittance building project and permeate the remittance spaces produced and experienced by remitters and their communities. Geographic distance is maintained between a person and where he or she came from, and between a person and part or all of his or her family. Distance allows actors to accrue money, gain access to state programs, and learn about and benefit from migrant networks. Distance, however, is also what causes vulnerabilities for migrants and emigrant communities, as well as dissonance between migrants and nonmigrant inhabitants. Divergent perspectives, perceptions, and experiences are produced by geographic distance because of people’s experiences in disparate places. The geographic, physical fragmentation of families creates a culture of longing. As noted by a priest in a small rural town in Michoacán, “People feel the frontera, the distance between their families; some return from the North and cry to me in private because they now have better resources, they finally have cars,
but they miss their family, their father and mother.\textsuperscript{26} Migrant longing can be both concrete (missing family and friends) and abstract (missing “home”).

Migrants’ legal status vis-à-vis the state also produces profound isolation from their communities. Individuals who migrate illegally are members of Mexican society while outcasts in the United States. Illegal status means that returning home is dangerous and difficult—known deaths at the U.S.-Mexico border have steadily increased over the last ten years.\textsuperscript{27} Attaining legal status in the United States does not necessarily protect migrants from the dangers of traveling home. Thieves wait at bus stops and train stations to rob migrants returning home with money in their suitcase. In migrant circles, it is commonly believed that U.S. and Mexican customs officials who document how much money migrants are carrying at the border work with thieves.

Even if migrants do not carry money home, rumors about their financial success in the United States can result in personal danger. A norteño from a small town near Ciudad Guzmán, Jalisco, was recounting the tragic story of a norteño who had lived for many years in San Francisco and had decided to return to Ciudad Guzmán to live. Upon his return, he and his children were kidnapped, held for ransom, and subsequently murdered. The kidnappers knew he had been successful in California and that the family had saved money. The norteño continued, “I still imagine the pueblo is as it was when I left twenty-five years ago. I put my family in danger when we go home without even knowing it.”\textsuperscript{28} Over time, migrant ideas of home differs from what home has become in their absence.

Further, migrants feel a subjective distance between their sense of themselves since leaving home and their sense of who they were before. After one leaves home, one’s identity and role in the community are destabilized. One exits the rules and regulations of the state as well as the social spaces in which one grew up. The rules one grew up with, to some extent, are replaced by new rules learned in the receiving community. What the social theorist Pierre Bourdieu calls “habitus” (a tacit realm of reproducible practices) becomes for the migrant a changing realm where their former culture is not necessarily maintained through social reproduction.\textsuperscript{29} Exits and entries create new opportunities and changes in social patterns and hierarchies. This subjective distance makes it possible for migrants to assume a critical position toward their hometowns. During a village festival, Juan Zamora, the president of a Los Angeles migrant social club, went up to a group of kids and told them not to eat and spit their peach pits on the floor. He then turned to me and explained: “They lack education, they need to change their style of living. Nobody tells them what is right and wrong... When I am here I can tell them, but I am not always here.”\textsuperscript{30} By asserting his role as cultural mentor, Zamora articulates and emboldens his identity as a norteño who “knows better” than those who have never left the village.

Distance exacerbates migrants’ guilt regarding their initial decision to leave. It also allows them to reimagine the past. Zamora is caught between memories and remorse: “I miss my pueblo. I yearn for it. But when I go back, the people are changing, the kids are drinking and doing drugs, and all these things we used to do as a community are lost—I feel bad because I was of the first generation to leave, so it is partially my fault that it is not like it used to be.”\textsuperscript{31} The village is used as a context for actualizing memories of what village life was and should be. Zamora’s generation of migrants left the pueblo,
in part, to help it survive economically. Now they live the consequences of returning to a community transformed by their “abandonment.”

The social and economic distance between successful migrants and village inhabitants is expanding. In Vista Hermosa, a quaint town south of Guadalajara, a pair of wildly successful norteños named Javier and Ruby Villaseñor built a palatial mansion. This practice is not uncommon. Building mansions is one of the ways that those who attain economic success in the United States enact their status in Mexico and mark their migration experience with distinction. The couple—once poor farmers in Jalisco and now rich farm managers in Napa Valley’s vineyards—employed over eighty people for approximately three years to build a house in their absence. The house electrician, who struggled to fulfill his clients’ desires to use U.S. appliances and have circuit breakers modeled after U.S. electrical standards (otherwise absent from houses in Vista), told me a story about his experience on the job. Sometimes he brings his son with him to work. One afternoon, the father and son sat at a plastic-covered dining room table. The dining room was part of an open-floor plan with a three-story-high dome roof at the center. European columns that supported the roof ringed the central space. From the first floor, one peered up to see second- and third-floor balconies. Imported Italian marble flooring, a plasma TV, a statue of Venus, and an Austrian chandelier were defining interior finishes. In this setting, the electrician’s son asked: “Papi, why can’t we have a house like this?”

Telling me this, the electrician shook his head and his eyes lost focus—how could he explain? While the son, at age six, was old enough to recognize the radical differences between their one-story concrete-block house with few amenities and the migrants’ mansion, he was not old enough to understand that his father would have to abandon him, his siblings, and his mother—and risk his life—to probably fail at attaining a similar house for their family. Remittance houses normalize economic distance among community members as they create new aspirations.

The norteños’ desire to create a landscape representative of their new socioeconomic status has created disjuncture and envidia or jealousy between migrants and inhabitants whose lives are defined by not sharing the migrant trajectory. In Vista Hermosa, after years of personal sacrifice, Ruby Villaseñor expressed frustration: “They [the locals] just don’t understand, they see us as ‘those norteños,’ but we are investing in Vista as a gift to the town. We want the things we build to be classy so that the town has a future . . . Our house is a gift to the pueblo.” Even so, remittance houses, like other remittance construction, create divisions in so-called emigrant communities.

Individual aspirations are fundamental to remittance space—they are why people leave and they are what allow people to sustain a life of psychological, phenomenological, geographic, and subjective distance. Aspirations are often geared toward the hometown. The hometown is the place where progress can be made manifest, the forum for symbolic representations of success, and the site of migrant modernity. Hometowns are also where migrants find an audience, where the community they assist is located, and where they are recognized as full members of society regardless of their U.S. citizenship status. Aspirations to address a lack, a need, or a desire are intended to open up what David Harvey calls “spaces of hope” for emigrant communities and families.

Early aspirations to build a remittance house or send home money for food have expanded into later aspirations to rebuild entire hometowns. The rebuilding of hometowns relates to migrants’ new identity as pueblo benefactors. Before I started my
field research in Mexico, I interviewed the Villaseñors in California. They want their entire hometown (like their remittance house) to reflect the social position that now defines their lives. Over a bottle of wine they had produced in their Napa Valley vineyard, they explained that for years they had been pooling dollars along with other immigrants in California to refurbish the town. They had landscaped and furnished the main plaza, installed serial lampposts along the main entrance to town, built public bathrooms, and built a colonnaded portico, and now they are building an immense multisport complex. With anticipation Ruby Villaseñor noted, “Everything is there, all we need to do is change it.”35 Their ambitions to improve the pueblo can be restated as an effort to erase the crumbling adobe and brick one-story facades, dirt and stone streets, and other built-environment features that attest to a history of poverty and neglect (fig. 1.5).

Migrants’ aspirations are influenced by images of success learned in the United States. North American sports arenas, roads, and businesses become the examples that migrants work for. In this way, migrant modernity in Mexico becomes a process of emulating North American places. In Vista Hermosa, the migrant club is building what they call a “state-of-the-art” sports arena intended to rival “those found in the U.S.” After club members visited Las Vegas, they decided to light up the arena at night. Vista Hermosa—like Las Vegas—is an oasis, but in an expanse of sugarcane. The hope is that a staged attraction, such as dramatic nightlights, will draw much-needed attention to the town (fig. 1.6).

Norteños from Vista now also aspire to represent their pueblo to a global audience. During our initial meeting, after three hours of heated discussion, Javier Villaseñor asked, “How do we put Vista Hermosa on the map?”36 Vista Hermosa, he and his wife explained, is located in a landscape that has “natural amenities, such as a waterfall and rolling hills,” and “looks very much like Napa Valley.” In an effort to reinvent their town and attract visitors, they changed its name from Santa Cruz to Vista Hermosa, “Beautiful View.” However, the town is one in thousands of small predominantly rural Mexican towns in decline. The Villaseñors’ initial motivation—some thirty years ago—to escape rural poverty required knowledge of and preparations for a long journey and foreign employment. Today, their motivation to present their town to the world requires an understanding of, and connections to, global circulations of power and wealth and the tourism industry.

Burgeoning migrant aspirations also shape locals’ expectations for and experiences in their hometowns. Daniel Gutiérrez, a man from Vista Hermosa who works with the Villaseñors, remarks, “They have affected the way I think about what is possible for Vista Hermosa. I see how they do things, like their house, and learn about what is possible.”37 With his sights set high, he too wants to “put Vista on the map.” He works with norteños and invests their dollars to achieve this.

The aspirations of migrants find expression in the built environment, which in the remittance landscape takes on a symbolic dimension. The remittance landscape is what Henri LeFebvre would call a representational space, a symbolic system that carries meaning for ordinary people beyond its immediate spatial properties.38 Remittance projects symbolize migrant journeys, modernity, and success. They represent both the freedom of mobility and migrant connections to home. In addition to expressing worldly success and refined sensibilities, these representational spaces address familial, religious, and political themes that are sometimes blended in unusual ways.
In the town of Torresillas, Michoacán, norteños constructed a church with a front elevation and a chancel dome in the style of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. (fig. 1.7). The dome is several stories tall, painted white, and crowned by a cupola. The religious space of the Catholic Church is given the architecture of a North American democratic institution in what would seem to be an affront to both traditional Mexican nationalism and religious observance. The building is not, however, intended to be a social critique. Rather, according to the priest who took me to see it, it is a representation of thanks to the United States for its opportunities to earn “billetes verdes” (greenbacks or green-bills). Because of migration to the United States, once-poor villagers can now build a modern church and provide the town with its first public bathrooms. The symbolic gesture permanently catalogs a particular moment in the region’s migration history defined by representations of American success in rural localities (fig. 1.8).

There is a certainty and confidence in these representations that by 2011 was threatened by the economic downturn and anti-migrant political climate in the United States. As noted by a migrant who has lived in the United States for over thirty years, “The American dream was attainable in the U.S., was.” Norteños who “made it” in the United States are now building in Mexico. They worry, however, about the younger generation of migrants, who face higher competition for jobs and stricter enforcement of immigration laws.

Ambivalence is another inherent dimension of remittance space. It results from investing in more than one place over an extended period of time while having the capacity to be in only one place at a time. As individual opportunities and positions in both Mexico and the United States change, migrants reevaluate which place can offer them a better life. Ambivalence takes the form of haunting questions that norteños continually ask themselves: Do I want to return home? When? With how much money? Can I return? What will I be returning to? Do I like who I have become? Do I like what the pueblo has become? Is the United States my savior or slave master?

The main ambivalence migrants experience is linked to indecision about where they want to be. Mexicans simultaneously want to stay in their hometown and want to leave it. Once they have departed, they want to return home but wish they could forget the shortcomings and burdens of home. The president of Club Lagunillas, Héctor Alarcón, reflected on his own experience of migration:

I left thirty-three years ago with the illusions of all the youth; I listened to stories about money, came for a time [to the United States], one year, but saw the future here and compared it to there and saw that it was better. After two years I married and had kids and there were ropes holding me. Then came the day that I was neither here nor there. This is not good—it is better to stay in your country, but the options are limited. We could stay poor . . . but we wouldn’t have ambition. At least in this country we have rights. We will have a pension. In Mexico, only government officials have this, in Mexico we need security for the people . . . What can I do? Live with my aspirations or reality? My aspiration is to live in Mexico, but here is reality.

Ideally, Alarcón would be able to attain a salary, retirement, and security while living among his people in Mexico. Because Social Security payouts in old age are attainable
only in the United States, he lives in a quiet state of crisis. While he fantasizes about home, the distance between himself and home grows. Jose Ochoa, the president of another club, Club Los Guajes, concludes: “If it was up to me, I would live in Los Guajes, but if I lived there I wouldn’t be able to help as much.” According to Ochoa, living in Los Guajes is not “up to him.” Thus he does not have to give up the Los Angeles business, house, and pool it took him over thirty years to acquire. For him, remitting—at least partially—resolves ambivalence and indecision about where to be.

The ambivalence about where one wants to be is tied to a deeper ambivalence about who one is. Mirroring the U.S./Mexico binary created by the international boundary, a series of binaries now define transnational migrants. Norteños feel they are either hijos ausentes or returning heroes, abandoners or pillars of the community, second-class citizens or upwardly mobile. Locals also flip-flop about who norteños are and what they represent.

Subjective ambivalence is masked by a discourse of “generosity.” This discourse is linked to how migrants feel about their economic success. Guilt, obligation, familial bonds, and communal purpose drive their generosity. Josefina Hernández, the hometown association president of Club Magdalena, commented that Gutiérrez, the president of Club Lagunillas, was driven to participate in the club and remit because of “his big heart” and “his love for his pueblo.” In spite of other motivations, this sentiment dominates the remittance development discourse.

Building projects embody the contradictions of remittance space. This is most glaringly manifest in the migrants’ new homes in Mexico, which represent success and the freedom to build but not economic stability in Mexico or the freedom to live in the new house. Public remittance projects embody another set of contradictions: they provide impressive new spaces for a community that is dwindling in population and spread across national boundaries.

Nonetheless, norteños build to resolve their ambivalence. Buildings provide evidence that they are returning heroes and pillars of the community rather than deserters. Buildings reinsert norteños symbolically and pragmatically into the hometown community. They require norteños to make a wide range of decisions about what the building will do and what it will look like; they require raising funds and saving money. All this work allows norteño investors to avoid facing harder decisions about where they will live and who they have become. But with building come new responsibilities and debts as norteño roles expand from migrant to planner, builder, booster, activist, team leader, role model, executive, and boss, with uncertain implications for the future of the community. The conditions under which, and reasons why, migrants leave hometowns help to define remittance space. The dynamics of aspiration, distance, and ambivalence and a culture of remitting have been established over time, as the history of Mexico-U.S. remitting reveals.

From Neither “Here” nor “There” to Both “Here” and “There”

While it is easy to view remittance space as a result of contemporary globalization and late capitalism—as labor markets are increasingly fragmented, governments break down trade barriers, and technologies aid human mobility—remittances and their attendant
spaces have been important to Mexico for the last hundred years. Even migrant ambivalence has historical antecedents.

Migrant desire and ambivalence, key characteristics in the production of remittance space, have a historical legacy that goes back to at least the early twentieth century, when individuals began making trips between Mexico and the United States. Political events, environmental factors, technological innovations, and economic change—the Mexican Revolution from 1911 to the early 1920s, the Cristero War in the 1930s, drought, and new railroads created structural conditions for individuals to take long journeys to places with dramatically higher earning power. In the first several decades of the twentieth century, individuals who went to the United States were recorded as earning from five to thirty-six times what they could earn in Mexican towns. These ratios were dramatically higher for rural workers, who earned far less in Mexico than townsmen did. Academics have argued that the tremendous imbalance created by enormous wage differentials alone would have sufficed to cause heavy emigration.

By the late 1920s, migrant dislocation, distance, and ambivalence had established historically observable changes in villages in Mexico. Two studies conducted in the 1920s and 1930s provide evidence of the social and cultural impact of migration on individuals and communities. Manuel Gamio and Paul S. Taylor were both commissioned by the Social Science Research Council to study the “Mexican problem,” or the impact on Mexican society of mass migration from Mexico to American farms. Manuel Gamio, a Mexican anthropologist, conducted extensive interviews of migrants living in different U.S. cities to understand their social and cultural adaptation and resistance to American ways of life (fig. 1.9). He questioned migrants about politics, religion, and gender roles. He also visited migrant hometowns in Mexico to photograph the influence of migration on place. Paul S. Taylor, trained as a political economist, also became interested in Mexican hometown societal transformations due to migration. He went to live in Arandas, Los Altos de Jalisco, for several months to examine how provincial town and farm life clashed with the dynamism of the industrial North. His study, entitled *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico* presents a portrait of Mexican modernity in the 1930s. Aside from conducting interviews and questionnaires, Gamio and Taylor examined U.S. and Mexican customs records—showing what migrants carried when returning to Mexico—and tracked remittance transfers to map migration streams and economic change (fig. 1.10). According to the *New York Times*, in 1928 Mexico received twelve million dollars.

In the 1920s and 1930s, migration brought material change to Jalisco in the importation of durable goods and clothing. In *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community*, Taylor records migrants’ penchant for buying wristwatches, overalls, and sewing machines. These objects had different symbolic and actual effects on everyday life. The wristwatch represented (and introduced) an American idea of time and timeliness to rural and town inhabitants who worked according to the sun and whose lives were monitored by church bells. Overalls became a ubiquitous form of dress. According to Taylor, it was “obvious that the migrant standard and kind of dress became a factor in setting new standards for non-emigrants who could afford it.” The introduction of overalls marked a moment when foreign dress began to redefine local standards. The introduction of the sewing machine created a great divide between women who used them and those who
sewed by hand. A traditional mode of production was rendered ineffective and inefficient once the industrial machine was brought into the household. This did not end sewing by hand; rather, it created new comparisons and relative satisfactions for those who sewed by hand and those who did not (have to). These imports also signified migrants’ contributions to the uneven economic development of families and communities.

While clothing and durable goods differentiated community members along nascent class lines, the introduction of imported automobiles produced more comprehensive spatial change in rural Mexico.56 On the basis of Gamio and Taylor’s findings, cars appear to have brought about the desire—and in some cases the will—to perceive (and attempt to resolve) the shortcomings of rural built environments. Gamio records that one out of every three migrants in his study brought a car back with him or her to Mexico:

The possession of automobiles is absolutely unheard of in the humble social class to which the immigrants generally belong. . . . Many sections of rural Mexico where the repatriated immigrant goes to colonize have no suitable automobile roads, and either there is no gasoline or else it is expensive or hard to get, with the result that automobiles are often useless. The good that results is that the possession of automobiles stimulates the owners to build roads, however poor these might be due to the humble circumstances of the owners. It would have been better had they brought in more buggies and carriages.57

The extent to which repatriated migrants built roads is unknown. This quotation, however, is evidence that the newly acquired modern amenity—the car—caused migrants to perceive a lack in their built environment that they attempted to correct. Building roads requires groups of people to band together. This makes road building a social process and indicates that remittance roads were one of the initial remittance spaces built into rural communities.

Fewer than one-third of imported vehicles were trucks suited to assist in rural tasks; over two-thirds were passenger cars. In a series of migrant portraits taken by Gamio in Michoacán, Mexico, repatriated migrants posed in their U.S. “Sunday best” in front of a model-T Ford. The same car was used in all of the portraits, providing a photogenic symbol of American modernity as migrant success (fig. 1.11).58

Despite the introduction of dollars and cars, major spatial change did not appear to have taken hold of rural localities and small towns during the period of Gamio and Taylor’s studies. Some migrants were interested in building a home in the American style, but this desire was quickly set aside by the logistical and practical difficulties of doing so. In Arandas, Jalisco, Taylor records a return migrant’s musings regarding a new home: “I would like to have a house in American style. . . . But . . . here we build thick so no bullet can come through, and no windows, so when the door is shut, no one can come.”59 Migrants that did build American-style houses quickly reverted back to their old customs and sought refuge in traditional-style homes. A local nonmigrant in Arandas told Taylor: “When the Mexicans come from the United States they are converted. They have better manners, dress and more money. They learn to wash their faces. . . . Many live in a jacal [traditional house], and upon return, make a new house. . . . But after [a norteño]
has been here for a time, he loses his learning and his wishes and makes his living as
before.”60

Taylor and Gamio also record migrants’ sporadic and largely unsuccessful
attempts to raise their economic status. According to Taylor, the majority of emigrants
“spent their money as fast as it was earned,” restricting material changes to ephemeral
things they could buy or consume.61 Taylor recounts several cases of migrants who rather
unsuccessfully attempted to change the structural conditions of their lives. “Probably the
emigrant most fired with enthusiasm for an altered model of life was the young
Pennsylvania steel worker who had purchased land, oxen, and horses. His works showed
both the hopes and the difficulty of realization: ‘I have many desires to do things in the
style of the United States. For example, I would like to have a pump for irrigation so I
could have better crops every year. Here we need money for machinery for our farms; we
have oxen and no machinery and can’t do much without money.’”62 The necessary
institutional, economic, and political support to bring infrastructure to such places did not
exist. Economic mobility was also blocked because many of the skills that migrants
learned in the United States were specialized. This was antithetical to how work was
performed in Mexico, where tradesmen had a holistic approach to farming and building.63

While migrant ambitions to change Mexico might have been tempered by
logistical constraints, from the perspective of some nonmigrant inhabitants in Arandas,
migrants were perceived as a threat to patriotism. Taylor records the voice of a leading
merchant in Arandas: “Every Mexican who goes, likes the United States better than
Mexico. He gets a better life there than here. After 100 years, it will be good-bye to
Mexico. I am afraid they will like America better than Mexico. We are making ‘war’ so
they won’t become Americanized. They will not like the Mexican flag; they have no love
of country, and that is a great danger to Mexico.”64

While this merchant is certain that migrants “like America better than Mexico,”
Taylor argues that migrants were actually ambivalent regarding their preference of
country: “But with a large proportion of the returned emigrants, the happier life in
Mexico was more than counterbalanced by the higher material standard of living in the
United States. Many asserted that they were happier in Arandas, and almost in the next
breath, that they would go back to the United States if work was plentiful, and would
gladly live there the remainder of their lives, apparently seeing no contradiction in their
statements.”65 At this time, migrants were ambivalent about where to live out the rest of
their lives. While Taylor was researching migrant housing conditions in California, he
approached a couple living in a self-built shack under a tree and asked the owners why
they did not invest more in their housing. They replied that they did not know if they
would stay and that they might return to Mexico. He then asked, “How long have you
been here?” to which they responded, “Thirty years.”66 Taylor notes: “Since it [Mexico]
was immediately adjacent geographically, it was also close psychologically in the minds
of Mexican immigrants in the United States.”67

Migrants in the last several decades who might “like America better than Mexico”
have built places and brought objects back to Mexico in part to create at home the “better
life” found in the United States. Seventy years after Taylor’s study, Guadalupe Gómez, a
Mexican migrant and political organizer in the United States, noted: “We have been those
who are neither from here nor there. Now we will be those who are both from here and
there—both things at the same time.”68 Migrants are resolving decades of ambivalence by
building worlds in Mexico (and the United States) that reflect new lifestyles acquired through transnational migration. Because of migration, the largest city in the region of Los Altos—the city adjacent to Arandas where Taylor conducted his research—is known as the “migrant city.” The upper-class neighborhood called Beverly Tepa refers to Beverly Hills. The desire to own a wristwatch has been replaced by more extravagant ambitions with higher stakes. Through migration, men and women want to be superhuman: in being both here and there at the same time, they attempt to transcend space and time.

Methods for Multi-sited Research

Demographers and economists, using statistical information, and anthropologists and sociologists, using ethnographic field research, have studied the effects of migration on urban and rural environments. Many of these studies have been conducted outside academia by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, both of which were set up in Washington, D.C., in 1945 to oversee global financing and international development. In 2001, the Migration Policy Institute and the Pew Hispanic Center were established in Washington, D.C., to study migration worldwide and to collect facts about Hispanic migration to the United States, respectively. Many researchers in these institutions, as well as in academe, have subscribed to an assimilation model of migration (in which migrants eventually adopt the culture of the country they move to) and the idea that migrants are “parasites” on the host country.69

In an article entitled “Placing the Migrant,” the geographers Rachel Silvery and Victoria Lawson claim that “postcolonialists have challenged Western authority in constructing places as ‘Third World’ and ‘underdeveloped,’ and have argued that developmentalist notions of place not only limit the discursive framework of migrancy but are also intimately tied to development policies that have material repercussions for migrants’ lives.”70 Furthermore, many studies of migration have assumed that migrants come to First World countries in search of a better life because of poverty, social problems or political repression in their home countries. Even the anthropologists and sociologists using ethnographic field research to explore the various motivations and cultures of the people who migrate tend to make these assumptions, without taking into account that in many home communities migration has become the norm; migration itself has become a part of the home culture.71

The demographic and ethnographic methods used to research migrants have contributed to some of these oversights. Statistics flatten people’s lives into quantifiable and objective knowledge, and ethnographies have often focused on “immigrant communities” in a First World country or “native villages” in a Third World country. The spaces of migration and the experience of migrancy are hard to explore if the focus is on only one site. This is because the spaces of migration, whether these are the literal places migrants inhabit (where they live and work) or the perceived spaces of their lives (spaces of resistance, dreaming, networking, or negotiating), are influenced by multiple sites. Although much can be understood about migration through an investigation of one locale, the spaces of migration and the experience of migrancy cannot.

Multi-sited methods reinvigorate the study of migrancy and the spaces of migration. This means that researchers are not only “hopping back and forth between the
whole conceived through the parts that actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole that motivates them”—Clifford Geertz’s proposed ethnographic method that results in a “thick description” of a foreign culture—but also hopping back and forth between two or more “sites.”

However, site is not necessarily limited to place. In his book *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*, the anthropologist George Marcus argues that multi-sited research is research that extends its case study to two or more sites, issues, or groups of people. In essence, multi-sited research can also be defined as extended case-study methodology. The extended case study as the sociologist Michael Burawoy puts it, extends the observer into the world of the participant, extends observations over time and space, extends out from micro processes to macro forces, and extends theory. The extended case-study method is sensitive to process, systematically using historical and geographical context to understand place. Burawoy continues that the extended case-study method encompasses “the global connections between sites.” Multi-sited research in which site is not limited to place achieves these aims.

However, once a research project extends to two or more sites, how is the focus of the extended case study narrowed? Marcus proposes to “follow the person, follow the thing, follow the metaphor, follow the plot, story or allegory, follow the life or biography, and follow the conflict.” Following various dimensions of social life allows researchers to trace the connections between seemingly unlikely events, processes, or relationships. Following the thing, the idea, or the conflict allows researchers, in keeping with the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, to establish a view of a “field”—a social arena in which people maneuver and struggle over particular resources—within which specific investigations are located.

Applying material-culture methods to multi-sited research can result in complex and rich histories of people and place. According to the architectural historian Dell Upton, *material culture* is a term derived from anthropology and archaeology that “embraces the entire human-made world. Those aspects of ourselves and our surroundings that we shape or modify as we have learned to do from others are material culture.” They include familiar artifacts such as houses, tools, and clothing, things “we can see and touch.” Today, architectural and art historians, as well as cultural theorists, use material culture to unearth local histories of those not documented in archives. Marcus’s framework can be applied to material culture in two ways: following the object as it migrates through space and as it moves through time. As the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai asserts, “Even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.”

The anthropologist Igor Kopytoff describes how Appadurai’s suggestion can be applied methodologically. According to Kopytoff,

Doing the biography of a thing, one would ask questions similar to those one asks about people: What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its “status” and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized “ages” or periods in the thing’s “life,” and what are the cultural
markers for them? How does the thing’s use change with its age, and what
happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness? Thus objects have “life
histories” or “careers” that are revealed through researching the cultural
biography of an object. This method is useful for addressing buildings.

“Following the idea” is another method that directly engages with material
culture. Connections are forged between the built environment and social, economic, and
political processes as a result of tracing how certain ideas about built form get carried in
people’s minds or in specific discourses across space, and are then implemented in
disparate locales. Scholars across a wide range of disciplines are increasingly using the
built environment to study how cultural and social practices “migrate” from one locale to
another. Geographer Paul Groth studies how people use everyday space to “establish
their identity, articulate their social relations, and derive cultural meaning.”

The built environment can also be primary evidence of histories and stories that
people conceal, are not aware of, forget, rewrite over time, and elude. These stories are
about who has the power to decide what is built at a certain moment, the relationship
between individual and collective decisions, the capacity for consensus in communities,
and the logistical building constraints on migrants’ goals and aspirations. The
environments that migrants inhabit are often changing. These environments are
vulnerable to multiple factors: migrants’ access to work, political attitudes toward
migrants, the effect of migration on culture, and the widening circulation of flows.
Therefore, studying the material culture of those environments is crucial for
understanding the spaces of migration, and ethnographic methods are also crucial because
they allow migrants to describe their investment in, and experience of, those
environments.

The built environment also tells stories about how global forces, whether
governmental policy, institutions, corporations, or NGOs, shape space. The historian
Anthony King writes that study of the social production of the built environment involves
“investigating the way in which particular kinds of economy, or modes of production,
and the ideologies with which they are associated, first give rise to distinctive institutions
and activities which, in turn, become embodied in urban and architecture forms.” Thus
the built environment is not just a register of social life; it is also a register of the gap
between social life and the ideologies that shape economies and institutions. The task is
to understand this gap: When does the built environment represent or spatially constitute
disjuncture and disconnection for individuals and communities?

A key to understanding this gap is interviewing the people who experience and
build places. Ethnographies present qualitative descriptions of human social phenomena
and are based on fieldwork that entails participant observation and interviews.
Ethnographic methods are the main methods used by many social and cultural
anthropologists and by sociologists who study contemporary phenomena. Histories that
give human voice to situations, such as diaries and journals, are also ethnographic. Multi-
sited ethnography is increasingly important for studies of the past and present that
attempt to understand place as it is increasingly affected by the circulation of people,
things, and ideas. Further, personal voice is central to developing an understanding of
migrancy because people’s stories and life paths knit disparate locales together.
This study uses extensive interviewing to understand place and the spaces of migration. As Bertaux Waime notes: “To tell one’s life story is not only to talk or to remember; it is an act, an encounter with reality. If this encounter seems to limit itself to an account of the past, it is orientated in fact by the present, in two ways: first it reconstructs the meaning of the past from the present point of view; second, and more deeply, it gives meaning to the past in order to give meaning to the present, to the present life of the person. And this last meaning cannot be the same for all social groups.”

Interviews can reveal not only migrants’ stories about how they experience the built environment but also how migrants position themselves vis-à-vis the past and the present milieu.

Nonetheless, interviews can be in danger of becoming “inherently micro and ahistorical” or substituting one person’s voice for a group’s position, must be positioned against an ethnographer’s other research tools for constructing place. Hence, this study continues ethnographic and material-culture methods to identify several sites shaping the “remittance landscape.”

The remittance landscape, as distinct from the peso landscape, is the landscape whose material transformation is funded by foreign, migrant-earned capital. In 2001, the Mexican government established the Tres por Uno or 3×1 program to triple migrant remittances sent through social clubs in the United States with municipal, state, and federal Mexican funds for regional development. 3×1 building projects and policies are now shaping the remittance landscape. I analyze remittance development and the 3×1 landscape as a “site” that inscribes the Mexican government’s development agenda “from above” onto informal migrant practice “from below.” I also investigate informal migrant remitting and family building as a site of domesticity and cultural change.

I use several indicators to identify the costs and consequences of the remittance landscape and the 3×1 landscape. Indicators such as the number of abandoned houses, types of remittance architecture projects, spatial arrangements of such projects, their geographic location, the use of remittance architecture, the role of institutional actors in their production, and their style expose the divergence between the remittance landscape as a utopian ideal and as a reality. Private migrant aspirations and dreams are often presented through the public formal characteristics of building projects whose facades and forms evoke U.S. styles. But as soon as projects are under construction, their meaning starts to become inflected by the social relations that define place. Putting the production of the built environment under this particular kind of scrutiny challenges dominant narratives about the success of remittances as a means of poverty alleviation.

By moving outward from remitting between families, to collective remitting between clubs and communities, to the government policies that structure collective remitting, my case study extends from the micro decision to send money home to the macro processes that shape remittance space.

Remittance Spaces in Sur de Jalisco

Today, a great number of places in rural Mexico are defined by remittance spaces. This is particularly the case in the state of Jalisco, in 2009, the fourth-largest receiver of remittances in Mexico. The Jalisco-California migration corridor has been influencing the development of two “heres” since the turn of the twentieth century. Each “here”
embodies a distinct version of “a better life.” The extended familial network known as compadrazgo (co-godparenthood), close ties to land, home-cooked meals, trusted gendered expectations, and an absence of state regulations define one “better life.” The other “better life” is defined by modern capitalism and consumerism, which create “equality” through one’s ability to pay for it. In this better life, rural Mexicans can attain retirement and social service benefits from the government. Migrants producing remittance landscapes hope to combine these “better lives.” The anthropologist Michael Kearney’s prescient argument in 1995 that transnationalism “is a sign of the fact that human action is now capable of culturally creating its own space” is manifesting materially in the built environment like those in Jalisco. 85

This dissertation explores the contradictions and disjunctures involved in migrant efforts to be here and there at the same time by building here through there, through a series of sites. As I traveled between different parts of Jalisco and California in the course of a year, I came to see remitting as inherently spatial, geographic, and multiscalar. Thus two axes run through the organization of the dissertation. The first axis is time. In time, remittance space evolves from the private realm of the house to the public realm of the village. The other axis is scale: from individuals, to family, to emigrant communities, to government policy, to transnational civil society.

In the next chapter, I explore remittance house building and dwelling practices. I argue that remittance houses represent a particular lifestyle that is still largely unattainable for their owners and users. The rise of the remittance house increases intrafamilial dependencies based on uncertain remitting practices and is the basis of a remittance development model that formalizes and institutionalizes transnational building practices in rural Mexico. An ethnographic and historical account of several remittance houses across time in one town in Jalisco, San Miguel Hidalgo, reveals formal patterns in the architecture that have explicit implications for social reproduction and cultural behavior. This approach, while narrow in scope, is necessary to demonstrate the evolution of the remittance house and to draw connections between the construction of remittance houses and changes in home-building industries and familial space.

In chapter 3 I examine the Mexican state’s intervention into remittance building practices. The Mexican government views remittance-funded development projects as a success. In 2001, President Fox publicly recognized migrants as the country’s heroes. That same year, the government formalized the Tres por Uno program. From 2002 to 2009, the federal government increased its spending on the program from approximately $15 million to $50 million. 86 The program has become a model for other remittance-receiving countries that are interested in new forms of development incorporating the poor or those that have traditionally been formally excluded from top-down development. This program, however, is more about the making of a development discourse than material change. While the government has increased its spending, this is a tiny fraction of the amount of informal remittances sent by migrants yearly. Roy articulates how actors that support microfinance (which several scholars have compared to remittance development) argue that it democratizes capital and democratizes development. Through microfinance, those excluded from capital circuits are incorporated and financed. While this might be the democratization of capital, she calls it the creation of “poverty capital,” in which the poor are incorporated into the financial realm but on ambiguous and often
unjust terms. As with microfinance, remittances are a “microprocessor” in the formation of poverty capital from below.

The urban and migration theorist AbouMaliq Simone notes that the official government narrative of development is not about meeting the needs of citizens but about “capturing residents to a life aesthetic defined by the state so that they can be citizens. It is about making ethical beings; about holding people in relations that make them governable.” Through 3x1, the Mexican government has indeed accomplished a range of goals that greatly exceed the needs of citizens: government ties to the Mexican diaspora are more concrete; the party in power, PAN, has the migrant vote; and remittances are used for productive projects that showcase the benefits of dual citizenship and broadcast relationships between government officials and migrants. But through 3x1 the Mexican state is also formalizing migrant responsibilities for hometowns they may no longer know. Migrant participation in projects that they may not be able to afford often puts them in debt. The process of building with remittances from a distance is institutionalized—development is democratized—but with grave consequences for those it is intended to support.

Concluding chapter 3, I argue that the program’s influence on emigrants and their communities in Mexico is antithetical to the program’s stated mission. Despite its democratic and transparent nature, 3x1 creates a top-down institutional space that channels emigrants’ informal remittances to government projects that migrants initiate but do not fully control. The program endows norteños with authority but does not fully equip them with the necessary resources to realize their goals. Nonetheless, the program is a major component in Mexico’s construction of a transnational civil society. This emergent transnational civil society operates throughout centers of power in the United States such as Los Angeles and Chicago and centers of power in Mexico such as Guadalajara and other capital cities, but has immediate material impacts on how people in rural localities live daily life. Ultimately, the 3x1 program extends the logic of the remittance house: stretching communities across disparate geographies can result in material change at home. Yet as the unit of analysis shifts from family to community and an increasing number of actors are involved, more is at stake and the complexities and consequences of transnational building are amplified.

Having established the role of 3x1, I explore how three 3x1 projects are executed and experienced in three emigrant villages of Jalisco. The first case study, presented in chapter 4, exposes the gendered nature of remittance space by showing how the construction of the Plaza de Toros, built in Lagunillas by emigrants to house the Mexican rodeo, supports “ranchero masculinity” while emigration destabilizes gender ratios and throws gender expectations into flux. As norteños, the government, and some locals create an arena for the spectacle of masculinity, integral to the jaripeo sport, they run into local constraints. Regional markets for rodeo events are not established to support the norteños’ spectacular vision, and local communities are strained by the expectations and demands that accompany the new rodeos. The construction of the remittance rodeo presents a paradox: Nortenos attempt to preserve local tradition and local culture while changing social reproduction through rodeo construction and use. The remittance rodeo builds migrant identities in rural localities.

While the remittance rodeo attempts to solidify local traditions, the casa de cultura (cultural center) challenges local norms. Chapter 5 argues that transnational
building projects in villages’ primary public space—the main plaza (or jardín) and surrounding buildings—challenge who constitutes the public and compromise the communal dynamic of public space. This is illustrated by the newly erected cultural center in San Juan de Amula, which introduces a new set of cultural norms and values to a small community by privatizing the once free, outdoor, and communal space of town fiestas and events and imposing formal and foreign regulations on a community organized around unwritten and informal social codes. New rifts and divisions arise as local and regional managers of public spaces are displaced by norteños’ growing sphere of influence. This opulent cultural center—unprecedented in small villages—also sharpens the growing disparities in a village composed of compradazgo or kinship networks. As certain actors can or cannot participate in the center’s events, this case amplifies the plight of nonemigrants in their hometown who are forced to live among imported cultural behaviors and social norms but are periodically excluded from them.

Finally, chapter 6 argues that transnational building practices not only unsettle who constitutes the public in rural Jalisco but also requires an expansion of the notion of the public to include new administrative capacities and services that care for norteños now integral to the community but physically absent from it. Emigrants’ construction of an asilo anciano (old age home) in Los Guajes in preparation for their retirement in Mexico is an attempt to bring about these changes. Certain norteños are no longer invested in the pueblo identity or the daily administration of public spaces and cultural behaviors, yet despite their removal from daily life in the pueblo they still view it as a place they want to return to in their old age or in death. For over twenty years norteños raised funds to build an asilo that is now abandoned because they do not have the support from the state to hire nurses, doctors, and caregivers. The abandoned asilo is evidence of the limits of norteños’ sphere of influence and the state’s reluctance to implement a public infrastructure that supports emigrants in rural localities. The asilo also challenges a rural social order whereby the elderly are cared for by extended family until death. The elderly in emigrant families on both sides of the border are increasingly abandoned and aging without adequate social services. Yet despite the asilo’s failure the government espouses the building of 3x1 old age homes as a social benefit to villages.

Chapter 6 also explores death and aging as represented in the built environment of Mexico. Remittance projects in cemeteries do not require constant community negotiation or daily use. In cemeteries, migrant families are unmoored from certain social conventions and tied to others in ways that result in a fantastic representational pastiche of lives that are perhaps more imagined than lived.

Remittance space is a shifting terrain where clear winners and losers are difficult to identify. It is hard to determine whether migrants are challenging hegemony or reinforcing it in a global age, whether they are challenging local hometown traditional social norms that, say, put men at the center of the town or reinstating them, and whether the changes associated with remittance space are positive, and if so, why. The remittance spaces that migrants (and their hometown communities) have achieved are immensely impressive given their circumstances, but the modicum of economic self-sufficiency that they achieve is at a cost that reveals the power of global capital to wreak havoc.

This dissertation illustrates the ambiguous role of norteños and hometown associations in their communities of origin, and the disjuncture between the 3x1 project as imagined and as executed on the ground, as critical to the production of remittance
space. I argue that migration cannot be understood without addressing material realities together with individual and institutional spaces because migration is about space: space made, space enacted, space governed, space deserted. That is one of the major findings of this work. Analysis of these spaces allows us to see migration in a new light.
Notes, Chapter 1

The epigraphs to this chapter are from Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 194, and from Ramon Dominguez, interview by author, California, August 2008.

1 *Hijos ausentes* is a term commonly used for “emigrants.” People also shorten it and simply say *hijos*.
2 Through this chapter I use pseudonyms for the individual migrants interviewed. I use real names for public figures.
3 Migration Policy Institute, “Global Remittances Guide,” 2010, www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/remittances.cfm; the data presented are stated to come from the World Bank. Note that more than three-quarters of these monies were sent to developing countries. Also note that these data capture only remittances sent through formal channels, such as banks and money transfer services.


19 The vast majority of literature on transnational migration does not address the material world, though there are exceptions to this generalization, notably Peri Fletcher’s *La Casa de Mis Sueños: Dreams of Home in a Transnational Migrant Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).

20 While the relationship between architecture and remittances has not been studied, a few studies on migrant home-building practices have emerged. A review of the literature on this subject is given in chapter 2.


22 As governments and institutions attempt to channel flows of capital, their actions sometimes subject migrants to predatory tactics and strategies. In 2000 a class action suit was filed against Western Union, the largest and oldest wire transfer company, as well as several other companies, not only for charging exorbitant transaction fees ($30 for sending $300) but for failing to disclose a foreign exchange markup—the difference between the exchange rate used to convert dollars to pesos and the bank rate—to remitters. The companies settled the lawsuit for some $375,000 and agreed to give coupons to remitters who had made transactions between 1993 and 1999. Migrant lawyers, however, do not expect that remitters will redeem the coupons. See “Mexico: Agriculture, Remittances, Social Security,” *Migration News* 10, no. 1 (2003), http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=23_0_2_0.
Here I am referring to the Tres por Uno, or the 3x1 Programa para Migrantes. This program triples migrant remittances with municipal, state, and federal funds geared toward development.

Most notably, Western Union and Money Gram control wire transactions. However, scores of small local businesses in small and large towns across Mexico are making a living off the remittance business.

A study on Latin American remittance practices conducted by IDB-MIF in 2004 found that some ten million immigrants from Latin America in the United States had conducted some one hundred million transactions. Sixty percent of Latin American immigrants in the United States at this time remitted. See Enrique Carrasco and Jane Ro, “Remittances and Development,” in The E-Book on International Finance and Development, ed. Enrique Carrasco (June 2007), www.uiowa.edu/ifdebook/ebook2/contents/part4-II.shtml.

Miguel López Covas, interview by author, Michoacán, Mexico, August 2008.


Jorge Reyes, interview by author, California, November 2008.


Juan Zamora, informal conversation, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.

Juan Zamora, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.

Karyn Gonzales, informal conversation with author, Jalisco, Mexico, March 2008.


See David Harvey, Spaces of Hope (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).


Ibid.

Daniel Gutiérrez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, April 2008.


Miguel López Covas, informal conversation with author, Michoacán, Mexico, July 2008.

In small towns, remittances have funded projects that refer to the United States at all scales. From replicas of the Statue of Liberty in personal homes to supermarkets built in the “style of the U.S.” where shoppers use carts and pay at checkouts rather than the typical storefront model, these material expressions suggest, but do not provide evidence of, migrant success in the United States.

Raul Robles, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, April 2007.

Héctor Alarcón, interview by author, California, August 2007.

José Ochoa, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, December 2007.

Josefina Hernández, interview by author, California, April 2007.

“Remittance development” is more explicitly dealt with in chapter 3.

While U.S.-Mexico migration can be traced back to this time, other migration corridors have older antecedents. Madeline Hsu, who has studied U.S.-Chinese migration streams from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s, documents remittance spaces—although she does not use this term—that predate the Mexican case study. At this time, globalization and

47 In the 1920s, Paul S. Taylor recorded the wage rates of several participants in his study on Mexican labor in the United States. His findings illustrate a wide range of potential earnings. For example, in 1929 one man received thirty-five and forty cents per hour working on the railroad, whereas coal-mining, steel, or car manufacturing wages were in some cases as high as $6, $7, or even $9 per day (12, 14, and 18 pesos). See Paul Schuster Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1933), 25. Yet Taylor also claims that even as early as the 1930s people were going to the United States “not from economic necessity, but to aventurar in the United States.” Ibid., 40.

48 The Social Science Research Council was then a privately funded organization whose mission was to study the scientific aspects of human migration.


50 Paul S. Taylor continued studying Mexican migration as one of his lifelong interests. The Bancroft Library has an extensive collection of field notes, correspondence, interviews, and more. On Mexican migration and place, see Taylor’s *Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community*. For a more general discussion of migration, see his *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1928–34).

51 While these are the first studies to analyze what migrants brought with them across the U.S.-Mexico boundary, thus leaving the question open as to when these practices began, the Gamio and Taylor manuscripts document emergent changes, suggesting the relative newness of the practice of remitting objects alongside dollars in the 1920s and 1930s.


53 Taylor, *Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community*.

54 Ibid., 57.

55 According to Taylor, customary local dress included the palm sombrero, the cotton *camisa* and *calzones* (cotton shirt and trousers), and guaraches. For Sundays the returned emigrants, both in town and from the ranches, sometimes wore tailored or ready-made suits and the hats and shoes that they had brought back from the United States. Ibid., 56.

56 Aside from road building, Taylor notes that overall factories were built in response to the demand for overalls. This spatial change was most likely an isolated occurrence. It does, however, suggest that the built environment of Mexico was responding to migration in several ways.


58 An album of Gamio’s photographs, *Fotografias diversas correspondientes a la colonia Acambaro*, is available at UC Berkeley’s Bancroft Library.

Ibid., 58. This comment can be contrasted to another of Taylor’s anecdotes: “I talked with repatriates—one of them from Mason City, Iowa. He had returned with savings of $3,000 and was living in ease on his father’s ranch with part of his savings out at interest of one and one-half per cent per month.” See Paul Taylor, “Vignettes from Old Mexico,” University of California Chronicle, April 1932, 128.

Taylor, Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community, 63.

Gamio, Mexican Immigration, 42.

Taylor, Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community, 54. In Gamio’s study, an interviewee expresses the opposite sentiment: “I would rather cut my throat before changing my Mexican nationality. I prefer to lose with Mexico than to win with the United States. My country is before everything else and although it has been many years since I have gone back I am only waiting until conditions get better, until there is absolute peace before I go back. I haven’t lost hope of spending my last days in my own country.” See Gamio, “Notes Gathered.”

Taylor, Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community, 52.

Taylor, “Vignettes from Old Mexico.”


Guadalupe Gómez is the co-founder of the Federación de Zacatecanos. She is quoted in Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, “Mexican Migrant Organizations,” ch. 2 of Invisible No More: Mexican Migrant Civic Participation in the United States, 5.


Marcus, Ethnography, ch. 3.


84 For a discussion of the “anthropological critique,” see Michael Buroway’s introduction to Buroway et al., *Global Ethnography*.


86 See SEDESOL, *Cuarto informe trimestral de SEDESOL, 2009*, January 2010, 52, www.sedesol.gob.mx/archivos/110/file/Cuarto_Informe_Trimestral_2009.pdf. The SEDESOL report states that the federal government spent 530.3 million pesos in 2009. This is the budget for the federal and state portions of the program. The municipal governments and migrants contributed an amount at least equal to this in 2009.

87 See Roy, *Poverty Capital*.

Bienvenidos Hijos! Building the Global Spectacle of Migration

Figure 1.1. (shown on first page of chapter) A remittance house courtyard, Pegueros, Jalisco, 2008.

Figure 1.2. Welcome banner, El Limón. Thousands of towns across Mexico welcome their *hijos ausentes* home for the December holidays. In 2007, El Limón, Jalisco, put up this banner to welcome home migrants from El Limón as well as the surrounding ranchos and pueblos. This is the only point of entry from El Limón’s hinterland.
Figure 1.3. Hijos ausentes parade, Los Guajes.

Figure 1.4. GruYork booth, El Grullo.
Figure 1.5. Remittance landscape. The peso landscape is being erased by the remittance landscape. The grass and dirt “sidewalk” is here covered with modern tiles.
Figure 1.6. “State-of-the-art” sports arena in Vista Hermosa. Norteños and the Mexican government have funded this arena. Sugarcane fields surround the sports complex. This is one basketball court out of over ten different courts. Note the modern backboard hoop with an adjustable height. For good reasons, Vista Hermosa means “beautiful view.”
Figure 1.7. Remittance church, Michoacán. This church features an impressive combination of architectural representations. In the front of the building, most impressive are the twin towers with their cupolas, and the double portico. In the back of the building, note the imitation of Washington, D.C.’s Capitol dome, shown in the lower photograph. This symbol of American democracy is located directly over the priest’s pulpit in the building’s interior.
Figure 1.8. “Super Manhattan,” Jalisco. This is a typical grocery store with a spectacular facade. The Statue of Liberty, to the left is accompanied by a satellite connection on the flat roof at the back and no fewer than six pitched-roof cornice details.
Figure 1.9. Mexican migrants photographed by Manuel Gamio in his SSRC study. In a scrapbook, Gamio comments below each photograph about the changes in his subjects’ appearances. This caption notes, “This type presented all of the characteristics of a Mexican peon, but is showing a certain evolution or better said, ‘change,’ in his style, one can see his use of ‘overalls’ and felt hat. In Tampico, in the petroleum camps, there are thousands of individuals of this type.” “Notes Gathered for His Book, Mexican Migration to the United States, and Related Material, 1926–1928.” Courtesy of the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.
Figure 1.10. Objects that return migrants brought to Mexico. In his 1937 book *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, Manuel Gamio published tables like these, recorded by customs agents of the objects migrants brought back with them to Mexico.
Figure 1.11. Repatriates in Mexico. All of these returned migrants are posing in front of the same remitted automobiles. Photographs taken by Manuel Gamio in Mexico in 1937. “Fotografías diversas correspondientes a la colonia Acámbaro,” in “Notes Gathered for His Book, Mexican Migration to the United States, and Related Material, 1926–1928.” Courtesy of the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.
Chapter 2

From the Remittance House to the Remittance Development Model

Figure 2.1. Remittance house, Pegueros, Jalisco. Note the relief inscription over the doorway, which reads: “Dedicated to My Parents.”
In the rural Mexican town of Vista Hermosa, Jalisco, a four-story colonial-style mansion built by locals who emigrated to Napa Valley, California, towers above modest adobe and concrete houses. Since construction began in 2004 the house has been the talk of the town. Local farmers, mothers, shopkeepers, and factory workers gossip about the Italian marble floors, two-story columns, copper antique elevator (to carry its owners to the fourth floor in their old age), private movie theater, personal gym, oak pool table, and mini-bar, even though few of them have ever been inside.

Nestled in a poor Mexican town reliant on sugarcane and corn farming, this mansion is an exceptional example of what I call the remittance house. This term refers to a house built with money earned by a Mexican migrant in the United States who sends dollars—remits—to Mexico for the construction of his or her dream house. More broadly, I use this term to emphasize remitting and migration as key components of contemporary transnational building practices around the globe. While exhibiting similarities, every remittance house is unique and embodies the specific circumstances of the migrant who finances and builds it. Some migrants and their families build informally, adding rooms as the need arises, while others use architectural plans to construct entirely new houses on their land. Understated facades may blend in with the surrounding buildings, or highly ornamental designs may announce a migrant’s success abroad (fig. 2.2). In Mexico, dating back to at least the middle of the twentieth century, the remittance house has crystallized migrant narratives and desires amid shifting cultural milieus. As artifacts of complex relationships, these houses are also embedded in the macro processes of globalization and transnational migration.

For at least a century, American immigrants’ remittances have dramatically affected the vernacular rural landscapes of their hometowns. As early as 1913, the New York Times observed that Italian immigrant laborers “go back when they have accumulated American money, buy property and restore it,” with the result that “in squalid villages stand new, clean houses” built by “Italians who have come back from America.” Today, Turkish migrants in Germany, Portuguese migrants in France, and Chinese migrants in America use hard-earned wages to build new houses in their hometowns. However, in contrast to Mexicans, many migrants whose homelands are far from the United States cannot return home until retirement.

The current scale of remitting and the continuous movement of migrants between Mexico and the United States are unprecedented. This fast-growing sector of the economy is spearheading home building for migrants and their families throughout Mexico. However, the consequences of imagining, building, and living in these homes
for local communities, family life, and local construction practices and markets have received scant attention.\(^6\)

Several migration scholars study the influence of remittances on household economies and family life, but the anthropologist Peri Fletcher’s study set in Michoacán has been the only one to focus on how migration is interwoven with the hopes and dreams of building a house in one’s hometown.\(^7\) While recognizing the importance of building, Fletcher stops short of analyzing the spaces and materials of the houses, yet these also warrant attention. Hence, this study explores how the forms of buildings and communities not only embed social meanings but also structure social life and relations between individuals, genders, classes, and groups and establish categories or descriptions fundamental to society.\(^8\)

In this chapter, I examine the meanings and implications of remittance houses through geographically and historically contextualized ethnographies of migrants and their families. Architectural analysis of these houses demonstrates remittance houses as a unit of analysis for larger social, political, and architectural discourses about migration and global building practices in rural localities. Remittance houses are emblems of the rising social status of once impoverished rural farmers. Yet the houses and the specific forms they take have unintended consequences that many migrants do not anticipate when building them and are subsequently forced to deal with. Paradoxically, the increased symbolic value of the house is linked to its diminished function or use value. The imported architectural styles and spaces often suggest to their owners or inhabitants lifestyles that are newly learned. Houses—a critical space of migration—reflect and reproduce the social condition of migrants. The remittance house, an alluring trap for migrants and their families, can be read architecturally and allegorically—it is both a house form and a crystallization of the inequities that underpin migrants’ lives. Also, villagers who do not migrate and do not have remittance houses still are affected by the spatial transformation occurring in small towns and villages.

The spaces of the remittance house are emblematic of a profound shift in rural Mexican society.\(^9\) Perhaps the single most striking quality of remittance construction is the social distance embedded in its form. Scholars of the built environment can contribute to the study of how migration is transforming rural Mexican society by analyzing changes in spatial form at both migrants’ places of origin and point of arrival.\(^10\) Social relations stretched across geographies and exacerbated by distance increasingly define local places. Places in Mexico increasingly are marked by the absences and familial fragmentation that constitute “migration as a way of life.”\(^11\) These absences are a necessary precondition for migrants to realize their dream house.

The Village in Historical Context

Jalisco, Mexico, is located about 1,500 miles below the U.S.-Mexico border along the Pacific Coast (fig. 2.3). It is one of the Mexican states with the highest rates of emigration.\(^12\) Migration to the United States from rural Jalisco dates back to the late nineteenth century. Even before the railroad connected the northern region of Jalisco to California at the turn of the twentieth century, people were heading north on foot.

At the turn of the twentieth century, large-scale agricultural production based on unequal power relations between hacendados (owners of hacienda plantations) and
indebted campesinos (or peasants) established agricultural communities. Campesinos in pueblos (small villages) surrounding the hacienda often planted and harvested land that belonged to the hacendados or powerful families known as caciques. In remote localities, very small subsistence farming communities, known as ranchos, were composed of one or two extended families.

In both pueblos and ranchos, farmers mired in poverty and indebted to large-scale landholders struggled to provide shelter for their families. In the first half of the twentieth century the Mexican revolution abolished the hacienda system and the caciques began to lose their power. Between the 1920s and the 1940s Mexico’s revolutionary presidents established communal land holdings called ejidos. However, the federal government otherwise neglected rural farmers, and most rural inhabitants could build only modest houses with local materials.

To study the remittance house I focus on San Miguel Hidalgo, a pueblo in the south of Jalisco established before the Spanish conquest. San Miguel’s range of building types (from adobe brick huts to lavish remittance houses), its location in a region of Jalisco that has a high emigration rate, and its proximity to the other sites examined in this dissertation contributed to my selection of the site. San Miguel, a pueblo of approximately five hundred inhabitants, was (and still partially is) owned by two caciques. Like many pueblos in Jalisco, San Miguel’s built environment reflects its migration history. The impact of emigration on the community dates back about fifty years. Various remittance houses—the types range from one-story cement-block houses to gargantuan trophy homes—share party walls with preremittance-era adobe brick houses, some of which are hundreds of years old (fig. 2.4). Although San Miguel is a unique case, it provides information about the remittance house that can be applied across disparate remittance landscapes.

Traditional House Forms in Rural Mexico

Historically, building an adobe house has been a communal activity performed by men. Until recently, the principal building material in rural Jalisco was adobe brick—a mixture of earth, zacate (grass), and horse manure. To make adobe brick, laborers worked in complementary ways: one worker’s knowledge of where the good earth was located was complemented by another worker’s knowledge of brick-drying techniques. Also, the vulnerability of adobe construction to the elements—notably water, wind, and pests—required a homeowner to continuously tend to his house and to rely on his neighbors to keep it in good condition. These processes reinforced ties between individuals and the immediate environment and created an interdependent community.

While most men in the village were known as albañiles (vernacular builders or carpenters), some held special craft skills: one was able to build roofs and another to craft wooden doors. These specialized skills allowed neighbors to strengthen their standing in the community by extending their help to other families. Similarly, neighbors traded critical items—one farmer’s honey would be traded for another’s time. This pattern of exchange allowed a seemingly homogenous community to articulate important social distinctions.

Vernacular dwellings in San Miguel also exhibit a close fit between domestic space and an agrarian way of life. Typical houses consist of a courtyard or partial
courtyard surrounded by inward-facing living quarters and an interior porch connecting private rooms with the communal space of the courtyard. The courtyard, a multifunctional space, is by far the most frequently used area in the house. In the courtyard a large outdoor comal, or wood-burning oven for stewing meat and making bread, a well, and a tub for washing clothes are situated among fruit trees, vegetable gardens, and corrals and stables for livestock. The courtyard also contains sheds for tools to make honey or adobe bricks.

The continuous exterior wall that defines the courtyard house acts to enclose the rear courtyard of the home and to define the edge of the street. This front wall is attached to a roof known as dos aguas (two waters), whose peak parallels the street and whose edges extend seamlessly over individual houses. The wall and roof create a continuous built fabric that separates public from private space (fig. 2.5).

Traditionally, adobe homes were built and expanded in an incremental fashion. The Rodríguez house, built around 1930, exemplifies this informal approach to the construction of domestic space (fig. 2.6). Originally a one-room dwelling, the enclosed space consisted of a communal sleeping area attached to a large unfenced yard. Adults slept on the dirt floor, while wooden boards that rested on the wooden roof beams created a tiny (and dangerous) attic-like space for their seven children to sleep next to piles of corn. During the dry months their five boys slept outside. About twenty years later the family added two additional rooms to provide separate sleeping quarters for boys and girls. Shortly thereafter they extended and enclosed the long veranda or patio on the courtyard side of the rooms, which allowed them to put interior furniture outside, where they spent most of their time. The patio faced the enclosed yard, where the corral and stables for pigs and goats, the well, an outdoor kitchen and oven, and fruit trees orchestrated daily life (fig. 2.7). The construction of the Rodríguez house paralleled the life cycle of the family.

The Rodríguezes did not (and could not) build for an imagined future. When many children were born, they added rooms to house them. When the livestock overtook the yard, they added spaces to contain them. After a particularly profitable summer harvest, they enclosed the patio to shelter the family from the rain. Farmers did not have the luxury of building, all at once, houses that fit all of their needs, in part because being able to build was contingent on external factors: rainfall, seed quality, prices for farm products, the farmer’s health, disposable cash, the cacique’s demands, and limited time to make bricks and build. These logistical constraints dovetailed with religious beliefs. The saying “If you plan for tomorrow, God will damn you,” was (and is) professed by devout Catholics who left “planning” in God’s hands. The lack of architectural plans, the continuous and open-ended approach to building, and the contingent nature of opportunities contributed to an environment in which a set of buildings, or in this case “the home,” was seen as something incrementally changing over time rather than as a completed product.

Available materials, shared facade elements, and a desire for uniformity have lent traditional Mexican pueblos a marked continuity and homogeneity of appearance. Locals wanted adobe brick made from the same earth. The exterior wall and the roof, made of a fired adobe tile known as teja, connected the disparate homes visually and materially, creating a uniform aesthetic. The goal was for the house to look like the neighbor’s house.
Since the 1930s, village life has been increasingly disrupted by a series of factors affecting Jalisco’s countryside. Critical droughts in the 1930s and the violence of the Cristero War (1926–29), which pitted the federal government against the Catholic Church, ravaged small towns. The Bracero program (1942–64), which contracted locals to work in American fields, and the geographic isolation of pueblos from the new highways built in the 1940s and 1950s, propelled hungry and desperate men north. These environmental, political, and social upheavals affected building practices.

Waves of successive migration during the twentieth century meant that fewer men and women were available to erect buildings and till the land. As soon as they were able, men who migrated north sent dollars as a substitute for their presence. The flow of men shuttling back and forth between Jalisco and the United States was paralleled by the flow of their dollars sent home to support families.

By the 1970s and 1980s a noticeable trend in new home construction, linked to remittances, emerged in southern Jalisco. In 2006, Jalisco received $2 billion from men and women who are now identified proudly in Mexico as paisanos (countrymen) or norteños (northerners). They are no longer called migrants—a term historically used to signify people who are willing to abandon their land, traitors to their home country. Although no one knows exactly how much of this money is used on home building, the influx of dollars has resulted in a building boom across rural Jalisco.

Over the last thirty years, local infusions of capital have changed the way that campesinos conceive of the building process. Now, rather than merely providing much-needed shelter at a minimum cost, building can involve changes that make families more comfortable or beautify their houses. Migrants also build for retirement, to define themselves as successful to their family and community, or to express themselves. In this region, very seldom do migrants view new homes as economic investments. A lack of potential buyers, and the possible damages to property and goods that result from renting, keep owners from selling and renting remittance houses (fig. 2.8).

Disposable income—the building capital available to a migrant family—limits the extent and quality of construction in a project. Small capital flows may result in the decision to undertake small-scale remodels that may simply replace old windows with new ones. More income may result in more substantial building projects that involve completely knocking down an old adobe house to build from scratch, or building on newly purchased land. In either case, migrants want to build rather than buy a house, and they want to change building materials and forms as well. Old materials—adobe, zacate, and wood—are updated to fired-brick, steel, aluminum, cement, and glass. Design motifs and lifestyles are pulled from a wide spectrum of personal experiences to create unique homes.

Motifs in Remittance Construction in Rural Mexico

A migrant’s decision to detach or semidetach his or her remittance house from continuous exterior walls and rooflines is the most critical spatial change in the village. To build modern houses, which may have second stories, double garages, high ceilings, and modern floor plans, migrants must tear down old adobe houses, break from the continuous fabric of the traditional dwelling, and start anew. This decision distinguishes migrant houses from their surroundings. It also shows migrants as people who have
withdrawn from the pueblo, though at the same time they are still heavily invested in its well-being and vitality and one day may return (fig. 2.9).

Detached from neighboring houses, the new house will have an articulated facade that is distinct from the continuous adobe wall. Traditional Mexican colors and modern house ornamentation are mixed to create individualized front facades. Purple, yellow, or fuchsia houses are complemented by columns, turrets, water fountains, or fake wooden crossbeams made out of concrete; together the decorative details may refer to American, Greek, Gothic, Tudor, or Neoclassical architectural styles. However, sensing that the four-sided freestanding house is not a part of local conceptions of space, the owners of a new remittance house tend to either reattach it to the neighbors’ wall (but not the roofline) or leave its sides unpainted, windowless, and unadorned (fig. 2.10).

The second major change caused by remittance construction is the abandonment of the courtyard plan. The focus of the house shifts from the communal spaces of the all-purpose yard to the individual spaces in the interior of the house. It is possible to abandon the courtyard, where family members once spent all their time, in favor of the individual rooms of the modern home because many intergenerational migrant families no longer live together. Instead, grandparents often remain in their adobe house close to remittance houses built by absent sons and daughters.

Amenities and new facilities often update the vernacular dwelling or equip the modern home. Modern kitchens known as the cocina integral, garage doors, washers and dryers, televisions, and bathroom sinks are meant to ease daily chores. Cooking on a gas stove replaces cooking on the comal, and a washing machine replaces extended periods of hand-washing in the yard. Moving the new kitchens inside allows open floor plans and changes the old gendered social interactions that used to accompany cooking outside or in a separate room. The space for casual encounters between women in the yard or the privacy of enclosed kitchens is eliminated in houses that feature a modern kitchen connected to a TV room where husbands or children may be lounging. Other amenities such as yard sprinklers and reliable running hot or cold water are lacking. Some houses have bathrooms that look modern but have no running water; in other cases, families tend a front lawn by pouring buckets of water on it.

Finally, select trappings associated with suburban domesticity in the United States are exported to Mexico. According to Hugo Galindo, an engineer who works in San Miguel, “Those who can afford a California-style house get one.” Many migrants (and even locals who have never left home) want a front lawn, a pitched roof, a two-car garage, a doorbell, and a mailbox. However, home building and designing in the United States are specific to the history of U.S. building materials, technologies, construction processes, and an American way of life—all embedded in architectural elements. In Mexico, these architectural elements have a symbolic value that overrides the difficulties of building, living in, and maintaining the houses.

In suburban homes in the United States, front lawns are a display piece for passing drivers and pedestrians and can be used recreationally. In rural Jalisco, remote roads have little to no traffic, and grass is proudly maintained for few to see. Furthermore, the lawn ends up replacing the all-purpose backyard rather than being an addition to it, since the house is moved to the back of the lot, where formerly vegetables were grown and animals kept.
The mailbox, which in the United States is functional, becomes symbolic in Mexico. Villages do not receive mail from the cabecera (head municipality), do not have postmen, and are not equipped with post office boxes. Norteños who add mailboxes to their homes are either preparing for a postal future or merely referring to a system that exists in the United States.

Often a remittance house evokes the pitched roofs of a suburban home in the United States without actually replicating them. Flat roofs are fronted with an ornamental pitched facade or pitched-roof window frames are used (imitating dormer windows) to refer to the freestanding house form (fig. 2.11).

The doorbell, a trapping of a modern way of life, may seem like a minor addition to the rural home. However, it changes the spaces of the home as well as the house’s relationship to the social fabric of the neighborhood. In San Miguel and several other pueblos around Jalisco, one enters an adobe house through a heavy wooden front door or through the courtyard. The front door is built with a small half window. Neighbors go up to the window, which is often left open, and call out for the owner of the house. The courtyard and vernacular door allow for casual interactions; they create thresholds between domestic interiors and exteriors that allow conversations without requiring homeowners to invite passersby inside the house.

The doorbell formalizes relationships between neighbors. Houses with doorbells often have one-piece wooden doors that must be opened all the way to see who is calling. This design and grassy lawns create two spatial barriers for passersby: a visitor must first enter the front yard through a wrought iron or wooden fence and then push the buzzer. Some neighbors are so put off by the doorbell that they refuse to ring it, and some homeowners refrain from answering a ring when they do not know who is calling. The doorbell consequently creates a remittance space that impedes the informal grito or street call.

The detached house, the elimination of the courtyard, and the addition of new amenities, facilities, and trappings associated with the image of U.S. domesticity are intended to update traditional vernacular homes and break with the construction methods of the past. As of this writing, new homes built in this idiom are not necessarily built by migrants. Some locals who have never left Mexico, the lucky few who can afford it, are building in either an American style, the estilo del norteño (style of the one who goes north) or a kind of rural modern. They are influenced by remittance houses going up around them, by the modern housing stock they may know from visits to Guadalajara, Jalisco’s major city, and by images they see on television and in magazines. The ubiquity of the remittance house has at least contributed to and perhaps also created a stylistic feedback loop between norteños and their rural counterparts. Dwellers in the remittance landscape (in select high-migration communities in the countryside) are increasingly influenced by other distant places even if they have not traveled to them. Thus, even for rural inhabitants who have never left Mexico, migration and remitting are a way of life.

The Remittance Construction Industry

Remittance architecture transforms local economies in rural areas not only by infusing capital but also by fundamentally changing the way the local economies operate. The expansion of certain sectors of the construction market coupled with new demands from
norteños brings foreign goods into local businesses. Global companies become part of rural localities, and government activity in the construction sector increases. New actors in rural construction markets are formalizing informal industries that are now larger in scale and more vulnerable to external market forces.

The remittance economy directly affects the local construction economy through the rapidly increasing demand for fired brick, the main building material used in new construction. The cabeceras used fired brick in the early twentieth century for houses and public buildings. Villages of campesinos did not use this material until the 1950s and 1960s, and even then only a few residents did. In the 1950s, Tonio Ortiz, one of the first braceros to return to San Miguel, built the town’s first remittance house of fired brick (fig. 2.12).22 Ortiz did not alter the basic spaces of the adobe house. In the 1950s, he built a two-room house about five yards in front of his adobe house. When more money became available he knocked his adobe house down and built an exact replica of it in fired brick on the same lot. Fired brick is preferred to adobe because it requires less maintenance and care and lasts longer.

Early fired bricks mimicked adobe bricks in size. Adobe bricks typically measured up to one hundred by seventy by ten centimeters and had to be large to bear the weight of the wall. By the 1950s, fired bricks, known as listones, were forty by twenty by six centimeters. According to Gustavo Chávez, a local albañil in his eighties, listón brick lasts longer than the fired brick made today. “In the past they made brick like you make good bread. They beat it and beat it until it was soft powder. Now they make the brick to break.”23 The substantial listón brick, though smaller, could bear the weight of a wall.

The most popular brick used in contemporary modern rural houses is much smaller than listón because steel columns and concrete have been introduced to bear wall loads. For the same amount of earth and clay used to make one listón brick, manufacturers now produce three tabique bricks, which measure fourteen by twenty-eight by six centimeters and cost about ten cents apiece. According to Rodolfo Sahagún Morales, the largest brick manufacturer in Autlán, a town that supplies San Miguel, “The smaller brick economizes on the use of the clay. For the same amount of good clay you get more brick, and you can build with less brick because of steel reinforcement.”24 Thinner, narrower bricks and slimmer walls appears to benefit everybody—locals, who buy cheap bricks, and manufacturers, who produce more of them. However, locals need to buy more of them, and the value of brick has declined. Furthermore, a new dependency is created on the external markets that supply steel beams and other steel used to reinforce the concrete.

Despite an increase in brick production, old technologies used to make them endure. Rodolfo Sahagún Morales estimates that there has been a 60 to 70 percent increase in ladrilleros or brickmakers in the last twenty years. In the town of Autlán, brick businesses now support six hundred families. However, laborers sometimes work thirty-hour shifts, watching big earthen ovens heat handmade brick, using old rubber tires for fuel. The ladrilleros—both men and young boys—work in full sun, hunch over as they mix two distinct types of clay and pour them into molds, and breathe noxious fumes emitted by the burning tires (fig. 2.13). Thus remittance construction supports local people through brick manufacturing, but under hazardous conditions.

Remittance building has also contributed to the expansion of other local craft trades for the production of goods that complement the lavish new aesthetic of the
norteños. Locally made custom doors and windows with wrought-iron ornamentation are still preferred to prefabricated windows and doors. However, local craftsmen are professionalized and increasingly expensive. It takes an ironworker one day to make one window that he can sell for 5,000 pesos or roughly $500. Ironically, local craftsmen advertise their ability to custom-make doors and windows that appear to be standardized or modern, yet are unique pieces that fit unusual openings or meet other requests. In this way, the remittance construction industry supports local craftsmanship and regionally specific design.²⁵

Finally, the numbers and importance of professional albañiles have increased. Before the rise of the remittance economy, at the turn of the last century, most men in the village were albañiles and participated in construction. Now, albañiles are professionalized and organized hierarchically from a peón to a maestro de obra with four positions in between. The albañiles are paid, not in informal exchanges with their neighbors, but with pesos. While wages have increased, so have the costs of the materials that wages must buy. Thirty years ago an albañil would make 30 pesos a day, which was enough to buy eight sacks of cement. Today, one worker makes 200 pesos, which will buy only one and a half sacks of cement. Albañiles, employed by norteños to build extravagant remittance houses, are pushed to the edge—and sometimes past the edge—of their knowledge. As a result, some of the houses are built with major errors. Accidentally, bedrooms open onto the street, second stories are built with doors that open to the sky, rooms are trapezoidal, or kitchen sinks are sunk deep into a wide countertop, forcing women to bend at the waist and reach for their dirty dishes.

Because of the prevalence of mistakes in the designs of remittance houses, norteños are starting to hire architects and engineers and introduce them into the building process, a development that produces tensions and competition with the albañiles who have traditionally played the professional’s role. The engineer Hugo Galindo, who was trained at the University of Guadalajara, uses computer programs to design norteños’ houses.²⁶ The software contains thousands of suburban house plans produced in the United States. However, albañiles (who cannot read architectural plans and want to retain their place in the construction process) argue that the architects and engineers are at a disadvantage: they probably have not emigrated to the United States to work and thus do not know the U.S. construction industry firsthand. An albañil who has migrated to the United States and worked in the construction industry is well positioned to know what norteños want.

However, both architects and albañiles—even if they have worked in construction in the United States—are faced with the same major challenge. Nearly all buildings in rural Mexico are built with concrete masonry block and fired-brick. But most of the designs and new housing types that migrants are imitating north of the border are stick frame construction. Making space is divorced from its material construction, which accounts for the fact that remittance houses can feel out of proportion, heavy, and monolithic. José López, owner of a business in El Grullo that supplies construction materials to San Miguel, told me, “The houses in the U.S. fall apart, they are flimsy, built for thirty years. This house,” he said, while knocking on its brick and concrete wall, “is forever.”²⁷ López has attempted to bring sheetrock and plywood to rural constituents, but locals do not want wooden houses and criticize the way that buildings are made in the United States. Norteños use photographs of houses that they have taken in the United
States or seen in magazines, or point toward other examples in nearby pueblos, in attempts to replicate the image of the American home without importing its construction materials or methods.

Aside from needing more bricks and specialized builders, norteños desire items that they have seen or lived among in the United States. These items are not manufactured locally and must be brought to rural Mexico in the back of a truck or imported from foreign manufacturers. This demand has created a niche market for foreign goods. For example, the automatic garage door, imported from the United States and paid for in dollars, was introduced to El Grullo in 1995. Some local nonmigrants also desire foreign goods. A girl from a small town north of San Miguel wanted hardwood flooring, which she had seen on television and in photographs of her cousins’ homes in the United States. Relatives in Los Angeles purchased hardwood flooring at Home Depot and drove it 1,500 miles in the back of a truck to her house in Jalisco. The symbolic value of the hardwood floor exceeded the time, money, and energy spent getting it to her. It essentially allowed a girl “stuck” in a pueblo to join remittance space and remain connected to her migrating family members. Local businesses are now importing Italian floor tiles and modern bathroom fixtures for both migrant and nonmigrant families.

National and global companies also see opportunities in this emerging remittance construction market. Construmundo, a branch of Cemex, Mexico’s largest cement company, franchises local construction businesses. Cemex thus controls prices and competes with local vendors. Home Depot recently opened branches in Guadalajara, and Famsa, a Mexican furniture company, opened branches in the United States in 2000. Migrants may buy a refrigerator in Texas for pickup in Guadalajara. Although residents of San Miguel would have to drive four hours to get to Guadalajara, this may become worthwhile if the prices there are much lower than in local businesses.

Remitting is a complex process, and global companies are strategizing about how to formalize it. So that migrants don’t have to bring uninsured money home in the back pockets of blue jeans (where it is easily and often stolen in airports or bus stations), Cemex allows them to open a “materials as capital” bank account. Migrants may deposit money in Cemex branches in the United States, and family members may then withdraw construction supplies from Cemex franchises in Mexico. This transaction mimics remittance wire transaction services spearheaded by Western Union; it allows migrants to control how their money is spent and to avoid wire transaction fees; and it allows companies to control where a family spends its money in Mexico. Famsa offers a similar service for furniture.

In turn, the Mexican government has become involved in the remittance house and the construction industry. Vivienda is the most recent in a series of programs that President Vicente Fox initiated during his presidency. The programs are geared toward assisting paisanos in the United States who want to build homes in Mexico. The federal and local government will subsidize either acquiring a house or remodeling one that is deteriorating. This program is vast and involves many strategies. Mainly, it allows the government to create alliances with manufacturers (part of the government’s portion of the cost is paid in materials and labor) and gives them some control over how remittances are spent. According to the program documents, the program helps “populations with the scarcest resources” who are forced to resort to “informal squatting” in “substandard housing.” In Mexico, where almost half the country lives in poverty and almost 15
percent in extreme poverty, the government is very interested in having the poor pay for what would otherwise be the government’s responsibility.\textsuperscript{30}

Local municipal governments are also changing their land policies. Land in San Miguel is starting to appreciate in response to the quality of houses being built there. This once sleepy subsistence farming community is becoming a \textit{pueblo de descanso}, or retirement community, for returning migrants and their parents. To collect taxes, the municipal government recently pressured locals to register their houses; 65 percent of the houses are currently registered in the \textit{municipio}.\textsuperscript{31}

The expansion of the local construction industry and the increasing competition between global companies and local markets are not unique to rural Jalisco—they are defining factors of globalization. However, the region’s dependence on remittances renders it particularly vulnerable not only to global market shifts but also to migration trends and individual remitters’ whims. Ignacio Robles Pelayo, owner of a local business franchised by Cemex, admits, “Without migration I don’t know how we would survive. We sell the most cement and bricks and windows in December when they [the norteños] all come home for Christmas and make improvements to their houses.”\textsuperscript{32}

Experiencing The Remittance House

The spaces of the remittance house and the larger-scale changes in local construction industries and building traditions influence the daily lives of migrant families. Some families, for whom migration has been a way of life for several decades, have houses that demonstrate a wide spectrum of construction techniques and reflect local experimentation and innovation. In these families individuals learn over time to better control the construction process. This learning curve can be explored through the building history of the Robles family of San Miguel.\textsuperscript{33}

The migration history of the Robles family echoes the experience of many of the family’s neighbors. Twelve Robles children grew up in a two-room adobe house with no running water or electricity; their house was located in a remote rancho connected to San Miguel by eighteen kilometers of unpaved road. Even after the eventual move to San Miguel, the family could not escape severe poverty. In 1970, Raúl and Sergio, the two eldest sons, eighteen and seventeen years old respectively, illegally migrated to the United States to pick peaches, wash dishes, and muck out stables. Ultimately, all but one of the family’s twelve children left for the North. After eighteen years of repeated migrations between California and Jalisco, the children had saved enough money to build new houses in San Miguel. They lived through deportations, illegal border crossings, and humiliating work experiences.

Today, the Robles family boasts six remittance houses built during the last twenty years; the houses line the main entrance of San Miguel. Since 1988, the Robles brothers (principally Sergio and Raúl) have spent nineteen years renovating their mother’s house. When the brothers started this project, the house consisted of two old adobe rooms, built at the turn of the last century, and a separate two-room addition built by their father with pesos over the course of twenty years. The brothers tore down the old adobe kitchen and rebuilt it in fired brick. Next, they added a second story to the father’s addition. Then they added a new kitchen next to the old kitchen; equipped it with modern appliances; demolished the corrals, stables, and trees in the yard in between the two units; and
connected the two units with a large living room and a new roof (fig. 2.14). By 2007, they had preserved the form of the rest of the old adobe house but had rebuilt it using fired brick, added a modern bathroom, and built a two-car garage (fig. 2.15). The Robles brothers learned about remittance building through this long extended process. By the fourth bathroom they knew whom to contract, what systems were needed to get running water, and how much the bathroom would cost.

However, the spaces are not used as intended. The mother for whom this eight-bedroom house was built uses her old kitchen and sleeps in her old bedroom. Sergio remarked, “We just finished her new bedroom and bathroom, which was really expensive. We brought state-of-the-art equipment, including safety rails for the bathroom wall so she doesn’t fall when showering, but she won’t use it.” Indeed, most spaces in the house are fully furnished but not used except for the living room, where Ms. Robles prominently displays photographs of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, most of whom live in the United States. During Christmas, her children and their growing families reunite in San Miguel; even then there is little use for the mother’s house because several relatives have built their own remittance houses.

In the early 1990s, while the mother’s house was being remodeled, two other sons—Julián and Abel—built their own two-bedroom houses. With limited resources and little knowledge of construction, they imported to San Miguel the trappings of suburbia in the United States: drive-in garages, narrow front lawns, and pitched roofs. As a result of improper construction, Abel’s half-pitched roof is waterlogged and his family fears it may collapse. Meanwhile, he and his family battle allergies caused by mold growing on saturated building materials. For both brothers, the houses are not as they imagined they would be when they were saving money in California to build in Mexico. Julián built a home with a big living room, a dining room, two bedrooms, and a double garage for his imagined family (fig. 2.16). But unwed and childless, he does not spend much time at his new home. He sleeps in the bedroom and eats elsewhere—in the field or at his mother’s house.

Both houses need major repairs that the brothers cannot afford because they no longer migrate between Mexico and California. Abel and Julián now earn pesos from farming; the average is about eight dollars a day, not enough to buy one bag of cement. Since they lack the papers to return to the United States legally, going back there would involve hardships. Rather than tilling their own fields they would be risking their lives in the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts, living apart from their family, and working for a boss.

The two younger Robles brothers, Sergio and Raúl, benefited from their involvement in the construction of a remittance house for their mother, and from Abel’s and Julián’s mistakes in constructing their own houses. In the mid-1990s, Sergio and Raúl began construction using architectural plans and architects. Sergio’s extravagant home, the only freestanding house in town, is one of the most admired casas de norteño in the region. The drive-through garage, entry drive lined with palm trees, and symmetrical Doric columns almost exactly replicate a house design from the mail-order catalog known as Home Design Services Inc. (the company is located in Miami) (fig. 2.17). Sergio originally chose the design because he liked a catalog photograph of it that bears the caption “Alluring Arches Attract Attention” (fig. 2.18). However, the plan of his house departs from the model house type and thus reveals critical distinctions.
between lifestyles in suburbs in the United States and in rural Mexico. Sergio omitted the attic floor. “What would I use an attic for?” he asked. He also commissioned a room-size safe in the master bathroom. The thick walls keep all his valuables protected: he lives in the United States eleven months a year.

Raúl Robles also used an architect-designed plan for his remittance house. His plot, sandwiched between two other courtyard wall houses, was not wide enough to allow the house to directly face the street. To maintain the original design of the façade, he rotated the house forty-five degrees, creating a triangular front yard and a few oddly shaped rooms (fig. 2.19).

Both brothers use ornamentation and detail to bring the experience of an American suburban home to rural Mexico. They both have a cheery “Welcome Home” doormat at the top of their front stairs, and wood furniture, which they carried across the border, creates a country aesthetic. Sergio planted the plants in his front yard, which he saw illustrated in the Home Design Services catalog, and Home Life magazines are on display in his house. Both brothers equipped their remittance houses with modern light switches, stereo systems, and large televisions. These objects create material connections to U.S. prosperity and provide fodder for local discourse about the details of modern house design as well as the luxuries of migration.

Although Sergio only paid $600 for his plan, his rough estimate of the cost of building the house was $250,000: “I am not sure how much I spent; I sent all the money to my brother and he bought everything.” His house cost more money than any other building in town, including the church. It is more than four times the cost of his two other brothers’ more modest remittance houses.

Both Sergio and Raúl were able to build such extravagant houses because they are no longer menial laborers. They now own two successful carpentry businesses in the United States. Furthermore, because both brothers were granted citizenship in the 1986 amnesty program, they may travel safely from California to Jalisco to tend to their houses and visit their family members still living in San Miguel.

Despite the convincing appearance of the Robles brothers’ houses, their success is ambiguous. The brothers, who maintain houses in California and Jalisco, are confronted with the expectations of their U.S.-born children, who expect an American standard of living and a world of opportunity in both places. The brothers work for eleven months out of the year to meet these demands while their beautiful homes in Jalisco stand empty. The choice is clear: living in a remittance house year round means losing the ability to maintain it.

Before winning citizenship in the 1986 Amnesty program, Raúl was deported multiple times, losing all his money and belongings each time. On one illegal border crossing he almost lost the finger that he used to hold open the trunk of a car. He washed plates in restaurants and conducted hard labor before he landed a job in the same carpentry factory as his brother Sergio. He endured all those trials and more before he could become the owner of a small carpentry business like his brother Sergio. His life, full of humiliating and dangerous circumstances, has been systematically invested in creating a remittance house. And though it probably reminds him of his struggles, the young and eager men and women of San Miguel who see it imagine success in America rather than hardship. Beautiful and harmonious representations often hide the arduous physical labor involved in the production of space. For many youth in San Miguel, the
remittance house reinforces the desire to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, overriding the difficulties of crossing the border and the insecurity they will inevitably have to contend with in the United States.

The Remittance Development Model: Distance Built into Emigrant Communities

The ubiquitous brightly colored facades of remittance houses contrasted against the backdrop of Jalisco’s farming communities provide evidence of the increasing dominance of migrants’ remittances as drivers of change in rural Mexico. The state’s reliance on entrepreneurial individuals as economic engines in rural Mexico constitutes the basis for what could be called a “remittance development model.” In this model, the state plays an increasingly marginal role in rural development, while migrants claim the mantle of civic benefactor with its attendant rewards, risks, and responsibilities. This relationship is formalized by federal programs like 3x1, which matches migrants’ funding with municipal, state, and federal dollars for public and infrastructure projects. While remittance houses are generally built informally with private funding, they are emblematic of the shifting realities underpinning rural Mexican society.

Remittance houses do more than signify a transition to a fundamentally different process of development; they also provide insight into the nature of the remittance development model. Where state-financed development is strategic and normative in its orientation, development driven by rural migrants is often tactical and based on personal aspirations. Migrants are reacting to local conditions, driven by necessity or ambition, or motivated by familial and civic pride. This orientation to the personal and local is evident in the form and appearance of remittance houses, which migrants distinguish by using the best available materials and by emulating the latest styles of U.S. residences.

More important than the distinct types of development associated with remittances is the evident distance between the aspirations and the realities of migration and remitting. People who migrate to improve their lives must risk a dangerous crossing at the border, endure second-class citizenship in the United States, and live apart from their closest family members with no health care or police protection. Some undergo all these trials to build houses that are left unfinished, are completed but not functional or comfortable, are lived in by part of the family while the remainder are in the United States, or are completed but abandoned or not maintained. There are a variety of reasons for this. Families in Jalisco that manage emigrants’ remittance investments may squander the money or use it for an emergency. Remittance flows stop when a migrant dies, loses his or her job, assumes more responsibility toward relatives in the United States, or becomes ill or incapacitated. Remittance flows also stop when a migrant moves back to Mexico. Scores of houses strewn across the landscape in rural Jalisco expose the discontinuity between the remittance house as imagined and the remittance house as built (fig. 2.20). Distance is literally built into the remittance house through its production.

Just as the distance between a migrant and his or her hometown is implicit in the remitting process, the state’s reliance on migrants is correlated with a general lack of support for migrants and their families. Successful migration and remitting do not guarantee a happy or peaceful retirement for those who return. The Mexican federal government sporadically and unreliably provides meager assistance to the elderly through Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF, the National Agency for Family Development).
However, it does not provide retirement benefits or guarantee social security. As a result, some or all of the family members must stay in the United States to continue remitting—fundamentally redefining the nature of “home” by embedding persistent geographic distance into daily life even after the initial goals of remitting have been achieved.

The economic crisis that began in the United States in 2005 has exposed the dangers of this model. Since 2006 remittances have declined. According to data from the National Survey of Household Income and Spending in Mexico, between 2006 and 2008 over 250,000 families that had previously received remittances from family members abroad did without those funds. The Inter-American Development Bank reports that in 2007 a reduction in remittances left at least two million people without the financial help they had once received. Many families still receive remittances, but the amount is less than before and is not enough for even minor construction. The Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* reports: “Less money from migrants equals a decline in consumption in many regions of the country and affects the *albañiles* who build houses for the migrants.” The reporter asks: “What happens when an *albañil* loses his work in the United States? Well, it is probable that four or five *albañiles* lose their work in Mexico. The drop in remittances, according to the experts, has affected overall the Mexicans who work in construction, a branch seriously affected by the economic crisis of our northern neighbors.”

Risks are not borne by migrants alone. Geographic distance and fragmentation affect families and communities. Decaying vacant houses, which disrupt the lived experience of the street, are a liability for locals because thieves have learned that the houses are often full of new and expensive goods. Houses are also a burden for families who have sacrificed everything to achieve them but cannot afford to live in or maintain them and do not want to abandon them completely. The spaces of these houses also change social norms and customs: the new settings tend to isolate migrant families behind yards and fences and create animosity in a community of people by disrupting their common bonds. Furthermore, the remittance house creates inequalities between those who emigrate and those who never leave Mexico.

Despite these issues, remittances have created beneficial opportunities for individuals in small towns. In some migrant families, daughters and sons from rural villages are attending professional schools in Mexico funded by a parent’s wages in the United States. Remittances result in a changing social status, reflect self-determination, and allow some families to enjoy meat and buy medicine. New houses also ease chores for women and instill hope in emigrant families that one day the whole family will live in them together.

Migration and remitting have now transcended economic necessity to become self-sustaining cultural norms. For many eighteen year-old boys, migration to the United States is an initiation into manhood, a rite of passage, the next logical step—because of the remittance spaces they have known intimately throughout their youth. According to one rural priest in Michoacán, “Now [migration] is more of a question of ideology than work and money. The United States is Superman. The clothes are better, the houses are better, the money is better. The people around me when I was growing up all had those things. I watched Walt Disney, Superman, and it wasn’t the reality that I lived.” Even those Mexicans who have never left their hometowns grow up in remittance spaces where they are influenced by popular culture and migration.
For all these reasons, emigrants from rural Mexico struggle with ambivalence in their journeys to support their families and improve their communities. On the one hand, migration and remitting provide a newfound capacity for self-determination—an example of globalization “from below” that empowers a rising class. On the other, the building of a remittance house implicates the migrant in a new status quo that exacts a heavy toll. This ambiguity and ambivalence are evident in the very houses migrants build. Crystallizing their contradictions, the remittance house demonstrates both migrants’ successes and their uncertain future.
Notes, Chapter 2

1 In speaking of transnational building practices I refer not only to migrants’ private homes but also to public migrant-sponsored projects. Here I refer to transnational building practices initiated “from below” as opposed to the actions and practices of corporate builders or international architects who build on the other side of the border. See Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, eds., *Transnationalism from Below* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998), for a discussion of migration from below.


3 Although the remittance house has received scant attention in scholarship, newspapers and popular magazines have published many stories about these trends. As early as 1984 the *New York Times* was publishing reports on Turkish migrants in Germany remitting to Turkey. See “Germany’s Guest Workers,” *New York Times*, August 19, 1984, adapted from *The Crowded Earth*, by Pranay Gupte (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984). For information about remittance flows in several countries, see Jason DeParle, “A Good Provider Is One Who Leaves,” *New York Times*, April 22, 2007. For scholarly work that addresses migrant housing in Portugal, see Roselyne de Villanova, Carolina Leite, and Isabel Raposo, *Casas de sonhos: Emigrantes construtores no Norte de Portugal* [Dream Houses: Emigrants Building in Northern Portugal] (Lisbon: Edições Salamandra, 1994), also published in French.

4 Remittance houses need not be associated only with migration across international boundaries. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century African Americans sent money from large U.S. cities in the North and West to their families in the Deep South to build their dream houses.

5 I confirmed the existence of remittance houses in twenty-three towns I visited in Jalisco. I saw what appeared to be remittance houses in the states of Guanajuato, Estado de Mexico, Oaxaca, Michoacán, and Zacatecas. Catherine Rose Ettinger and Salvador García Espinos at La Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo are studying the impact of remittances on housing in Michoacán. See also Álvaro Sánchez Crispín and Salvador García Espinosa, “Impacto de las remesas sobre el recurso turístico de la imagen urbana en localidades de la Sierra Purhépecha y ribera del lago de Pátzcuaro, México,” *Boletín del Instituto de Geografía*, no. 65 (2008): 102–17, www.igeograf.unam.mx/instituto/publicaciones/boletin/bo165_08.html.

6 Research institutes such as the Pew Hispanic Center, as well as multinational banks such as the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, aggressively investigate how migrant remittances influence the U.S. and Mexican economies and local development in Mexico. The Inter-American Development Bank published the first state-by-state analysis of U.S. remittances to Latin American countries in 2004. The report links remittances from a specific state in the United States to a specific state in Mexico.

7 Her in-depth study discusses the effect of migration on an indigenous community in the state of Michoacán and the meaning that home building holds for individuals, families, and the community as a whole. See Peri Fletcher, *La Casa de Mis Sueños: Dreams of Home in a Transnational Migrant Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).

8 My method of spatial analysis builds on that of Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially chs. 1 and 5.

9 Ibid.

10 The material implications of migrant disinvestment in American immigrant neighborhoods linked to the remittance house has yet to be studied. See Anthony King, *The Bungalow: The Production of Global Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), for a discussion of British migration to India and the impact on the vernacular Indian house.


12 For discussion of early migration to the western states of Mexico, see Douglas Massey et al., *Return to Aztlan: The Social Process of International Migration from Western Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

13 See Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), Mexico’s national geographic institute, for more information about rural demographics and migration trends at www.inegi.org.mx. Also note that some migrant remitting communities in Jalisco, especially in the region of Los Altos, date back further than San Miguel, while others are more recent.


The term *norteño* is used in this region to connote a migrant, somebody from the *pueblo* that goes north. It is not used to refer to an American from the North, who would be called an *Americano*.

A national study estimates that 80 percent of remittances are used as general family income and 16 percent are used to remodel homes. See M. Gamboa, *Informe bimestral septiembre-octubre de Nacional Financiera* (Mexico City: Nacional Financiera, 2001). However, these figures dramatically contradict the findings of Álvaro Sánchez Crispín and Salvador García Espinosa in Michoacán, where a higher percentage of remittances is used for home construction. In my case studies, more than 16 percent of family remittances was spent on the construction industry. Too little regional research has been conducted to know these percentages throughout Mexico.

See Fletcher, *La Casa*, for a discussion of women’s use of the interior of new houses.

Hugo Galindo, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, March 2008.


Tonio Ortiz, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, October 2007.

Gustavo Chávez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, January 2008.

Rodulfo Sahagún Morales, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, January 2008.

José López, interview by author, Jalisco, March 2008.

Hugo Galindo, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, April 2008.

José López, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, December 2007.

Barba family, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, February 2009.

For information on this program, see SEDESOL (Secretary for Social Development), “Programa de Ahorro y Subsidios para la Vivienda Progresiva (Vivah),” http://sedesol2006.sedesol.gob.mx/programas/vivah.htm.

Poverty rates are hard to identify and are defined differently by institutions and government agencies. The American Central Intelligence Agency’s statistics of extreme poverty rely on food-based definitions of poverty; more general poverty statistics rely on assets. See CIA, “The World Factbook,” www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geo/mx.html.

This figure is based on available records. San Miguel’s records are kept in the Public Works Department of El Limón’s city hall. El Limón is the *cabecera* or county seat for the municipality.


Several interviews with the Robles family occurred between the months October 2007 and August 2008.

Sergio Robles, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, February 2008.

Ibid.

Sergio Robles, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, July 2008.


40 Miguel López Covas, interview by author, Michoacán, Jalisco, August 2008.
Figures, Chapter 2

From the Remittance House to the Remittance Development Model

Figure 2.1. (shown on first page of chapter) Remittance house, Pegueros, Jalisco.

Figure 2.2. Hillside house, San Miguel Hidalgo. Houses in various stages of construction and inhabitation mark the landscape of Jalisco. Migrants begin building houses with the intention of completing them but often cannot predict when or how they will. This two-story unfinished remittance house remained unaltered between 2007 and 2008.
Figure 2.3. Map of four Mexican states, highlighting the state of Jalisco. The four states shown are those with high rates of emigration: Zacatecas, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato. The village and its outlying lands discussed in this chapter, San Miguel Hidalgo, is shown in the south of Jalisco. Courtesy of Chesney Floyd (delineator).
Figure 2.4. Streetcorner house. This modestly scaled but elegant remittance house remains attached to the crumbling adobe walls of much older houses on either side.

Figure 2.5. Street facades of two houses. Until the 1980s, remittance house remodels tended to conform to local vernacular forms. Here the continuous exterior wall and rooftop of the adobe house are unbroken by newer concrete construction.
Figure 2.6. Plan and cross section of the Rodríguez house, a typical traditional courtyard house in San Miguel. A series of rooms connect to several stables and a corral. The section is drawn through the initial room of the house, which was built in the 1930s. Drawings by Job Daniel Robles Robles.
Figure 2.7. The yard of the Rodriguez house. Note that this working courtyard is filled with fruit trees, a comal for baking, laundry lines, a well, and stables and a corral.
Figure 2.8. Two remittance houses, Ejutla. While most remittance houses in this region are viewed as social and cultural investments as opposed to economic ones, some norteños have managed to make money from new houses. Don Miguel built and then sold remittance houses in the 1980s and 1990s; his own full-time residence (right) was built with the money he earned. His house is dwarfed by a huge remittance house (left) built by the owner of a gardening business in California. The left house remains unused for most of the year.

Figure 2.9. Local-income house (left) and remittance house (right). The remittance house interrupts the continuous facade of the vernacular fabric with a fence, carport, patio, and second story. This house also demonstrates inequalities between emigrants and those who stay in the south of Jalisco.
Figure 2.10. Contrast between front and side walls in a remittance house. The facade of this house, built in Jalisco by a family in living in Texas, mimics wooden siding using stucco and concrete. Note that the side of this house is unadorned even though there are no plans to build an adjacent house.
Figure 2.11. House in Jalisco. Note the representation of pitched-roof dormers in the ornate window frames, and the very innovative, cantilevered shed-roof features above the windows.
Figure 2.12. Tonio Ortiz, San Miguel’s first bracero to return and build a house with dollars. Don Tonio stands in his entryway next to the *moto* (also bought with dollars) that replaced his horse. He drives his *moto* to and from his agricultural fields every day.
Figure 2.13. One of Autlán’s largest brickyards. Laborers make all the bricks by hand without shelter from the sun.

Figure 2.14. Two adjacent kitchens in the house that the Robles brothers renovated for their mother. The “old” kitchen, on the left, was rebuilt with modern materials. The new kitchen, on the right, remains unused, leaving the cabinets, microwave, and oven in mint condition.
Figure 2.15. Plan and front elevation of the remittance house built for the mother of the Robles family. Note the awkwardly shaped living room, the two adjacent kitchens in the rear left corner, multiple bedrooms, two indoor bathrooms, and two outdoor bathrooms. A one-car garage is shown on the right. The additional garage is adjacent to it (although not depicted in the drawing). Drawing by Job Daniel Robles Robles.
Figure 2.16. Julián Robles’s house. This is one of the first remittance houses built by the Robles brothers. Notice the two-car garage, thin strip of grass, ornamental pitched roof, and fence. The yard and fence create distance; peso houses tend to meet the sidewalk or street directly.
Figure 2.17. An Architect’s presentation drawings for construction in San Miguel, Jalisco. Sergio Robles purchased this plan from Home Design Services Inc. in Florida. Sergio added a second garage door, to the right, making it a drive-through space. Courtesy of Home Design Services, Inc.
Figure 2.18. From inspiration to realization. The “alluring arches” of the house in this photograph captured the attention of Sergio Robles, who produced an exact replica of the house, including the plantings illustrated in the front yard.
Figure 2.19. Raúl Robles’s house, San Miguel. The house is not perpendicular to the street because Raúl’s chosen model house plan was too wide for his lot.
Figure 2.20. Haunting columns that await further investment. According to local knowledge in the Jalisco area, they have remained unaltered for several years.
Chapter 3

The 3x1 Landscape and the Construction of a Transnational Civil Society

Figure 3.1. Map of El Limón, Jalisco, showing a street remodeled with dollars that is named Calle Hijo Ausente (Street of Absent Sons and Daughters) and runs directly through the heart of the town. Calle Hijo Ausente runs parallel to Calle 5 de Mayo, which commemorates Mexico’s victory over French forces, and Calle Cuitláhuac, which is named after an Aztec ruler in Tenochtitlan. It intersects with Calle Hidalgo, a street named for the priest who declared independence from the Spanish crown in 1810. These historic place names suggest the relevance of both hijos ausentes and remittance development.
Today, the Mexican landscape is experiencing a building boom at multiple scales. For decades, Mexican migrants located in the United States have spent hard-earned dollars on building both private homes and public projects in their hometowns in Mexico. What was at one time an informal process of remitting directly to one’s family and immediate community is now a process increasingly formalized by the Mexican state, corporations, and migrants themselves, with an impact on how remittances are used and the spaces they produce in rural localities.

In 2001, the Mexican government created the Tres por Uno or 3x1 program. In this program, migrant remittances sent through formal hometown associations (or HTAs) in the United States are tripled by municipal, state, and federal Mexican funds for regional development. As the name implies, the program matches every dollar remitted for development projects with three dollars of government contributions. Since the inception of the program, there has been an ongoing exchange between the voluntary actions of transnational migrants to improve their hometowns and the Mexican state’s development agenda. Generally, informal remittance building and planning practices spearheaded by migrants have been formalized by the state. In turn, the state’s formalization of the remittance economy has redefined the context for remitting and has created new incentives for migrants. While most migrants still remit directly to their families, since 2001 scores of new HTAs have formed in the United States. The new HTAs are intimately involved in the development of their hometowns, defining the town’s needs and shaping their landscapes, while the Mexican state is increasingly invested in the organizational structures and daily lives of its emigrants in the United States.

This chapter examines how the state-migrant relationship affects remittance building by formalizing its production. The formalization by the state of migrant organizations and their remitting practices affects what is built on the ground, which in turn shapes daily life in rural Mexico and local subjectivities. I argue that the formalization of remittance building is linked with the Mexican state’s social construction of a migrant benevolence: migrants’ sacrifice toward the shared goal of bettering the quality of life for people in their hometown. I examine relationships between individual and collective action, informal and formal processes, and grassroots activism and government programs, not just in opposition but as defining a continuum of strategies and effects in remittance development. I examine these relationships as they directly influence and shape places and people’s experience of them.

This chapter builds on the notion of agency “from below”—a term used by Alejandro Portes to describe nonelite migrant engagement in grass-roots initiatives that
involve finding alternatives to low-wage dead end jobs. For many nonelite migrants, limited social, cultural, and economic capital does not keep them from contributing to remittance building. And, involvement with 3x1 has repositioned a select group of migrants as activists and key players in community development, increasing their social and cultural capital but putting heavy demands on their time and earnings. These migrant activists can be most clearly defined as individuals who are on the board of directors of the federations—or umbrella organizations that represent and unify various Mexican HTAs—as well as presidents and key participants in social clubs or HTAs across the country. They serve as brokers between migrants “from below” and state interests “from above.”

Migrant actors from below, migrant activists, state officials, and locals are all implicated in a nascent remittance development model. The model is defined by a set of conditions linked to what I call *remitting as a way of life* for migrants from below, transnational activists, and families in Mexico. Remitting as a way of life signifies saving and sending dollars as an integral part of migrant social lives and spatial orientations. Although this emergent model extends beyond and predates 3x1, the state’s 3x1 program is attempting to harness migrant grassroots social action in its construction of a remittance-state model for community development. Today, the model creates the potential for migrant activists to better their communities’ standard of living but at a cost: common conceptions of and use of public space are destabilized, as well as the local structures and networks that produce and maintain them. As I will discuss, the 3x1 policy, which formalizes remitting as a way of life, renders problematic migrant civic participation and agency. The policy unifies migrants on the basis of their common goals to better their hometowns, but limits them through a series of regulatory measures that attempt to define how their money should be spent. Furthermore, the policy instates a development model that requires geographic distance (between remitters and their hometowns) and dispersion (among the emigrant population in the United States) to function and does not plan for how 3x1 projects will affect place, community, and individual experience.

The 3x1 is historic in that, for the first time, migrants are partnering with the government and incorporated into the state’s decision-making processes about local development. No other models of development in Mexico explicitly rely on migrant remittances. According to a Migration Policy Institute report conducted by Raúl Delgado-Wise and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, “Through such programs [like 3x1], the state co-opts migrants’ efforts to support their communities. The migrants’ contributions represent a sort of subsidy for public works, which is not required from better-off sectors of Mexican society.” The state is increasing its control over migrant remittances, saddling migrants with a responsibility that is, and should be, the government’s and creating a context in which emigrants are increasingly dependent on the Mexican state.

Recognizing the importance of migrant remittances, the Mexican government, through its U.S. consulates, is collaborating with immigrants in efforts to create powerful and effective migrant networks that can be used for future state agendas. These trends have primed the current moment: an opportunity to reinvent the state’s and migrants’ roles in the production of space and place in the countryside. The state presents this program as a democratic development policy that aids Mexico’s poor migrants who want to better serve their communities; however, it does not present or incorporate a social
analysis of Mexican migration as it affects those communities. A social analysis of migration is inherently spatial because of the consequences of geographic distance and dispersion for migrant families and communities. Thus a spatial analysis of 3x1 and HTAs sheds light on how they affect rural Mexican society.

The 3x1 program normalizes remitting by framing it as an act of charity or social benevolence without addressing how the program interfaces with the spatial legacy of independent capital investment, migration, and remitting in Mexico. In this chapter, I argue that the 3x1 program reveals and reproduces conditions of inequality to which rural Mexicans are subject. To do so, I map the spatial and political geography of the 3x1/HTA alliance, investigate the discourses and representations surrounding the state construction of migrant benevolence, and analyze 3x1 projects in their regional context.

The Scope and Scale of Remittance Development

In 2006, 570 migrant social clubs were officially registered in the United States. Three years later that number tripled to 1,454, and it is estimated that several thousand informal HTAs exist as well. Since 2002, government spending on 3x1 has extended to twenty-seven out of thirty-two Mexican states. By 2007, 3x1 had financed more than six thousand projects with an annual federal budget of $20 million. In 2008 that amount more than doubled to approximately $50 million. All of these figures have led the president of the Inter-American Development Bank to declare 3x1 a leading axis of economic and social development for rural communities in Mexico.

However, 3x1’s impact is small when put in the larger context of remitting and migration. In 2007, remittances to Mexico were estimated at $28 billion. Over one million households in Mexico benefit from remittances, and 92 percent of Mexican municipalities register migration. The government’s federal contribution toward migrant-initiated development projects was thus equivalent to roughly 0.08 percent, or less than a tenth of 1 percent of the total amount of migrant remittances sent in 2007.

The small proportion of federal contributions to 3x1 relative to overall remittances has caused observers to question the relevance of the program vis-à-vis the significant political discourse surrounding it. Salvador García, a Mexican academic based in the state of Michoacán, argues that 3x1 is little more than a state strategy to win the migrant vote in the United States. Indeed, many Mexican politicians have gained political leverage through the visibility of this program on both sides of the border. However, spending on a policy is only one way to measure its impact. This policy is also about constructing a new model for building with remittances in which the state reacts to migrants’ informal activities taking place on the ground and inserts itself in migrants’ building processes. Just as James Scott argues that European colonialism was dependent on mapping distant populations, the Mexican state is attempting to render migration and remittance flows legible so that it can increase its access to and control over the migrant population. To do so, this model targets the building process itself, which is tied to local construction, trade, and the flooding of local markets with globalized products. New buildings erected through 3x1 create spaces and places that shape the lives of locals. Moreover, this model is being disseminated to other countries such as Haiti, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Brazil. Thus, while the scale of the program is small, its impact on perception and ways of doing business in small towns is significant. Moreover, the
miniscule percentage of remittances captured by the 3x1 program in 2010 speaks to the program’s immense economic potential for future years. Remittances are viewed by the state as an untapped resource.

3x1 Federal is especially important in the state of Jalisco because in 2003 Jalisco created 3x1 Estatal (State), which tries to absorb some of the projects that the federal 3x1 program’s budget forces them to reject. In 2007, 3x1 Estatal spent more than the federal government on remittance projects in Jalisco; they accomplished 546 projects with 94,246,553 pesos or just under $100,000. Also, from 2003 to 2007 Jalisco captured the biggest percentage of 3x1 federal money out of all the Mexican states participating in the program. The Secretaría de Desarrollo Humano or Secretariat for Human Development (which runs the 3x1 state program) reports that since the inception of both 3x1s, over three thousand projects have been carried out, benefiting over 4,153,633 inhabitants out of Jalisco’s seven million.9 They also note that the most important states in the United States that contribute to the program are California, Texas, and Illinois.

The Nascent Remittance Development Model

The basic contours of the migrant-state remittance development alliance have been in formation for almost a century. Although very little research has been conducted on the history of migrant clubs, Mexican political economist Basilia Valenzuela notes that by the 1920s, the development of migrant “social clubs” originated as a response by Mexican migrants to exclusionary practices in U.S. cities. Originally, clubs were not based on migrants’ places of origin but rather on the places where they settled in the United States. They revolved around providing basic services for other Mexican migrants or pooling money to bury the dead.10

Mexican clubs in the 1920s and 30s also constructed a sense of national identity among migrants who identified with their specific pueblos as opposed to the Mexican nation. For example, Paul S. Taylor records fifty-one “Mexican Honorific Commissions” registered with the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles in 1929. The goal of all these commissions was “to aid consuls in imparting protection and to aid compatriots resident in the U.S. Also to care and guard in respect and dignity the Mexican Nation.”11 The guidelines proposed taking action on complaints and reclamations made by Mexicans working in either American fields or factories. The individual clubs within the Mexican Honorific Commissions had their own guidelines that spoke more directly to community interests. While protection of Mexicans’ rights was still important, the aim of one such group in the agricultural town of Gilcrest, Colorado (Sociedad Mutualista Obreros Libres de Gilcrest, Colorado) was to assist individuals and families facing illness and accidents, to establish schools and recreation centers that serve Mexicans, to celebrate Mexican national holidays in areas with large Mexican populations in the United States, and to elevate the intellectual, moral, and material level of all its members.12 Even though echoes of the current HTA and federation structure can be traced back to the 1920s, if not earlier, the first clubs were not collectively sending dollars to their hometowns or creating political alliances that would support the growth and development of their hometowns. They were, however, forging critical connections with the Mexican consulates.

Today’s HTA structure can also be traced back to activities in Mexico during the 1940s and 1950s. A recent study conducted by David Fitzgerald tracks the origins of
HTAs to migrant activity in Arandas, Jalisco, that inspired the Catholic Church to initiate policies explicitly addressing migration. In 1944, first motivated by the demoralizing impact migration was having on family and community values in Mexico, the archbishop of Guadalajara instructed priests to form a Pro-Emigrant Section of the Mexican Catholic Union in each parish. This eventually led to the organization of emigrants explicitly around their community of origin, dedicated to its improvements and vitality. Some of these early clubs were based in Mexico’s larger cities like Guadalajara because of the internal migration of rural people to urban localities. Once more people began migrating to the United States, as opposed to Mexico’s major cities, organizations could span greater distances.\textsuperscript{13}

Not all regions in Jalisco, let alone the rest of Mexico, had migrant clubs aiding small pueblos this early on. The Los Altos region of Jalisco, where Arandas is located, is one of Mexico’s oldest emigration centers. While migrants from Arandas were contributing to the construction of their church as early as the 1950s, the organization and collective remitting of migrants from other regions in Jalisco did not begin until much later. In 2010, some small communities were just starting to organize in the United States for change at home, while others had yet to do so.

The historical genealogies of HTAs have been affected by large-scale economic change. Some scholars argue that Mexico’s structural readjustment in the 1970s and 1980s, which put many farmers out of work, as well as U.S. amnesty for migrants in 1986, not only increased migration to the United States but also resulted in the growth and maturation of social clubs.\textsuperscript{14} In contrast to the clubs of the 1920s and 1930s, many of these social clubs were civic, fraternal, informal or formal associations of volunteers based on their pueblo of origin as opposed to their current residence.\textsuperscript{15} Club members practice Mexican culture, or hometown culture in the United States, in their quest to both maintain ties to home and create space to express themselves in a foreign land.\textsuperscript{16} Clubs use cooperation and social networks to create a collective fund for public development in Mexico through collective remitting.\textsuperscript{17} Today, a club can be loosely defined along a broad spectrum of formality. A club can be three friends who call themselves a club or 150 members who organize and fraternize. HTAs differ in the extent of their organization, participation, size, and effectiveness in completing projects.

The informal remitting of early informal clubs of the 1970s and 1980s was often marked by uncertainty. In 1980, the Los Angeles San Juan de Amula Club informally sent remittances for the construction of a curato, or small parish building, adjacent to the town’s church. The club members collected cash and sent it to Mexico with a member of their hometown. In San Juan, the priest of the town was responsible for allocating remittances and soliciting assistance from a local committee during construction. However, no written records exist to document these cash flows, and oral histories reveal competing narratives about how the money was spent. Similarly, the HTA president José Ochoa from Los Guajes recalled, “For the last twenty years we have given what we could to the church, but nobody there has any idea of how much we spent.”\textsuperscript{18} The church in Los Guajes did not track remittances or distinguish dollars from other capital flows. Uncertainty linked to knowing exactly how many dollars were received in hometowns led to the formalization of sending remittances.\textsuperscript{19}

In 1986—the same year as U.S. amnesty—Zacatecan migrants were the first to address various risks embedded in informal remittance building practices through the
creation of a federation. The federation, an umbrella nonprofit organization, unifies all of the state’s registered HTAs to represent one Zacatecan migrant voice, strengthen social and community networks, and structure informal remittance building. The federation now influences Mexican politics and American legislation and works directly with the Mexican government.20

What is now a nationwide federal program (3x1) originated in Zacatecas. In the 1980s and 1990s, clubs representing the state of Zacatecas financed the refurbishment of plazas, churches, and cemeteries with American dollars. By 1993, state officials started contributing to Zacatecanos’ efforts, and in 1995 an official program called the “2x1 Citizen Initiative Program” was created in Zacatecas that required the state and municipal governments to create partnerships with migrants. In 2002, the federal government expanded the 3x1 program to all Mexican states.

The 3x1 program reflects changing attitudes about migrants. Previously, policies such as the U.S./Mexico Bracero program (1942–64) and the Border Industrialization Program (1965) encouraged rural migration.21 These earlier policies coincided with the fragmented and sporadic development of rural Mexico and the popular construction of the emigrant as “traitor,” willing to abandon his or her land to work in and strengthen the United States.22 The increasing financial power of HTAs has caused a shift in the Mexican government to work directly with those whom President Vicente Fox described in 2001 as “heroes.”23

Mexico’s interest in its emigrant communities’ dollars has resulted in the creation of several governmental institutions. In 1990, the Secretary of Foreign Relations began the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad. On the basis of their involvement with Mexican communities and the formation of the Federación de Jaliscienses in 1991, Jalisco’s governor created the Office of Attention to Jaliscienses in the Exterior (OFAJE) in 1996. OFAJE not only aids the organization and implementation of migrant clubs and the federations in the United States but also co-manages the implementation of 3x1 alongside two government branches: SEDESOL (which manages federal development programs) and the Secretary of Human Development (which manages state-level social programs). OFAJE does this by working directly with these branches, the federation, and the Mexican consulates in the United States. However, these Mexican institutions are challenged not only to channel and manage remittances but also to find innovative ways to capture the attention and dedication of Jalisco’s emigrant population, scattered throughout American cities and towns.

The State Influence on Migrant Remitting Practices

Since the inception of Jalisco’s first federation in 1991, the state has become increasingly involved in the construction of migrant federations. Today, the directors of OJAFE, SEDESOL, and the Secretary of Human Development collaborate with organized emigrants in the United States to reach undocumented and documented persons who are not affiliated with a club, organize meetings that broadcast the state’s development agenda, and initiate federations in U.S. cities. The first migrant federation, the Federación de Jaliscienses en Sur de California (Jalisco Federation in Southern California), is still the most robust, representing over 120 migrant clubs. The Federación de Jaliscienses del Medio Oeste (Federation of Jaliscienses in the Midwest) followed in 1995, and more
recently, concerted efforts by OFAJE directors have aided in the startup of federations in Northern California and Nevada. These federations represent over two hundred clubs in the United States. In 2007, Gilberto Juárez González, the director of OFAJE remarked: “We still lack contact with Jaliscienses in Detroit, Michigan, Atlanta, and Denver.” Aware that they “are the closest contact that paisanos have with the government,” OFAJE officials state that this lack of contact with other Jaliscienses limits the government’s ability to channel dollars from emigrants in these cities to government programs in Mexico. In essence, federations act as geographic anchors that create openings in American cities for Mexican statesmen and bureaucrats. Without federations, the directors of these Mexican institutions would have to contact the Mexican consulate to research individual clubs and then undertake a massive outreach campaign to inform clubs of the 3x1 program. The state’s outreach costs are minimized by dedicated emigrants who do the organizing for free.

The Jalisco Federation activities, which sometimes directly involve Mexican government officials, are possible because of the thousands of informal club meetings in peoples’ backyards or parks throughout the United States. The political economist Basilia Valenzuela and others posit that it is through the increasingly formal structure of club members, club presidents, and federation board members that a “transnational civil society” emerges. They argue that the federation opens up a space for migrants to directly engage with and question the Mexican state. The federation is a hierarchically tiered system: emigrants’ distance from hometowns, their geographic dispersion from one another, and their increasing numbers are managed through a pyramid whereby those at the top gain the most access to statesmen and big business officials. This also means that those on the top of the pyramid make decisions that affect individual emigrants contributing to the remittance pool. Paradoxically, the increasing formalization of migrant clubs compromises the spaces opened by migrant organization in the first place.

While migrants at the bottom of the pyramid are participating in the 3x1/HTA nexus through informal gatherings that allow them to express nostalgia for their hometown while contributing to a social project, migrants or “transnational activists” at the top of the pyramid are increasing working with the state to steer the remittance funds toward social projects. This is particularly evident during Semana Jalisco, the federation’s annual event. Uniting a wide array of actors involved in transnational development, migrant clubs are motivated to raise funds all year long in hopes of being publicly acknowledged during Semana Jalisco for their hard work. Semana Jalisco is an opportunity for statesmen and transnational activists to broadcast their development agenda.

Analysis of government documents outlining 3x1 regulations, observation of several federation/government meetings focused on disseminating information about 3x1, and analysis of Semana Jalisco (an annual magazine that covers the event) reveal several tactics used by the government and migrants on the board of directors of the federation to reframe the migrant’s role as critical to the future development of rural Mexican society. Migrant benevolence is the goodwill of migrants actualized in the service of their community of origin. At a 2008 Federación de Jaliscienses meeting in Dublin, California, the director of OFAJE explained the benefits of 3x1 to nonaffiliated migrants and club members (fig. 3.2). After the director’s speech, a man in his late fifties asked: “I want to put a truck farm in Mexico, like there are here. It is what I have worked on for over
twenty years. Will you help me with that? I have the experience but not the land. Will the government help me buy the land?” The director responded, “We are interested in social projects. If the project will help ten families, we are interested, but if it will only help yours then we are not. The idea is to spread the resources we have to as many people as possible.”27 Through such face-to-face encounters, migrants learn that the “social projects” sanctioned by the state must help towns and not individuals. More importantly, they learn that the state is now expecting them to help not just their family but also their community. If the migrant assumes this responsibility, which is primarily the state’s in most of Jalisco’s large towns and urban centers, the state is relieved of some of the pressure to provide physical infrastructure and public services to rural localities.

The *migrant as independent benefactor* of the community is somebody capable of enacting public good and seizing a golden opportunity. The SEDESOL program guidelines for 3x1 announce: “The program has an important sociopolitical dimension to permit [migrant] civil society to change the conditions of their communities . . . without depending completely on the government. . . . Mexico has big business partners in the exterior: its migrants, who allow collective remittances to better the country, have this grand opportunity with much potential.”28 The state announces that through 3x1 “civil society” is “permitted” to “change the conditions of their communities.” Migrants are repositioned as business partners, taking advantage of a “grand opportunity” to transform their pueblos and effectively distribute wealth to those in need. It is migrants’ sacrifice (“It is their personal money, we are aware that they don’t have to do this and that their lives are hard in the United States”)29 that allows them to partner with the state.

The *migrant as a family (wo)man* creates connections between migrant dollars and their children’s future. At the same federation meeting in Oakland, a man asked about how to manage a rift between the club members and the mayor of his hometown. The government representative responded, “The relationship between the municipality and club is like a marriage. What happens, happens, but in the end it’s for your children.” This question is addressing very real concerns migrants have when they go home and try to implement 3x1 projects. The statesman uses humor to say that the burden is on the migrants: dealing with recalcitrant or corrupt mayors is a necessary sacrifice for their children, and no state or federal recourse is available to them. In most cases, the sacrifice is for the people of the migrants’ hometown, who may or might not be family but are here positioned as children. However, this comment also plays off migrants’ dreams of one day returning with their children to a thriving pueblo, their dream of creating a hometown that their children will cherish and want to visit, and their sense of familial responsibility toward those they left behind.

The *migrant as patriot* is an individual who not only identifies with Mexican nationality but also maintains loyalty to his or her motherland. In the 2007 *Semana Jalisco* magazine, the governor of Jalisco, Manuel Acuña, wrote:

[Semana Jalisco] allows us to unite as Jaliscienses to promote the strength of our culture and support united families. We invite you to preserve, among the new generations of Jaliscienses in California, love of our land, Jalisco and our motherland Mexico. . . . This event has given us the opportunity to realize that we are not alone, that together we can achieve actions that allow us to develop as a community and as Mexicans in land far from our own. It is because of that that I
wish to reiterate my promise to be an attentive and transparent governor, conscious of the importance of constructing one sole community, one sole Jalisco; it is not important which side of the border we find ourselves on.30

Here, individual family and community devotion is expanded into devotion for state and country. Migrants who feel a strong allegiance to their pueblo or their state, not the Mexican nation, are told: “Jalisco is Mexico.”31 This belief is performed at the beginning of each federation meeting when participants sing Mexico’s national anthem. Furthermore, the governor’s construction of one sole community of Jaliscienses attempts to discursively collapse the geographic distance between Jalisco and the United States. These three strategies are used to frame remitting in a context of goodwill and responsible spending.32

Statesmen’s presentations of 3x1 as linked to migrants’ social purpose and benevolence has influenced the way migrants think about development and remittances. Hector Alarcón, an HTA president who supported the building of a Mexican rodeo in 2004, now wants to invest in education for the children of his pueblo and in “social projects with a larger impact.” Migrants repeatedly announce that they are giving to their “patria [homeland]” and put Mexican flags in their homes or on their cars in Los Angeles. A migrant who has become a remittance development project director for the Zacatecan Federation, Efraín Jiménez Muñoz, gave a speech at Stanford’s conference on “borderless giving” where he argued for “projects improving the health care and water and sewage systems [that] can benefit the overall wellbeing of communities.”33

Government institutions managing 3x1 also hold events in Mexico that mirror Semana Jalisco in the United States; information about the 3x1 program is disseminated at migrants’ expense. The Mexican version of Semana Jalisco has been held in pueblos that “illustrate the most success with the 3x1 program.”34 One such event held in Degollado, Jalisco, in 2007 involved attending Catholic mass, a PowerPoint presentation illustrating projects successfully implemented with 3x1, and an informative session regarding the logistics of the program. This information was followed by an extravagant fiesta that included a sit-down dinner, several famous mariachi singers, a band, dancing, and Jalisco’s queens parading around in evening dresses. Notably, Club Degollado, located in Chicago, put considerable effort and expense into this event. As a reward, the town’s success with 3x1 was showcased to other migrant clubs, to municipal presidents from other towns in Jalisco in attendance, and to state and federal government officials (even Governor Emilio Gonzáles made a guest appearance). This positioned Degollado favorably for future 3x1 fund solicitations. But the event also created a platform for the state to disseminate information about 3x1 and garner the trust of local officials throughout Jalisco at the expense of the club members of Degollado. Often, it is local nonmigrants or municipal presidents who ask emigrants to look into 3x1 or form a club so that their particular town can benefit from the program.35

The proliferation of federations in the United States and the Mexican government’s participation in large-scale annual events in small Mexican towns signifies the Mexican state’s reach into American cities and Mexican towns. However, it also increases the demands migrants put on OFAJE and the 3x1 program and creates competition between pueblos and emigrants for the government’s attention and funds. The Mexican statesmen and municipal presidents who are invited to each event continue
to represent one place—the state of Jalisco or a specific town—even as their emigrants are increasingly dispersed across America. The spatial fragmentation of emigrants across the United States increases the potential for Jaliscienses to earn and remit dollars (fig. 3.3). However, Jalisco emigrants no longer have a single federation in Los Angeles that can claim to represent emigrant interests, a power used to leverage and direct state investment. Furthermore, the attention that the Mexican state directs at individual federations, clubs, and/or migrants is diminished as it increases contact with Jaliscienses abroad. The “closest contact” Jaliscienses have with the Mexican government becomes increasingly distant as the state successfully organizes its population of emigrants in the United States.

This is particularly problematic in terms of how the millions of dollars poured into 3x1 are managed. 3x1 is structured to promote a democratic and transparent process, which echoes Mexico’s larger goals as an emerging democratic nation. The three levels of government (federal, state, and municipal) are required to pay equal amounts. A managing committee composed of twelve representatives makes final decisions regarding the disbursement of funds. The committee consists of three members representing the federal government, three for the state, three for the municipality, and three specifically for the emigrant population. Each municipal representative is from one of Mexico’s three political parties, PAN, PRI, and PRD. The committee convenes twice a year to revise project applications and allocate funding. Officially, equal funding is allocated to each of Jalisco’s 124 municipalities; however, if the money is not used it will be redistributed. This is intended to instate a policy of fairness that will dismantle the legacy of favoritism, corruption, and clientelism. However, as the number of people contributing to 3x1 expands, the number of migrants who make decisions about which projects are accepted or rejected remains the same. For the first several years of the program, Salvador García, the most influential leader of the Los Angeles Federation, along with two other men from the same federation, participated in the committee of twelve’s final decision making. Now, with four federations in California, Nevada, and Illinois, the Mexican government must make critical decisions about who participates. They must balance maintaining allegiances they have forged with migrants over the past decade with their goal of incorporating new migrants into the program. In 2008 Jorge Rosales participated in the committee of twelve as a representative of the new Northern California Federation. While, as he puts it, “it is kinda cool to get to decide where the millions go,” it is also a major responsibility that results in distinct winners and losers—three migrants contribute to decisions about project proposals that represent thousands of emigrants’ efforts and desires.

Once migrants are organized and aware of the 3x1 program, the individual projects must be implemented in Jalisco—a place with its own spatial legacy of capital investment, migration, and remitting in Mexico. Social and political relationships that are spatially situated in the Mexican landscape affect the state’s and migrants’ effectiveness and ability to achieve their goals.

Spatial Legacy of State Investment, Migration, and Remitting in Jalisco

Mexico’s spatial legacy is the history of the material manifestation of the social and political structures that organize the nation’s society. The spaces produced by Mexico’s
The distribution of remittance funds under 3x1 follows a spatial logic established by the size, relative proximity, and cultural relationships between towns. With the exception of Jalisco’s largest city and capital, Guadalajara, Jalisco is composed of a series of cabeceras that serve as control nodes in regional networks of outlying towns or villages. These villages are then connected to even smaller rancherías, which historically are rural settlements made up of extended families. Generally, the geographically remote towns and rancherías are the most neglected by the state. The cabecera is the only location that gets money directly from the state and federal government. It then allocates those funds to its dependent localities. Migrants who do not come from a cabecera often complain that the mayor (or presidente municipal) has not taken care of their extended dependents, leaving rancherías and pueblos to fend for themselves. Proximity to Guadalajara also greatly aids a community’s capacity to receive promised funding. Private remittances challenge this because migrants directly send money to families no matter where they are located. However, once migrants in the United States join a federation to work on a 3x1 project, at least a portion of their money is funneled through the cabeceras, creating opportunity for disputes between migrants, mayors, and state officials and increasing state control over transnational development projects at a regional level.

Regional development has been affected by Mexico’s political system, which creates instability within the cabeceras. Every six years the governor of Jalisco and president of Mexico change, and social programs often change with them. Furthermore, corruption has plagued the government and caused many social activists to expose politicians who pocket state money or give it to family businesses and their towns. Mayors have been blamed by people in their extended ranchos for using federal money that was intended for the surrounding localities. Mexico’s institutions have not effectively developed parallel agendas that challenge the new administration’s goals, budgets, or corrupt practices. Although 3x1 is an exception to this legacy, continuing on beyond one
administration, the mayors involved in 3x1 are still being blamed for using 3x1 money on the cabecera as opposed to its intended rancho.39

Mexico’s long-standing traditions of discontinuous development programs and corruption have affected not only municipal mayors’ practices but also the material development of places, crippling remote localities. Disenfranchised rancherías must deal with a fragmented and very localized history of the development of roads, water, electricity, and postal services. Disjointed development efforts and the effects of corruption are illustrated by the construction history of most roads in rural Jalisco. In Magdalena, three different government programs over a four-year period were used to pave six kilometers of rural road (fig. 3.4). In Lagunillas, the state built approximately half of the main road connecting the town with a nearby highway in 1997. It took local ejidatarios five years to save money and three years to build the remaining half. In 2004 the residents of Lagunillas could finally boast that a paved road connected their rancho with the highway (fig. 3.5). These localities are located outside of the cabecera, meaning they fight to secure government funds for infrastructure.40 In these remote places, locals have responded to state neglect with grassroots action; rural citizens of all ages, usually organized by local men, have built roads, wells, churches, and community centers and have put in community electrical wiring.

3x1’s mission is to address Mexico’s poor and marginalized rural population—or those most geographically remote from centers of commerce and transit—on the basis of “migrant initiative.” However, migration patterns and remittance patterns make it difficult for the state to map rural demographics and poverty. Historically, bad land, drought, and remoteness from cities or towns have pushed people to emigrate. This helps explain why Los Altos, a dry region in the north of Jalisco, has the longest migration history in the state involving the largest percentage of people. Also, the railroads and major roads constructed in the first half of the twentieth century allowed the people in pueblos along such routes easier access to the North. However, the history of remittances and migrant organization resulting from continuous historical migration is slowly changing the characteristics of these once impoverished places.

Disproportionate migration patterns and migration history create unequal distribution of remittances. Some high-migration zones are much better off than their neighbors.41 For example, San Miguel Hidalgo, a locality of El Limón located in a high-migration zone, boasts several large houses built with remittances and is outfitted with a new rodeo stadium that officially seats four thousand people (and unofficially seats seven thousand), even though the town’s population is only four hundred. Even within high-migration zones, some neighbors are much better off than others. In San Miguel, many of those who still farm, and are considered to be poor by the state, are also subsidized by remittances, while neighboring farmers are living hand to mouth. While the state may be able to identify marginal localities on the basis of indigenous populations and high emigration, they still do not have an effective way to map how remittances have affected marginal places.

Places in Jalisco with a long history of migration tend to have strong networks in the United States. Transnational activists rely on these networks to stir up interest in transnational community development and to raise money to remit collectively. Thus strong HTAs tend to come from places with longer migration histories. Transnational activists are also supported by the federation, which creates insider networks that give
transnational activists more access to government representatives and state funds. Among
the members of the Federación de Jaliscienses, the board of directors are most familiar
with the program and have direct access to the statesmen and HTA members that are
elected to approve 3x1 project proposals. Despite the 3x1 mandate that each municipality
get equal funds, the distribution of projects is highly uneven, and clientelistic approaches
to distributing money prevail. Unequal migration patterns create unequal distribution of
3x1 funds (fig. 3.6).

On a national level, the federal government’s goal of reaching “marginalized”
people through 3x1 refers, in part, to Mexico’s indigenous population. Many indigenous
peoples’ migration history is distinct from, and shorter than, that of mestizos. In Jalisco,
indigenous communities are pushed deep into the countryside on some of the state’s
driest and poorest lands. Throughout the nation, the larger indigenous populations of
Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca, to name a few, are predominately settled in arid land.
Poor mestizo farmers also tend to be pushed into remote localities, beyond the reach of
private interests, and many live without electricity, running water, sanitation, or basic
infrastructure. The truly impoverished are often not able to make the journey to the
United States or have only been able to do so more recently, which results in a weaker
migrant network. For example, Oaxaca’s continuous-migration history dates back
roughly twenty years, while Jalisco’s dates back to the 1920s.\footnote{Places that have been
historically in need—but perhaps not truly impoverished—tend to have longer histories
of remitting, which give them more opportunities for involvement with 3x1.\footnote{In Jalisco,
the indigenous population is only 0.32 percent of Mexico’s total indigenous population.
Even so, nationwide, Jalisco has received the most 3x1 federal support. 3x1 attempts to
make up for some of the inequality of migration history but relies on migrants’ initiatives
to do so. Thus 3x1 has exacerbated inequality in rural localities.}

On the receiving end, 3x1’s impact is linked to the size of a town’s population. It
has also been argued that the smaller the community, the greater the impact. In towns
with populations of less than one thousand, which account for 30 percent of communities
receiving 3x1 funding, typically donations annually represent around seven dollars per
person, which is seven times the average government investment in public works.\footnote{In
Jalisco, most 3x1 projects are built in towns of fewer than a thousand people. However,
small towns with strong existing grassroots networks tend to distrust the state and to have
historically contentious relationships with mayors because of fears that mayors may be
abusing their position as the gatekeepers of federal and migrant money allocated for rural
development.}

The nested geographic relationships of towns, migration, and remitting
complicate the state’s purported mission to funnel migrant remittances to poor and
marginalized communities. Knowing the historical patterns of rural Mexico’s spatial
legacy is critical to our understanding of who is affected by 3x1 and how its funds are
distributed. However, the state’s capacity to reach poor and marginalized communities is
only one way it measures success. The state is not only educating emigrants about the
importance of basic infrastructure but also making sure that this is how emigrants will
spend their remittance dollars.
State Migrant Negotiation over What to Build

The state of Jalisco wants 3x1 to focus on basic infrastructure. Rural Jalisco is plagued by hundreds of miles of unpaved roads, and approximately 15 percent of the population do not have running water or electricity. Although these percentages are low compared to other Mexican states (in Oaxaca, approximately half of the population does not have running water or electricity), Jalisco is striving to equip all of its localities with basic infrastructure. Yet many migrants are more interested in building sports arenas, churches, or ornamental landscape elements that will more visibly signify their devotion to their pueblo.

In particular, municipal officials and rural nonmigrant Mexicans in El Limón express anger over two large-scale migrant projects, a cultural center and Mexican rodeo, in localities that have roads waiting to be paved and houses without running water. According to El Limón’s mayor, “The vision that they [migrants] have of development at the municipal level and that we have do not coincide. They want a lot, and they want it visible and looking good to them. In the Presidencia Municipal (Municipal Office) we are interested in works that sometimes you don’t see but have social importance, like drainage.” However, migrants feel that they should be able to spend their money on projects that are important to them; they negotiate distance and the impacts of migrancy on social and cultural traditions through built space. A priest from a small town notes: “The unique marker of identification in the pueblo is the church. People think, ‘How am I going to identify with a road or potable water? That doesn’t say anything to me, but look at what a nice church we have.’” The symbolic value associated with remittance building is most clearly expressed by large buildings rather than through the construction of infrastructure.

The state addresses these tensions through the logic of negotiation. A government employee at the federal level explains: “When the paisanos come home for festivals here, it is very important that their sons who were born there continue to have affection for their communities of origin; they want the garden and plaza to be good so their children maintain affection. The ornamental work is very important to paisanos, more than drainage. So the mayor says, ‘We will help with your plaza if you help us with the potable water.’” In essence, the state barters thus subsidizing state projects with migrant remittances. Jaime Garibay, in charge of 3x1 Estatal, notes:

My function is to tell them why we need certain projects. For example, the municipio of Mesquitic is the poorest. The people from that town who live in Chicago said, “We want to invest two or three hundred thousand [pesos] in the church,” but I know the church is fine. They want to make it beautiful. So I tell them that I don’t agree, that we should build water plants for four different communities, two health clinics, and electric networks. Think of the people who have no drainage, no electricity, invest some money in bettering the church but put most in improving basic resources. I convinced them that that was what they had to do.”

The state’s agenda is being implemented through 3x1. Government records of all 3x1 federal projects built in Jalisco between 2002 and 2007 document an increase in the
number of works dedicated to basic infrastructure. In 2002 17 percent were infrastructure projects, whereas in 2007 the number of projects dedicated to potable water, sewer systems, electrification, residential developments, and road paving rose to 61 percent. Before 3x1, the club members went directly to the townspeople and implemented whatever project they desired. Now complex layers of bureaucracy mediate migrants’ desires. The migrants’ precious “plaza de toros” or bull-fighting ring is usually not supported by 3x1. Similarly, when 3x1 started, migrant clubs were excited about building arches to mark their town’s entrance and exit (fig. 3.7). Some arches, such as Juchitlán’s, are even marked by a state plaque that lists 3x1’s participants. For migrants who work menial labor jobs in the United States and live well below the poverty line, the symbolic importance of building inaugural arches or rodeos is a meaningful part of their daily lives in their hometowns (or their imagined hometown life of the future) that has not been valued in the 3x1 guidelines. Just after 3x1 was implemented across Mexico, migrants in Los Angeles voiced their frustration with the direction of the program in *La Opinión*, L.A.’s leading bilingual newspaper: “We are not able to have a computer center, give scholarships, collaborate in the construction of churches or a Mexican rodeo, or purchase machinery for the development of farms.”

Carlos Leal, a previous director of 3x1 at the state level acknowledges: “At the beginning the federal government wanted to control which projects would be passed without thinking of paisanos. Now it is different.” Alongside the state’s construction of migrant benevolence is the internal development of a more empathetic attitude on the part of the state regarding migrants’ motivations and needs in relation to remittance funding.

* * *

The 3x1 policy has led scholars to question the role of the state in managing its emigrant population and their remittances. While several scholars argue that a defining feature of the neoliberal era is the state’s retreat from citizen activities, or that globalization and transnational migration have resulted in the deterritorialization of the state, scholars investigating 3x1 point to the state’s increasing involvement with its emigrant population. The Mexican state is actively promoting a reconceptualization of the emigrant, formerly a wanderer, traitor, or vagabond but now a model citizen, hero, and countryman (though someone who plays those roles from a distance). 3x1 scholars seek to identify precisely how and to what effect the state’s involvement with migrant clubs has affected migrant agency and their control over remittance flows. While it is important to identify the extent to which the state is influencing migrant activity versus being influenced by it, my interest here is to point out three critical issues that have been overlooked in the 3x1 policy approach. First, the 3x1 policy is not simply one part of the Mexican state’s rural development initiatives, as some statesmen have claimed. Rather, it is the heart of a nascent remittance development model that is setting a precedent for how migrant remittances should be spent and managed in Mexico and abroad. The construction of migrant benevolence and goodwill, necessary to convince Mexico’s poorest migrant constituents to volunteer their dollars toward state-sanctioned projects, is at the core of this model. Second, the policy does not take the social and cultural impacts of building or consequences of remittance building projects into account. Remittance buildings are the bricks and mortar of villages, and infrastructure projects too are
important; both types of projects shape daily life for locals. The injection of remittance capital flows into local building traditions and industries affecting the production of place. Finally, the policy does not address migration itself as a social and spatial process. 3x1 accelerates the ways in which new social patterns created by migration have been built into local landscapes. Migration is a social process that is changing migrants’ worldview, which in turn affects what they build and why they build it.

3x1 is only one part of a larger set of aims and conditions that constitute the remittance development model. These conditions are based on not only the government’s policy but also the social, material, and spatial conditions tied to remitting as a way of life. If 3x1 continues to grow in importance, it will further formalize and institutionalize HTAs in the United States and intensify rural Mexico’s dependency on them. Furthermore, the creation of 3x1 through the state institutionalizes a practice—international and often “illegal” migration—that is dependent on structural inequalities between Mexico and the United States, as well as a practice that legitimates the Mexican government’s neglect of its rural constituents. 3x1 also requires migrants to maintain distance from their communities and families in Mexico so that they can remit.

What is at stake here is the missed opportunity for migrant-state relations to be reconstituted in both the United States and Mexico because of migrants’ roles in the development of Mexico’s countryside. Migrants must be repositioned from the shadows of Mexican society to the center of a migrant civil society and Mexican and American society at large. Furthermore, remittances present an opportunity to build vital landscapes. Currently, many 3x1 buildings and infrastructure projects are not completed, or they are completed but nonfunctional because the money to fund their operation runs out. Migrants want technologically sophisticated buildings, but there is often no local expertise to execute such visions. 3x1 buildings are often out of scale with the local vernacular architecture of the region. And once completed, these new buildings can create an enormous burden for both the migrant and local community that must then maintain them. Hundreds of thousands of hard-earned dollars could be spent to build vital places that serve the local community and the migrant community, but to achieve this a social and spatial analysis of migration and of the building process is a necessary step.

From August 2007 to August 2008 I visited many 3x1 projects that were under construction or complete but nonfunctional. I was able to see the extent to which migrant-state negotiations are etched into the Mexican landscape and the implications they have for the built environment and daily life. The next three chapters explore three migrant-initiated 3x1 projects in their regional context to better situate migrants and nonmigrants in remittance development, as well as to outline the social and spatial consequences of remittance building on place, communities, families, and individuals.
Notes, Chapter 3

1 I use the term *transnational* with caution. Mexican migrants are involved in binational activities that are increasingly informed by transnational corporations and governmental institutions. For a discussion of the academic debates surrounding the use of this term in contemporary scholarly work see David Fitzgerald and Roger Waldinger, “Transnationalism in Question,” *American Journal of Sociology* 109, no. 5 (2004): 1177–95.


3 Michael Peter Smith refers to these individuals as “actors and institutions from the state and civil society from in between.” Michael Peter Smith, *Citizenship across Borders: The Political Transnationalism of El Migrante* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 46.


To visit the current directory of Mexican clubs, go to Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, “Directorio de Organizaciones y Clubes de Oriundos,” www.ime.gob.mx/DirectorioOrganizaciones/. Note that as of December 2009, 112 HTAs were registered in countries other than the United States.


7 Salvador García, conversation with author, Michoacán, Mexico, June 2008.


11 Loose papers in the University of California Bancroft Library’s Paul S. Taylor papers.

12 Ibid.


José Ochoa, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, September 2007.

In a local publication for Los Guajes, Tagüinchí, a veteran migrant wrote: “Last month I sent five dollars [to Los Guajes], but I sent it in cash and now I don’t know if it arrived. I need to be relieved of my doubts.” Migrants want to know if their money is spent as intended.


Here I refer to the Bracero program, 1946–62, during which Mexican officials allowed an estimated five million agricultural workers to work in American fields, as well as the Border Industrialization Program, better known as the Maquiladora Program, of 1965.


For an argument about migration as produced by the Mexican and American state, see David Beacon, Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).

The numbers of clubs represented are in flux. This information was gathered from the federation Web sites and magazines; see Federación Jalisco del Norte de California, “Clubes,” accessed March 2007. Available at: http://federacionjalisconc.ning.com/page/clubes-2 and www.fedejal.us/?seccion=clubs.

A range of meetings are held by the federations’ board of directors throughout the year. Outreach meetings spearheaded by Mexican statesmen but advertised by the federation are primarily conducted in cities with new federations. The federation board of directors also holds more private monthly meetings to go over federation goals, to network, and to inform club members of 3x1 requirements or new government programs. The president of each club belonging to the federation is required to attend these monthly meetings.

Valenzuela, “Los clubes de migrantes,” 2004, 28. Also, according to Jonathan Fox, “migrant civil society” or “transnational civil society” emerges from but is distinct from transnational communities, which may or may not be engaged with the public sphere. See Jonathan Fox and Xóchitl Bada, “Migrant Civic Engagement,” Research Paper Series on Latino Immigrant Civic and Political Participation, no. 3, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, June 2009, www.wilsoncenter.org/migrantparticipation.

Observed by author at a federation meeting, Dublin, California, February 2009.


Carlos Leal, secretary of COPLADE, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, August 2008.

Manuel Acuña, Semana Jalisco, Federación de Clubes Jaliscienses, 2007, 2; translation by the author.


Historically, Mexico’s rural poor greatly distrust the Mexican government. The rural poor have been underrepresented by the state and fought the Cristero Wars with the government during the 1930s. Many Jaliscienses lost family members in this war and can date initial migration to the United States to this time period.

34 Gilberto Juárez González, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, July 2008.

35 See Olinka Valdez, Cynthia Pérez, and Bet-birai Nieto, “Sugieren replantar el 3x1; Ya se rebasó,” Imagen Zacatecas, November 11, 2009, www.imagenzac.com.mx/sugieren-replantear-el-3x1-ya-se-rebaso. The article notes that Zacatecans are increasingly frustrated by the municipal presidents’ involvement in 3x1 and that the original intention of a migrant club based on migrant initiative is compromised by presidents who encourage migrants to form a club in the United States so that they can get 3x1 money to execute their projects in Mexico.


37 Jorge Rosales, interview by author, Oakland, California, November 2009.

38 The dominance of men’s roles in shaping the built environment through the remittance development model is explored more fully in the next chapter.

39 Prominent migrant activists argue that if a governor tried to cut the program, protest from U.S. migrants would threaten its political standing. Libier Jiminez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, 2008. Also, a recent article by Olinka Valdez, “Piden migrantes limitar a los alcaldes en el 3x1,” Imagen de Zacatecas, November 10, 2009, exposes the tensions migrants have with the municipal presidents in Zacatecas, who, they argue, are taking advantage of the program.

40 This can be contrasted to select aspects of U.S. infrastructural history. In 1896, the U.S. postal system regarded it as a national duty to serve even the most remote homes with “rural free delivery.” In 1916, the U.S. federal government passed the Federal Highway Act, which nationalized road building and supported local road development. Although there are inequities in U.S. infrastructure, especially among Native Americans, the inequities in Mexico are far more pervasive.

41 The Mexican Census and Bank of Mexico have not effectively documented remittances; thus increases in local inequality and in the complexity of personal and familial income are only roughly understood.

42 Although Oaxaca’s migration is rooted in the mid-twentieth century, international or circulation migration is a much more recent phenomenon. See Jeffrey H. Cohen, “The Oaxaca-US Connection and Remittances,” Migration Policy Institute (January 2005) http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=280.

43 It is very difficult to make these claims because the definitions of “truly impoverished” and “in need” are relative to specific localities. Here I am referring to largely indigenous groups without basic services, clean water, or substantial food as “truly impoverished,” whereas those who can meet their basic needs but have no insurance or safety net ensuring that they will be able to do so in the future are “in need.”

44 See Manuel Orozco and Rebecca Rouse, “Migrant Hometown Associations and Opportunities for Development: A Global Perspective,” Migration Policy Institute

45 President of El Limón, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, April 2008.
46 Miguel López Covas, interview by author, Michoacán, Mexico, July 2008.
49 Both the Migration Policy Institute and COPLADE publish information regarding 3x1 projects. The data here is available at: http://www.migrationpolicy.org/.
50 La Opinión, June 13, 2002.
51 Carlos Leal, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, August 2008.
Figures, Chapter 3

The 3x1 Landscape and the Construction of a Transnational Civil Society

Figure 3.1. (shown on first pages of chapter) Map of El Limón, Jalisco, showing a street remodeled with dollars that is named Calle Hijo Ausente (Street of Absent Children) and runs directly through the heart of the town.

Figure 3.2. Federación de Jaliscienses meeting, Dublin, California. The photograph captures Mexican statesmen in the center of the room discussing the benefits of the 3x1 program to an audience of HTA members and individual migrants.
Figure 3.3. Advertisement for DirecTV, *Semana Jalisco* magazine. This advertisement reads, “Feel at home.” It illustrates Jalisco’s rural towns spread across California’s landscape. While this is not a literal depiction of where Jaliscienses are located, migrants from Jalisco are both spatially fragmented across California and clustered into migrant groups that are based on their pueblo of origin.
Figure 3.4. Road illustration, Magdalena. The municipal president of Magdalena drew this map to illustrate the various programs and costs ($ refers to pesos) of paving this road over a period of three to four years.
Figure 3.5. Road, Lagunillas. Multiple programs are required to pave rural roads. This road from Lagunillas to Autlán was a major accomplishment for the community of Lagunillas.
Figure 3.6. Programa Emigrantes 3x1. Publication of 3x1 showing increases in program dollars from 2000 to 2006. Even though Jalisco is not one of Mexico’s poorer states, it has benefited the most from 3x1 program funds.
Figure 3.7. A 3x1 road under construction and gateway. The 3x1 program values building roads more than building arches, but for many migrants the reverse is true.
Chapter 4

*El Jaripeo*: Ritual, Gender, and the Economy in Village Rodeo Grounds

Figure 4.1. Praying *jinetes* (bull riders), Lagunillas. Just before these men risk their lives, they pray for protection to the Virgin of Guadalupe. The local branch of the Red Cross estimates that in the municipality of Autlán in Jalisco five to ten deaths each year are caused by jaripeo bull-riding accidents.
New rodeo arenas, forged in the crucible of migration, remitting, and tradition, are rapidly emerging across Jalisco’s rural landscape. On the one hand, rodeo rings and stadiums that dwarf rancherias deep in the mountains are what Walter Benjamin calls “wish images,” markers of a promise yet to be fulfilled, an inauguration of a new mode of production based on emigrants’ investment in places they once abandoned. On the other hand, the new rodeo grounds are evidence of the limits of transnational capital from below, the result of state neglect, and the displacement of migrant desire, with very real implications for individual subjectivities and community formations.

The management of a mega-remittance rodeo in San Miguel Hidalgo, a very small village in the south of Jalisco, exposes both the hubris and the dangers of remittance development. San Miguel has approximately four hundred inhabitants. A handful of the town’s norteños—now successful businessmen in the United States—wanted to build the biggest rodeo facility in the region. With the help of 3x1 program funds, they built a recreation center with a plaza de toros, a basketball court, a soccer field, and a running track in four months for approximately $500,000. The gigantic and hastily built arena is estimated to have the capacity for up to seven thousand people, easily making it the largest rodeo grounds in the municipality but in one of the smallest villages.

Drawing sufficient crowds to a rodeo event requires carefully planned strategies. For the inauguration of the rodeo in 2008, two key norteños with capital resources hired “La Arrolladora,” Mexico’s nationally famous banda from the state of Sinaloa, in Northwestern Mexico, to create investment-driven profits. The band cost an astounding $75,000 or 750,000 pesos for two hours. This amount is almost seventy-five times the cost of the local band in San Miguel and fifteen times the cost of the most popular (and expensive) regional band in the nearby cabecera of El Grullo. The hope was that these internationally recognized musicians would draw large enough crowds from the region and the surrounding states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Zacatecas, and Guanajuato, as well as from norteños in the United States, to fill the arena. The San Miguel rodeo illustrates norteños’ conception of the relative importance and economic potential of their town.

The norteños were influenced by the Mexican rodeos that they had attended in Los Angeles, California. Built in 1979, the Pico-Rivera Sports Arena in Los Angeles is allegedly the oldest and largest arena for Mexican style jarrapeos (bull-riding events) and charreadas in the United States. The arena seats up to five thousand spectators. In contrast to arenas such as the Cow Palace in San Francisco, the Pico-Rivera Sports Arena was built for Mexican sports events, not American rodeos. Because of its scale and capacity to attract audiences, it has served as a model for norteños who are playing new entrepreneurial roles in rural Mexico.
An apparent reversal of the town’s fate seemed imminent: at least for a day, the pueblo of San Miguel was about to become the center of Mexico’s contemporary music scene. A teenage girl from San Miguel predicted, “They will get the plaza full with that band. It’s the biggest band in Mexico!” Her mother replied, “Well, if they don’t now they never will.” A young boy from San Miguel walked around with a cooler each day after school selling paletas (homemade popsicles) at two pesos each until he made enough money to buy his ticket to attend his pueblo’s event. After spending his spring and summer selling 150 paletas, and being teased by his friends who were securing money from less obvious sources, the boy had the 300 pesos to buy his ticket. From individual tactics to group efforts, the event transformed daily life in the pueblo for several months before its arrival.

On the day of the event many in attendance must have been shocked to see the plaza at only 50 percent capacity. Over three thousand people came to the small rural pueblo over four hours from Guadalajara by car. The massive scale of the venue, however, dwarfed the crowd. As is often repeated, crowds are the most important marker of success in a Mexican fiesta: crowds mean that the dance floor is packed, that the seats are full to the brim, that men have to stand to show their chivalry, and that long lines form to use the women’s bathroom. Even with its rodeo arena half empty, San Miguel was inundated with over six times its population—a huge number of people needing gas, food, restrooms, and parking in a town with no gas stations, no formal restaurants, and not a single parking lot. These logistical issues were not addressed, nor could they have been, by the norteños who sponsored the event. When the day was over, despite all their hard work, the sponsors faced new debts and the event was deemed a failure.

Uncontrolled rodeo development aided by the Mexican state thus resulted in a catastrophe whose cost fell on the shoulders of migrant investors and rural inhabitants alone. Buildings could not promise the economic and social networks necessary to attract large audiences; overnight, they could not erase or reverse the spatial legacy of rural Jalisco. Furthermore, the large-scale event was incommensurate with the barely developed local infrastructure, and in subsequent years the available population of fiesta participants has kept diminishing because of emigration. Clearly, San Miguel’s rodeo arena demonstrates the gap between what is possible and what is practical.

This story dramatizes a series of processes that are under way because of the influx of American dollars into rural localities and their use for development projects. In particular, dollars are affecting regional economies, gender relations, and local traditions. The regional remittance economy in rural Mexico is inherently unstable and discontinuous. The U.S. economic crisis starting in 2008 demonstrated that rural Mexico is tethered to global capitalism: remittances dropped, in part because of the housing market crash in the United States. The local economy is also linked to Mexican and U.S. government economic and immigration policy decisions that swing according to each country’s political climate. Thus money coming into rural localities from outside cannot be counted on. Additionally, the money that does come in follows the uneven development of historic migration flows, creating competition between communities with scarce resources.

Gender also plays a large role in how remittances influence the spaces of the hometown. Typically men have been the ones to migrate from Jalisco, and although women are increasingly joining migration streams north, the gender ratios in rural Jalisco
are still lopsided. Scholars who study the mothers, wives, and daughters who live off partners’ inconsistent and uninsured remittance flows characterize the village as female. In Jalisco, colloquial speech is used to refer to the village as a womb or cuna natal. The female village can be contrasted to its male-dominated remittance spaces. Men are powering most development decisions regarding remittances in the government and the migrant HTAs. Women, however, are starting to band together and articulate how remittances should be managed and who should manage them. Thus new tensions are born between villagers’ gendered expectations and between male and female migrants’ visions for remittance space.

At a more abstract level, remittances are also directly influencing the reproduction of local traditions. As the infusion of capital throws local hierarchies and social positions into flux, new opportunities emerge. “Tradition” becomes what Nezar AlSayyad calls a “foil for exploring the contested subjectivities involved in producing or occupying space.” Some remitters have preservationist instincts, while others want to instigate changes. These desires collide with the various desires of villagers who live among remittance developments on a daily basis.

Rodeos are regional economic engines (and have been since their inception). They are also cultural engines; they house a gendered sport, and they perform a whole series of local rural traditions. The production of the rodeo as a political and economic space, the construction of the rodeo facility as a material site, and the rituals and performances that take place in rodeo arenas narrate the emergence of new identities, the weakening of older collective solidarities and forms, and increasing political fragmentation. Communities separated by physical, cultural, and economic distances, but linked through the circuits of the global remittance and migration industry, are unified and yet differentiated. They occupy what Fredric Jameson calls a “hyperspace,” a domain in which local experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place. While the rodeo arena houses one of the most parochial of sports, jaripeo or bull riding, it is now a hyperspace where “globality and locality are inextricably linked” and where the nonlocal processes driving remittance capital are “experienced, constituted, and mediated locally.” Allan Pred and Michael Watts call this process, whereby global economic transformation is negotiated locally, a “working and reworking of modernity.” Communities undergoing such transformation, they argue, use cultural and symbolic resources to remake a social order and craft new traditions.

As one in a collection of dispersed but interrelated spaces produced by remittances, the remittance rodeo arenas results from the conversion of the rural peasant into a service sector laborer. The social mobility he or she experiences, which requires the crossing of international borders, has resulted in the financialization of two regional events in rural Jalisco: the jaripeo rodeo (with its bulls and jinetes or bull riders) and the coronación de la reina, or beauty queen contest, often linked to the fiestas surrounding the bull-riding event. These emergent markets based on regional traditions seek to locate a new frontier. In a rural region defined by scarce resources and the limited acquisition of new land, the frontier is envisioned as the expansion and untapped promise of migrant remittances. The increasing scale of the rodeo arenas, the professionalization of the jaripeo’s main actors, and the insertion of new jaripeo music markets together constitute the financialization of traditional and cultural forms represented in the modified public space of the remittance rodeo.
One danger of the remittance rodeo, highlighted in another context by David Harvey, is that as capitalist development tries to overcome spatial barriers—in Marx’s formulation, “to annihilate space with time”—it produces a landscape of constructions whose immobility subsequently becomes a new barrier to be overcome. Individual arenas are rendered obsolete because of the immediate quest for bigger, better, more attractive, and economically productive venues. There is now a competition between towns that race to attract large audiences and earn profits. While the production of the remittance rodeo is transnational, its spaces are continue to be parochial. Ultimately, the remittance rodeo illustrates transnational migrants’ limited capacity to bring about positive structural economic transformation.

Just as flows of remittance capital into rural Mexican towns shape the built environment, they also drive social transformations. This is evident in the choice by migrants and their allies to build rodeo arenas, the politics and logistics of the building process, the structuring of the jaripeo event, and the evolving gendered dynamics inscribed at every level of the event’s planning, construction, and performance.

The rodeo arena becomes the spatial container for a set of rituals and performances that dramatize and reveal changes in the social order as a dialectic between the local and the global. A focus on particular aspects of spectacle during the rodeo highlights the role of spectacle during a crisis of power and identity driven by the rise of new actors and the restructuring of the economy. Bret Gustafson argues that the bull ring spectacle can be used to “visualize power through displays that naturalize gendered, racial, social, and spatial boundaries and conjure grandiose illusions of prosperity against the underlying precariousness of both.” The rodeo in Jalisco reinforces the dominance of men in the political and public sphere by representing a rural social order with men at the center. This representation is critical because it cultivates continuity despite a real and imagined sense of regional economic crisis and social instability.

Social instability is linked to a shift in the meanings associated with bull riding. The forms of masculine courage associated with agrarian ways of life are giving way to a new bravery associated with crossing the border, living in a foreign land, and remitting as a way of life. Jaripeo struggles to reorient itself away from a social order based in agricultural production toward a market-oriented entrepreneurialism dependent on emigration. Paradoxically, female emigrants increasingly produce the spaces of the remittance rodeo, enabling the masculinity represented by it. These underlying structural changes magnify and destabilize the role that tradition plays in emigrant societies.

The jaripeo “tradition” is performed. As argued by Ananya Roy, performativity, by borrowing from and unsettling fixed relations between tradition and place, makes explicit how tradition is consumed. The remittance rodeo performance is about the consumption of a ranchero masculinity (and a ranchera femininity) as they are becoming unmoored from the village and are being reinterpreted, reformulated, and manifested in increasingly distant localities.

The Mexican state also plays a critical role in the rise of the remittance rodeo. Neoliberal economic restructuring in Mexico has resulted in the privatization of large government companies as the government dismantles trade barriers, retreats from Mexico’s financial realm, and encourages entrepreneurial activity in lieu of government-funded social programs. While the 3x1 program appears to be out of step with a neoliberal ideology because the government is investing more money in small rural
localities, by doing so they encourage norteños to assume new political and civic responsibilities. Furthermore, the encroachment of the state in rural localities has triggered a jump in scale in the production of rodeos. This jump in scale, which has resulted in disruption and discontent in hometowns through rivalry between and within hometowns, calls our attention to regional struggles over community, identity, and economic vitality.

To understand how new identities are being performed in particular institutional and structural contexts, in this chapter I use an extended case-study method. I analyze the transformation from the peso rodeo to the remittance rodeo, and the financialization and gendered spaces of the rodeo throughout the municipality of Autlán. Tangentially, I analyze the construction of one rodeo facility in Lagunillas (an ejido community within the municipality) to situate this exploration in particular political struggles occurring in emigrant communities. Lagunillas is the only rodeo in this municipality built with 3x1 funds and migrant remittances completed during the field work year of this study. I move between the specificity of the Lagunillas rodeo to jaripeo space more generally to explore the jaripeo as a material site and a discursive arena for migrants, villagers, and statesmen involved in the rearticulation of social roles and positions of power in localities ravaged by emigration.

In what follows, I approach the story of the remittance rodeo in two ways. First, I analyze the rodeo as a component of the changing fortunes and trajectories of rural Mexican towns as they shift from an agricultural society to one based on a remittance economy. I address the remittance economy as a new mode of production and unpack its implications for political formations in relation to authority, power, and entitlement. I then explore the gender dynamics, acted out in space, that are embedded within the remittance rodeo. These new expectations, and the shift from community solidarities to individualized notions of access, advancement, and transformation, feed back into the social and economic spaces of the emigrant village.

History of the Jaripeo in the South of Jalisco

To understand the remittance rodeo and its subsequent transformation, we must unearth the meaning and role of the preremittance-era or peso jaripeo. The peso jaripeo was a cultural practice that defined and was defined by local place. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, villages throughout the south of Jalisco mobilized on-site resources to stage a jaripeo primarily for the people of that town. Often the sport was performed during villages’ fiestas patronales, or patron saint festivals, which celebrate a miracle that took place in the village. Dating back to the colonial period, the jaripeo tradition has survived changing modes of production and social transformation. During the nineteenth century, when the fiesta de toros (festivities surrounding bull-riding events) was a critical part of hacienda life, a successful fiesta allowed hacendados to show off their horses and equestrian skills, as well as the skills of the mestizos or campesinos who managed the haciendas and herded, branded, and vaccinated cattle. Over time, these fiestas assumed multiple functions; they enabled the hacienda to raise money and showed the might of the horsemen who protected the hacienda. As the anthropologist Olga Najero-Ramírez explains, while “[bull-riding] competitions simultaneously stressed individual ability and team effort,” they “became particularly significant as a
representation of life of the hacienda as one of unity and work for the common good.”Regardless of the grueling realities of daily life, the rodeo event allowed hacendados to present a unified front to other nearby haciendas.

In the twentieth century, newly appointed ejidatarios and independent rural farmers reinterpreted and reinvented the role and meaning of the jaripeo. Political and social revolution resulted in the dismantling of the hacienda and the construction of ejidos and independent villages. New ejidos and abandoned hacienda grounds allowed campesinos and peones to take full ownership of rodeos, corrals, and jaripeo events (fig. 4.2). Ejidos, envisioned by the state as the bedrock of a new family-farming sector in Mexico, were both revolutionary, in that they purported to give new social status to once-indebted servants, and regulatory, in that they allowed the state to secure political allegiance from its rural constituents. The teamwork required by ejidatarios to hold a jaripeo event reinforced the Mexican state’s interest in the rise of the ejido as an autonomous and self-reliant agricultural unit. In the context of societal transformation, war, and famine, man’s capacity to conquer a bull showcased villagers’ success; as tragically expressed in Juan Rulfo’s story “Es que somos muy pobres” (It’s Because We’re Very Poor), during this period the ownership of bulls created a critical buffer between subsistence and dire poverty.

The jaripeo also supported the state’s construction of agrarian reform as masculine. State land reforms created not only new political entities but also new identities tied to land stewardship. Ejido lands were passed down from generation to generation within the same family, usually from father to sons, and only male ejidatarios had the right to vote about the use of the ejido’s communal lands. While migration throughout Mexico, and within Jalisco specifically, was a major part of life before agrarian reform, many ejidatarios felt that the land they had been granted was land that had rightfully belonged to their family for decades, if not centuries.

The peso jaripeo allowed the poor to perform identities associated with nationality and urbanity. The jaripeo was a simplified version of a more formal Mexican sport known as the charreada, which involves several suertes or skill sets that are performed with trained horses, bulls, and skilled riders who wear formal and elegant suits. Originating in Jalisco, the charreada has been branded as one of Jalisco’s, and subsequently Mexico’s, defining cultural characteristics. In contrast to the formality of the charreada, the jaripeo was rough and rowdy. It featured no formal competition, no judges to score the performance of jinetes, and no requirement of elegant and expensive attire for participants. Through the peso rodeo, villagers enacting jaripeo from the lowest social class in Jalisco could reference the charreada, even though its production was economically and socially unattainable. This allowed villagers to symbolically participate in the activities of cities like Mexico City and Guadalajara where the charreada was performed.

An ejidatario, Antonio Gómez, who participated in jaripeo events recalls the spirit of the jaripeo of the 1950s and 1960s:

Before, they would start the event earlier and it would go for much longer because the men would play with the bull, rope its legs, throw it down, let it chase their horses. Any person in the audience could decide to get onto the bull. They didn’t have the mechanism that they have now to drop the man on the bull and release
the bull into the ring. They just jumped on the bull when it was on the floor, had been knocked down. The bulls were local bulls; somebody who owned cows had their bull so the herd would grow, and they would use these, so sometimes the bull was as tame as a cow and other times he was brave or courageous.\textsuperscript{24}

Gómez recalls the distinctly informal and autonomous nature of the event. The event did not start and end at a specific time; rather, it would continue at length. In part, this was because the bull riders, and the bulls themselves, were nonprofessional locals. Rather than “protecting their animals,” people were “playing” with them in the rodeo ring and throughout the streets of the town. Because “any person could decide to get on the bull,” spectators did not have to wait for professionals, and the event was not limited to professional performances. The event also took place throughout the rodeo ring and in the streets of the town. And because it was not bounded by a fence or marked by an entrance, people entered and exited the spaces of the jaripeo as they pleased. Overall, Gómez expresses a sentiment that is echoed by others: the jaripeo was an event that involved the entire village, and “everybody paid attention.” The jaripeo that he recalls reflects a particular moment in the development of the landed peasant farmer class.

As ejidos and small farming communities struggled to survive throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, the building and remodeling of rodeo arenas was a demonstration of their communal capacity, stewardship over land, and perseverance. Rodeo facilities were built from locally harvested materials such as quarried stone, wooden planks from fallen trees, or communally made brick (fig. 4.3). Often these materials would be used to modify a rodeo arena that had been built for hacendados to corral cattle. Even though ejidos were (and are) hierarchical and subject to conflict, ejidatarios’ investment in and presentation of a collective identity cannot be overemphasized. Much as in the days of the hacienda, the representation of a collective identity helped to strengthen the position of the ejido relative to other neighboring ejidos and to the state.

Today the impact of emigration, remitting, and national governmental policy changes regarding rural lands has created a new climate of instability for many rural communities. But emigration and remitting have also held communities together. In the 1960s and 1970s, after the Bracero program (1942–64), foreign capital allowed Mexican migrant farmers to save and buy seed, invest in cattle, or hire farmhands to work and till their land in their absence. Remittances have also been invested in tractors and other modern farming equipment.\textsuperscript{25} The anthropologist Peri Fletcher notes that in Pátzcuaro, a village in the state of Michoacán, early investment in cattle with hard-earned dollars from migration to the United States created a more stable and successful class of farmers.\textsuperscript{26} These early investments allowed certain families to break the cycle of poverty that had defined their lives and strengthened local desires for social mobility based on capital accumulation rather than political or social standing.

These changes initially affected the production and use of rodeos in diverse ways. At first the insertion of dollars did not radically reorganize the cultural and social meanings associated with the peso jaripeo. A regional history of the transformation from peso rodeo to remittance rodeo in one municipality allows for an exploration of the uneven development of the remittance rodeo. Autlán, a municipal region in the south of Jalisco that is composed of over twenty-five smaller towns, localities or pueblos, and
ranches, is an ideal place from which to study the transformation of the rodeo that has depended on the rodeo’s importance in the region, the length of time individuals have been migrating, and the diversity of communities in terms of size and political structure. Importantly, in the municipality of Autlán, in contrast to places like Los Altos (in the north of the state) where remittances and migration have been instrumental since the 1920s and 1930s, migration has been more recent. The acceleration of migration and remitting since the 1970s means that contrasts between the peso rodeo and remittance rodeo are still visible in the landscape.

From Peso Rodeos to Remittance Rodeos in Autlán de Navarro

The first remittance rodeo in the region was built in the community of El Chante to strengthen the existing political structure; ejidatarios used dollars to support the ejido. Built in the 1970s (by 2007 a total of fourteen out of seventeen rodeo arenas in fourteen villages throughout the municipality had been remodeled or rebuilt with remittances), the rodeo arena introduced the role of the norteño as the external financial unit or “bank.” At this time, the ejido of El Chante was the largest town in the municipality outside Autlán itself and had a sizable emigrant population. The ejidatarios solicited dollars from their northern contingent at a rate of 1,000 pesos per norteño, for a total sum of 30,000 pesos. With these funds, the ejidatarios were able to build a ten-tiered rodeo grandstand, seating 2,500 people, that they operated and managed. The ejidatario Don Benjamín River proudly recalls: “When we finished the plaza we took the money we made from the rodeo event and handed the men who lent money their free ticket and their 1,000 pesos.”

By asking the norteños (only some of whom had been ejidatarios) for a loan, the ejido built a rodeo arena that further institutionalized the ejidatarios’ position as decision makers and builders in the village.

Remittance rodeos developed unevenly in relation to particular migration streams and trends. Two decades later very small communities in more remote localities had adequate emigrant networks to contribute to rodeo remodels. Even then, the rodeo arenas were humble in comparison with El Chante’s. In the 1990s, the remote rancho of La Cidrita built a wood and steel corral with $2,000 that had been donated by approximately twenty norteños (fig. 4.4). This rancho of approximately ninety inhabitants does not have a formal hometown association in the United States or enough norteños to fund the construction of a concrete and brick rodeo arena. Norteños paid for a modest hybrid ring of steel beams nailed to tree trunks that was sufficient for holding jaripeo events that they returned home to see and for collecting a modest profit used to refurbish the church. The influx of dollars introduced foreign materials into a remote village and allowed villagers to accrue profits that were then used to fund modest infrastructure or building projects. While modest in scale, the La Cidrita rodeo ring is a civic improvement that local farmers have taken immense pride in.

As dollars were used to built rodeos, the men necessary to participate in rodeo events were increasingly absent from the community. Since the 1970s, the autonomy of the villages and their capacity to manage and administer jaripeo events has been compromised because of the emigration of men and subsequently women. In what became “emigrant villages,” norteños began to assume the responsibility of implementing and managing the jaripeo remodels and events. Community members feared that the
community’s geographic dispersion was threatening the continuation of the jaripeo sport itself. Norteños were poised to assume the responsibility of keeping the tradition alive because they returned with money and desires. Early remittance rodeo arenas built by norteños signaled a shift in how space was produced: that is, they followed the logic of remittance capital itself rather than social relations defined in place.

Remittance rodeos initiated by norteños have unanticipated consequences. Primarily, there is an implicit assumption that norteños will finance future jaripeo events. While norteños often initiate construction projects out of an altruistic sense of responsibility to their hometowns, many are unprepared for the enormous personal responsibility that attends the funding, management, and execution of construction projects, not to mention the continuing need to organize events and maintain facilities. In the town of El Chacalito, three norteños and one nonemigrant decided to replace the existing eighty-five-year-old stone corral (fig. 4.5). Their arrangement stipulated that two men would go to the United States to work and send money to El Chacalito while the other two managed the construction process. Since project completion, the pairs have annually alternated the responsibility to pay for and organize the fiestas. One norteño, who now lives in El Chacolito, reminisced about his time working at a restaurant, Simple Blue, at Sunset and Vine streets in Los Angeles, “at the top of a tall building with ten floors.” He made good money there from 1973 to 1988. Now that he was back in Mexico and earned far less from his rancho, it was harder for him to co-manage the jaripeo event. In El Chacalito, norteños who want to continue in their role as patrons of the fiestas del toro do not have the luxury of retiring in their pueblo.

Norteños’ increasing responsibilities were, and are, exacerbated by neoliberal policy changes at the national level. In the 1990s, the rodeo once again entered a period of acute rearticulation, much as the ejido community itself did. In 1993, as a part of national efforts to modernize the Mexican economy and privatize resources, President Carlos Salinas made it possible to sell ejido land for the first time in over seven decades through his land-titling program, PROCEDE. While this is now a choice, selling ejido land is logistically difficult: ejidatarios must first survey and title it to obtain the necessary deeds. Once this privilege is attained, they are stripped of the social status linked to their stewardship over ejido lands. This law has destabilized the autonomy and viability of the ejido, already under duress, as some ejidatarios decide to sell and others to retain their land. It remains to be seen whether ejido communities will continue to perform jaripeos while under national pressures to dismantle.

Within this context, the remittance rodeo illustrates an experimental remittance development model. Distance is built into local building projects, new alliances and dependencies are created with the emigrant community, and there is a new potential for profits. As we have seen, however, this model does not always work. For some communities continuous remitting is unsustainable, norteños stop coming home, and populations dwindle. In Autlán, half-built or abandoned rodeos are reminders of the experimental nature of remittance building. Chiquistlán’s rodeo ring has an almost finished modern concrete stage with steep stairs that was intended for bands, but these bands may never come (fig. 4.6). El Rodeo’s rodeo grounds never got an infusion of cash, and the bricks from the days of the hacienda are now covered with grass and brush.
The Remittance Rodeo and the State

Most recently, with the rise of 3x1, remittance rodeos have multiplied, grown in scale, and been reimagined to prime the jaripeo event for new economic possibilities, accrue profits, and usher in progress. Through 3x1, the state essentially piggybacks onto informal remittance financing of rodeo facility construction that has been occurring in the region since the 1970s. The state recognizes building as an effective way to give order to the chaos of migration. Ideally, in 3x1 building projects, migrant transnational social and economic networks and villagers’ needs and desires together create a space that not only reflects the strength of emigrants’ ties to their hometown but also assigns norteños permanent “responsibility” for the maintenance and well-being of these villages. Norteños’ responsibility to their hometown is institutionalized; the Mexican state wants to know that Mexico will continue to receive remittance flows regardless of norteños’ evolving relationship with their host city. The state’s 3x1 program has given money to one rodeo in the municipality of Autlán, in the village of Lagunillas, and to two other rodeos in nearby municipalities. The Lagunillas rodeo illustrates how transnational building projects create new structures of power and exclusion that are coupled with an increase in access and economic potential.

In Lagunillas, it was ejidatarios who had originally wanted to build a new rodeo facility. They had talked about it for fifteen years, but because of a lack of funds and political will, their efforts to build it repeatedly failed. Until 2003, Lagunillas was one of only four pueblos, out of a total of twenty-one in the municipality, too poor to build their own rodeo arena. The other three towns without rodeos were small ranchos of between 100 and 250 people, whereas Lagunillas was an ejido community of over eight hundred farmers, schoolteachers, and retirees. Struggling to redefine their position in the municipality of Autlán de Navarro, the local ejidatarios of Lagunillas decided again in the 1990s that “this corral [lot used for jaripeos] didn’t satisfy us. We wanted something better and started up the idea to build a new one.” A local from Lagunillas who travels back and forth every six months between Lagunillas and Los Angeles paid a visit to norteños in California to encourage them to join 3x1 and contribute to the building of a much-needed rodeo. The norteños in Los Angeles were already organized into HTAs, one in Los Angeles and the other in Las Vegas, and had been experimenting with different project ideas for Lagunillas. They were inspired by the ambitious and finite nature of building a rodeo facility (fig. 4.7).

The new facility, built from 2003 to 2007, cost an estimated $500,000 (about sixteen times the amount it would cost to build an ordinary home in Lagunillas) and officially seats 2,500 people (fig. 4.8). It stands out in a village composed of a main plaza surrounded by dilapidated one-room public institutions and a cluster of primarily one-story adobe houses, and locals repeatedly referred to it as the most modern and accommodating rodeo arena in the region. Despite these impressive facts, conflicts arose over land and project ownership, management, and implementation. Generally speaking, even though the inhabitants of Lagunillas had originally solicited norteños’ help and continued to seek state funds, they received remittance development with ambivalence. They were hesitant about state-norteño intervention and influence over local affairs, especially the rise of norteños in the local political process and the encroachment of the state onto ejido lands. Since norteños
are ambiguously both *insiders* and *outsiders*, it is unclear how external they actually are; further, they occupy an important position as interlocutors between the pueblo and the state.\(^{36}\)

More specifically, mounting tensions over social status and power between ejidatarios and norteños are exacerbated by 3x1, which requires ejidatarios and other locals to operate and manage the project on the ground while ownership of the project and the land on which it is built transfers to the state, even if that land is ejido property. This is a unique and unprecedented way for the state to assume ownership over prized ejido lands.

Ambiguities in the provisions for land ownership and transfer codified in 3x1 program guidelines have resulted in a legal battle. The ejidatarios of Lagunillas were told that norteños and the government were going to help them build their rodeo. An ejidatario, Felipe Quiñones, donated his land for the project. After construction commenced, the state approached the ejidatarios to have them sign over Quiñones’s land. He notes: “I understand that the municipality wants to put the land in their name, but I didn’t donate the land for the municipality, I donated it for the pueblo of Lagunillas. I am not trying to keep the land for myself; I just want to make sure that the pueblo controls the rodeo and manages the resources.”\(^{37}\)

According to ejido law, all the other ejidatarios have the right to buy the land from Quiñones before he can sell it to somebody outside the ejido—giving each ejidatario a strong voice in the battle over ownership of the new rodeo. The municipal government drafted a contract that stipulates the ejidatarios and townspeople as owners of the plaza for ninety-nine years. The ejidatario Jorge Cortez scoffs: “The municipality is saying we will be in charge for ninety-nine years. As captains, we can borrow it to use it. Why should I want to be a captain rather than an owner? Why should I feel that I am borrowing it? I am the owner! And my son is the owner! And my grandchildren will be owners!”\(^{38}\) Ejidatarios are reluctant to give up land granted to them less than a century ago as reparation for injustices and inequities their ancestors faced. As noted by Fletcher, the “importance of land cannot be overstated. It separates the farmer from the peon; it provides a living, even when meager, and is a prerequisite for livestock production. Most importantly, it provides independence.”\(^{39}\) Additionally, ejidatarios have real concerns over the present and future intentions of the state. The region of Autlán has been plagued by political corruption, and until recently the local government shared power with rich caciques. Every six years, power is transferred to a new municipal president. Cortez explains: “They assure that the contract will be respected by the next party. That makes me laugh; how can they know what will happen?”\(^{40}\) Regardless of the contract, he fears that the incoming party could relinquish ownership of the rodeo.

While three levels of government have contributed to the rodeo, it is the municipality that is most invested in state ownership. Municipal officials express concern that if the ejidatarios do not relinquish ownership the rodeo will become a private project funded by public money: “What would happen if Felipe died? The rodeo would be his and would go to *his people*.\(^{41}\) Here officials express the desire to have the rodeo benefit “the pueblo,” not only the ejidatarios who retain rights over the land. There is no precedent, however, for how the state would administer a publicly owned rodeo outside the cabecera to ensure that the profits were distributed.
Both the municipality and ejidatarios have resorted to petty measures to assert power and authority over the rodeo. The architect Eduardo Ramírez, who works for Obras Públicas (the Public Works Office) in Autlán, explains, “This dispute has been going on a long time now, and there are ramifications. The federal government sent a letter to Lagunillas saying that the project was intended to be a public project and that if they do not sign the agreement then they need to pay the municipality and federal government back all of the money that they gave for the plaza [rodeo arena].” While this tactic is official and came from the federal government, it is also a bluff. Villagers have no way of ever paying back the hundreds of thousands of dollars donated by the state.

Municipal officials attempt to assert powers external to 3x1 guidelines in their efforts to convince ejidatarios to relinquish ownership. As noted by an accountant in Autlán’s Public Works Office: “They are a pueblo. They don’t have the resources to have a fiesta like Autlán. The money to maintain the building and hold an event is beyond the capacity of the rancho. And they think that migrants will continue helping, but they have other interests and can’t continue forever. If they don’t hand over the land we will close the project, not allow them to have events or use it at all. It will become a ghost project.” The municipality perceives the temporary nature of migrant remittances and knows that the time will come when the villagers will turn to it for assistance. Additionally, the municipality “officially” requires the police and Red Cross to attend rodeo events in villages and can close an event down by banning these civic employees from attending. That authority, however, is undermined by the fact that these “civic” institutions are largely subsidized by private investment, often in the form of migrant remittances.

Just as the municipality attempts to assert control over the rodeo, the inhabitants of Lagunillas resort to tactics and strategies to claim ownership. Most notably, the ejidatarios have built additions to the rodeo facility that were beyond the project guidelines. In 2007, ejidatarios solicited funds from norteños to build the necessary passageways, corrals, and paddocks to perform a corrido formal or Spanish bullfight whose prestige would rival the charreada (fig. 4.9). The architect scoffs, “It is not normal for ranchos to have corrido formales, there is not another example of a rancho that I know of that has one. They were driven by ego, they wanted to be the only ones to have the corrido formal. Norteños too wanted the corrido.” This addition cost the ejidatarios and norteños $40,000 beyond the project budget. Additionally, Quiñones built a new house right next to the rodeo while the rodeo was being built (fig. 4.10). From this house he could watch over the construction process. He also assumed the civic and financial responsibility of bringing water to the site, initially for his house but eventually also for the public bathrooms in the rodeo arena.

Villagers managed the construction process most intimately. First, they formed a committee that met up to several times a week for the entire duration of the construction process. The committee’s president, Darío Valdés, served as the project manager, recording in several notebooks each financial transaction conducted by the municipality and by the committee (fig. 4.11). Second, villagers guarded and protected the rodeo arena while it was under construction. Pieces of equipment, such as sound equipment and large high-powered lights for night events (installed days before the event), were not secured. In this region of Mexico, and even more in others, bandits and thieves prey upon
transnational communities that do not secure the material goods resulting from flows of remittance dollars. The leader of the Lagunillas committee’s own family, including his teenage son and his elderly father, ended up taking continual shifts throughout the day and night to watch over the lights and equipment for fear that they would be stolen. With a cot set up in the unfinished bathroom, they slept and ate at the rodeo for over two weeks.

These measures to assert authority reflect Lagunillas in the construction process of transnational buildings whereby 3x1 gives locals power to build but provides no regional planning and only limited expertise. Thus the project and its management are prey to a host of conflicts and inadequacies in the building process. The architect professionally designed the Lagunillas rodeo arena using distant prototypes in Guadalajara, Tijuana, and Spain for inspiration. The rodeo, “lo más cómodo” (the most comfortable) in the region, is outfitted with an inclined ramp and railing for the handicapped, several grades of hand-carved wooden seating, formal entrances and exits, modern bathrooms, and a perimeter sidewalk (figs. 4.12 and 4.13).

But the rodeo is sited several kilometers outside the town. The elderly in wheelchairs cannot travel on cobblestone streets that do not have sidewalks, so they cannot attend events unless they can get rides in cars. The rodeo was built without a budget for infrastructure. Quiñones personally paid for pipes to carry water several kilometers from the pueblo to the rodeo, but he is not promising to continue paying indefinitely for the water or electricity. Fifty percent of the households in this region are still waiting for running water, so investment in the rodeo occurs while basic needs go unmet. The three-thousand-person rodeo arena is surrounded by agricultural fields, which must provide parking during rodeo events. Currently, the committee rents the adjacent agricultural field for parking spaces during an event, but they do not know if the field’s owner will continue to let them do this (fig. 4.14). When Quiñones’s land was donated to build the rodeo, the impact of building it outside the pueblo was not addressed.

Additionally, the professional architect determined the scale of the rodeo by creating it to accommodate 2 percent of the regional population of ninety thousand during a period when the population of Lagunillas itself was steadily declining. The rodeo arena accommodates three times the population of the entire pueblo of Lagunillas and depends on a regional audience to fill it.

These complications in the ownership, construction, and management processes rest on two central questions. First, the rodeo was intended to benefit the pueblo, but who constitutes the pueblo? Second, who has the authority and power to determine how the project is envisioned and built? The pueblo of Lagunillas is thought of and talked about as an ejido by both locals and outsiders. However, those in the village most of the year are not primarily ejidatarios. The village contains just over eight hundred people, of whom only ninety-seven are officially ejidatarios. People who have moved to Lagunillas are called “newcomers”; others were born there but their parents were ejidatarios of a neighboring rancho; and the rest of the population are women and children. The pueblo, however, is also an “emigrant village.” At every level of society, the emigrant who returns is part of the local construction of place and its operations—indeed, the people of Lagunillas estimate that between four hundred and six hundred people from Lagunillas live in the United States. When norteños say they want the plaza to benefit the pueblo,
they are in that moment excising themselves from the pueblo in a material sense (they do not want profits, they give money). However, they are intimately bound up with the pueblo in a symbolic sense—they do want certain benefits. While they could not manage the project daily and do not want to, key contributors expect to be consulted about both major and minor decisions during the construction process. Their experience as members of the emigrant village is critical to ensure a continuation of their voluntary donations. Villagers and statesmen are battling for authority over who manages the rodeo because of its potential for profits. Theoretically, a rodeo intended to “benefit the pueblo” would have to be managed by ejidatarios, newcomers, women, and emigrants. This is not only logistically difficult but also undesired. Barring the exclusion of women, the committee attempts to represent the pueblo by being composed of four ejidatarios and four newcomers. However, many fear that one group, or an astute individual, will find a way to usurp the profits. The only local models the committee has for how ejidos manage their profits are the neighboring ejidos of El Chante and Auacapan, where committee members are notorious for pocketing profits.49

**Commercialization and Regional Competition**

While villagers, especially ejidatarios, resist the political transformation occurring in relation to the rodeo project, they embrace its potential for earning capital. Now the ejido itself has the most at stake because of the new role that remittances play in the commercial development and potential of the town. The ejido is not an isolated village holding its rodeo event but a part of a regional network of villages undergoing transformations in jaripeo space. Transnational development is caught in a web of **hyperspace** where there is a fundamental disconnect between the places where events and project occur and the new mode of production linked to remittances that produce them. Distant financial relations extend into communities, leaving winners and losers in their wake.

Rodeo promoters are attempting to usher in a model of development based on the profitability of the rodeo event, fomenting competition in a region defined by scarce resources. This goal changes the focus of the event. According to a local elder in Lagunillas, in the past, attendees “knew what the different moves were called. Now they don’t pay attention to these things. They come for the music, to dance, and to drink beer. Before if the bulls were weak nobody would come, but now the bulls don’t seem to matter as much.”50 Another elder, Don Ignacio, is skeptical: “The old jaripeo was free, not about making money. Now it is all business [puro negocio].”51 The “puro negocio” aspect of the event hinges on the new professionalization of the jinete, the bulls, the banda, and the beauty queens. Schools throughout Jalisco have been established to train jinetes. Specialized bulls are raised to be fierce. Beauty queens are involved in a binational fundraiser, and local bandas are increasingly implicated in binational music venues and networks.

The similarities of strategies across towns that are all using professionalized actors breed competition. For example, throughout the last ten years, competition between and among local bands for fame has exploded (fig. 4.15). Currently almost every town in Jalisco has a banda of over twenty men who play brass instruments. It is an aspiration for young boys, and those who are successful travel to the United States on
work visas to perform for primarily emigrant communities in cities like San Jose, Los Angeles, and Fresno. Banda recordings allow youth to escape the space of the village and join YouTube, MySpace, and other Internet sites that serve as vehicles for a transnational apotheosis. Additionally, beauty queen contests, a tradition that originated in villages well before emigration, have become practices that now happen across international borders. U.S.-born daughters of men and women from the village now represent the pueblo and family left behind. As queens, they raise money throughout the year to donate to the pueblo. Whoever raises the most money wins. Beauty queens are also now sponsored by big business: Coca-Cola, Agribusiness, Azteca TV, and other companies view the binational competition as a way to tap the emergent transnational market.

As the potential to accrue more capital increases, local aspirations regarding the rodeo also expand. A local ejidalario of Lagunillas asserts: “It is obvious to us that know about it that it is an important rodeo; all of the proper requirements are in place to recognize this rodeo internationally . . . This plaza de toros will cost 500 pesos for a ticket, and a lot of people will come, from Guadalajara and Mexico. I want to think that we will get to that level, people from Spain! Even though I might sound boastful, we are first place!” The contest has begun, and Jorge Cortez feels well positioned to win.

While people from Lagunillas are brimming with excitement over their earning potential, other villages are left scraping their coffers in search of money to build a rodeo, maintain their rodeo, or even hold an event. Another 3x1 rodeo in Ejutla is barely scraping by. Built ten years ago, the Ejutla remittance rodeo (only partially funded by 3x1) is unfinished. The archway that would have had Ejutla’s name carved into it never got built, there is talk of tearing down the partially constructed quiosco [gazebo], the bar downstairs never got built, the rodeo seating does not completely surround the rodeo floor, the stairs are sagging, and the engineered retaining wall is falling over (fig. 4.16). The president of the Ejutla HTA in Los Angeles, Pedro Sánchez, notes that the rough entryway stairs are “especially bad for the ladies with their heels.” He is upset about how little support he gets from the people of Ejutla: “Instead of going forward we are going back. If it wasn’t for my sons helping me I wouldn’t continue.” Uneven development in the remittance rodeo is linked to particular migration and remittance histories. Indeed, migration itself is the new competition between towns. Towns with larger migration streams have more potential for remittances, a higher likelihood that some of the norteños will be “benevolent,” and thus a greater capacity to produce a rodeo that will draw in what money there is throughout the region. Ironically, towns with fewer people in them and more people elsewhere have the advantage.

While the building of the rodeo grounds can be understood from the perspective of development, streams of capital, and political formations, it can also be understood as a project through which migrants and villagers negotiate their identity. Gender and identity in Mexican society are being transformed as people are exposed to a transnational universe and as the spaces of the rodeo are shaped by the spaces of remitting. In this transnational universe, the rodeo is loaded at every level with symbolic meaning. Despite the diverse array of actors involved in this transformation, it is primarily migrants who come to be represented through the symbolic space of the jaripeno. Remittances are the new mode of production transforming traditional forms of identity throughout the region.
Spectacle, Ritual, and Identity

Contemporary jaripeo events involve a particular set of rituals. Typically, villagers, people from other pueblos, and people from the United States drive, walk, or ride horses to the rodeo in procession, especially when it is on the outskirts of town (fig. 4.17). Stadiums are host to a smattering of advertisements; 3x1 rodeos have big government signs that detail the construction cost (fig. 4.18). Young men are clean shaven, groups of girls come with their hair pressed and curled, and families sport brand-new clothing. Once everyone is inside the stadium, elders from the village parade horses around the ring to the sound of brass trumpets played by the evening’s first band. Announcers come out to introduce the names and pedigrees of the jinetes and band. Priests may make an appearance to bless the young jinetes who are about to risk their lives. These professionals come out in full regalia—sombreros, leather fringe jackets and pants, spurs, vaquero shirts—to present the image of a ranchero of impeccable ethics and religiosity when kneeling before cheering crowds in the name of the Blessed Virgin (fig. 4.1). The rodeo is buzzing with transactions: food and liquor are brought to one’s seat, and the selling of hats and cotton candy keeps the dollars flowing. Hours later the main attraction starts. One after another, the young men jump onto a bull as it is released into the arena. The rider is thrown to the floor or he grips the bull tighter, digging his spurs into the bull’s ribs as his back whips and neck flops furiously from side to side (fig. 4.19). Finally, the evening is completed with a twenty-person all-male band wearing matching silk suits who blast music late into the eerily dark and quiet night. This roster is “hellishly” repeated in villages and towns throughout the south of Jalisco and beyond.54

In theory, norteños finance remittance rodeos from a distance to support this tradition and ensure a space for its continuation. However, norteños’ intentions and the negotiation of gendered identities in the village, the American city, and the spaces of migration reveal the complexities of envisioning, building, and using remittance space. The people who most directly experience the change from an agrarian to remittance mode of production are the migrants themselves, the conduits of this change. In their behavior, decisions, aspirations, and fears we can see how this changing mode of production is affecting the broader community.

Traditional gendered expectations in the town are expressed by rodeos that put men at the center as performers (the jinete, the banda, the announcers, the horse riders, the bulls) and women at the periphery as spectators. Once a year women spectators command attention as queens who are representative of place and symbolic of male desire. Even then, they orbit a spectacle of masculinity. This spatial relationship—men at the center and women on the periphery—dramatizes men as providers for the family and as leaders of the political process. It is the sine qua non cultural practice for rural society, contributing to local and extralocal constructions of ranchero masculinity.

Drawing on the work of Robert Connell, Robert Smith defines “ranchero masculinity” as one hegemonic configuration of gender practices that legitimize men’s dominant and women’s subordinate position.55 In this view, men exercise authority and women obey. This is one of the paradigmatic readings of rural Mexico’s patriarchal social order.56 More generally, Matthew Gutmann defines masculinity as anything men think and do to be men, to be more manly than others, and to not be women.57
When a person for whom ranchero masculinity is an important part of his identity becomes a migrant, two critical things happen. First, the migrant leaves his home. Home is where gendered identities are enacted and performed, where men acquire the local *habitus* of masculinity, where men are taught how to be men, often from their father.⁵⁸ When the migrant leaves his house he also leaves his land. Control over land is linked to male independence, working the land relies on the strength of men’s bodies, and profits from it structure men into a familial hierarchy. Thus, becoming a migrant for many men is immediately emasculating. It means sacrificing for the future one’s home, land, and place in the world.

The journey, the next stage in this migration trajectory, involves crossing the international boundary and, if one lacks documentation, becoming illegal. Migrants leave their home to enter the shadows of the American city, the underbelly of the American economy. They cease working their land—which if it is ejido land means they give up their rights to it. They are recognized as criminal, if at all, defined through the illegal act of border crossing above all other acts. Their vulnerability immediately creates a divide between them and those who stay.

At the same time, migration is empowering. It is an act that seeks to fulfill desires and dreams, that embodies satisfaction, assertion, and determination. As noted by Douglas Massey and others, for several decades now emigration itself has become a rite of passage into manhood.⁵⁹ The experience of initial migration is empowering at times and emasculating at others, promising and demoralizing. All too often, it does not match up with how individuals imagine it will be or what it will mean. Individuals negotiate this variegated gendered terrain throughout the course of their lives.

Once in the United States, and in a space of vulnerability, migrants take on gendered roles that they normally would not perform at home. Many men who cook and clean are doing what would be considered “women’s” work. Migration scholars have argued that first-generation male migrants lose status and power in the United States because of the particular socioeconomic positions they come to occupy. Over 30 percent of male migrants have service sector jobs in the United States.⁶⁰ Hector Alarcón, the president of Club Lagunillas de Los Angeles, went from working on farms and building houses in his village to cleaning a factory in Los Angeles. Men are also aware that the jobs they hold—in the service sector, construction, and agriculture—are not well respected by many U.S. citizens.

Meanwhile, women have increasingly opted to leave the house and become migrants. Whereas in 1990, 80 percent of emigrants from Mexico to the United States were male, by 2006 over 40 percent of them were female. What has changed is that now women are doing paid work and contributing financially to the household. Fewer migrant women in the United States hold jobs than men, and those who do earn less, yet they too remit money to their families at home.⁶¹ Women are also increasingly participating politically in the United States. They partake in HTA activities, making food and organizing migrant gatherings to raise money. They are also more involved in the HTA political structure; the first female president of the Federation of Jalisco was inaugurated in 2008.⁶² This creates a divide between women who stay versus those who leave, since those who leave are exposed to gendered norms in the United States that are contested at home.
Migration scholars argue that these shifts result in a “crisis of masculinity” and the “liberalization of femininity.” In this view, “men want to return to Mexico, or at least imagine they will return, because they lose status and power in the U.S., whereas women want to stay because they gain authority and establish deeper roots.”

Migration, however, is not always a crisis for men, and it can be a major crisis for women. Smith, who examines the construction of gender in migrants’ lives, argues that men make good money in the United States and that their involvement with HTAs results in power. Furthermore, the men’s shift from traditionally masculine forms of work to cooking and cleaning, which are often associated with domesticity, occurs within the logic of migration, whereby earning power triumphs over the means by which money is earned. Those receiving remittances in the village do not look down upon men who cook and clean for their wages. Social and economic status achieved in the United States influences the extent to and ways in which migration causes individual identity crises.

Also, despite women’s increased participation in HTAs and remitting, remittance development is male dominated. Men currently control remittance development projects because they have the necessary capital and political credibility to do so. The head of the 3x1 program notes that rodeos and church remodels are the most common projects solicited by norteños who are also the presidents of HTAs. Also, in 2007, 13 percent of HTA presidents were female. The few women who are involved in remittance development often speak of their interest in educational projects, projects that contribute to the social reproduction of civil society. In Petra, one of the few female presidents of an HTA has attempted to build a school (fig. 4.20). Men and women, then, approach remittance construction with different agendas and desires.

Rodeo building allows migrants to translate their hard work in the United States into increased social status and visibility in Mexico. And, it allows them to do so through a project that preserves a space for rancho masculinity. Once in the United States, norteños perceive several benefits to being a man in Mexico. For example, though men in rural Mexico do not earn good money, they can drink wherever and whenever they want, and no policeman will arrest or ticket them for driving too fast in the countryside. Time in the United States aids in the reimagining of the village as outside the law—migrants then do the cultural work of linking a lawless utopia with their masculine identity, reconstructing a ranchero masculinity that they find little room and time for in the United States.

The rodeo allows migrants to define the symbolic identity of the village from a distance. After the church, the rodeo arena is the most highly visible place and symbolic center of the town. Smith links hegemonic masculinity to space, arguing that “public space and work belong to men and private space and domestic work belong to women.” The rodeo asserts from a distance a man’s claim on public space in his hometown. Everybody goes there to see the event and be seen during the event; migrants go there when they come home. While the plaza is quotidian, the rodeo is spectacular. It is a Lefebvrian representational space that demonstrates to the other surrounding towns the virility and potency of the migrant men from that town. If one drove on the highway past a village, the rodeo arena might be the only building one could see.

The rodeo also asserts masculinity by being an economic engine. A norteño from Lagunillas notes: “I am honored to be received with thanks, and to do for the pueblo what nobody ever did for me when I was growing up.” He “gave” the pueblo a rodeo arena to
be proud of something that could bring profits into the community. By bringing an engine to one’s pueblo, norteños render their pueblo as vital, or hope to. Norteños amend the wrongs of the past by claiming that their pueblo—the one they had to abandon—is now somewhere. In the case of Lagunillas, norteños were motivated to give an additional $40,000 to build the capacity for a corrido formal because Lagunillas was to have the best rodeo arena in all of Jalisco, if not Mexico! Male ambition manifests. Norteños idealize their past to invigorate their future.

Much as emigrants fantasize that they can protect ranchero masculinity through the production of jaripeo space, they fantasize that they are the contemporary bull riders. Migrants substitute remitting to the family as a form of paternity for a virility that would otherwise be acted out daily. The emblem of that substitution is the professional bull rider. When he rides, he is the crown jewel of the rodeo. The people who are providing the spectacle are the people hired by norteños to perform a vision of rancho masculinity.

Michael Kimmel characterizes the cowboy as “unconstrained by the demands of civilized life, unhampered by clinging women and whining children. The cowboy is a man of impeccable ethics, whose faith in natural law and natural right is eclipsed only by the astonishing fury with which he demands adherence to them. He moves in a world of men, in which daring, bravery, and skill are constantly tested.” The American cowboy presented by Kimmel is inspired by the Mexican vaquero—for whom the jaripeo is the shining moment. Today the migrant’s “faith in natural law and natural right is eclipsed only by the astonishing fury with which he demands adherence to them” as he risks his life to attain and sustain economic and social mobility. William Cronon gives us a different view when he reminds us that “the cowboy was the agent who tied . . . [the] . . . livestock raising zone to its metropolitan market. Far from being a loner or rugged individualist he was a wageworker whose task was to ship meat to the cities.” Structurally, the emigrant is the cowboy. He is the agent linking flows of capital to neglected places.

Norteños’ desires and ambitions in turn affect the identities of ejidatarios and newcomers in the village. On the one hand, the distant investment in the jaripeo and jinete authenticates local villagers’ own embodiment of the vaquero tradition and affirms their cultural relevance (the jinete is the cultural articulation of the work conducted in the ejido). On the other hand, it forces them to face their economic impotence and hierarchical displacement; they cannot finance the building, and their collective power is destabilized by the rise of the state and norteño in village affairs.

While men dominate the spaces of the rodeo, women are critical counterparts to their displays of masculinity. In Lagunillas, once a year, the local queen is crowned at the rodeo. While the queen is lauded for her grace, beauty, and even intelligence, none of these characteristics affect whether she wins. Women win because they earn the most money (fig. 4.21). As stated earlier, the competition for the queen is “puro negocio.”

This emergent trend has implications for feminine identities in both the rancho and emigrant communities. The female counterpart to the rodeo spectacle is driven by a competition that is no longer located in the rancho and by girls (almost women) who are often second-generation children of migrants from the rancho but live in, and identify primarily with, the United States. The Mexican American queen, in the name of Lagunillas or any other pueblo, comes to the rancho during the yearly festivities and

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occupies center stage. She creates a hyperspace in the rodeo whereby the actual experience of being in Lagunillas is directly shaped by spatial formations elsewhere.

Key to the identity of the transnational queen, an identity that is performed in the rancho when she travels there, is the notion of a culturally and spatially bounded place known as the pueblo. The queen performs throughout the year in the United States to raise money. In these performances she speaks of the needs of the pueblo and the important cultural traditions that enliven it. She even illustrates the pueblo on her folklore gown. Specific built-environment elements—the kiosko, the church, the cornfields, the rodeo—are painted or sewn on the gowns to construct authenticity and demonstrate the queen contestant’s practical and working knowledge of the pueblo (fig. 4.22). The dresses are worn at a major migrant event in Los Angeles known as Semana Jalisco and “are the most important part of the event, because they represent the folklore and life of their pueblo.” In the 1950s, Lagunillas queens represented their pueblo by being women of the pueblo. Today emigrant children craft representations of the pueblo to construct their heritage and to justify their participation in remittance networks. The new practice of having a U.S. beauty competition does not keep Lagunillas’s inhabitants from holding their own competition; rather, it recasts their competition as concomitant to the one in the United States. In 2007, the queens in the United States (one in Los Angeles and the other in Las Vegas) collected over $50,000 each. Meanwhile, their “original” antecedents in Lagunillas made rounds to restaurants during the Sunday post-mass meal with tin cans, collecting pesos for a total sum of $9,000. The comparison of these two practices reveals what Doreen Massey calls “power geometry,” the types and degrees of agency people exert given their social locations. In the consumption and reproduction of a local tradition, Miss Lagunillas USA reinforces the economic and social limitation of her twin rival. This new axis emerging, whereby norteños financially dominate their rural counterparts, is possible because of international migration and global capital and results in new economic disparities at home.

Importantly, while women are participating in one of the most important aspects of remittance development by bringing in revenue, they still have little direct power or political influence over development projects. Nortenas are fundamentally changing local modes of production, but they have yet to disrupt hegemonic displays of gendered expectations in the hometown and spaces of migration.

The Transnational Inauguration

The Lagunillas rodeo grounds inauguration of 2007–8 was particularly dynamic because of who was in attendance: large numbers of norteños came from several states in the United States, a diplomat came from Guadalajara to represent 3x1, the municipal president and his wife came from Autlán, the president of the Federación de Jaliscienses came from Los Angeles accompanied by other emigrants from the federation, and locals came from nearby villages and towns.

The committee of Lagunillas worked tirelessly to prepare the town for four days of festivities and the norteños’ arrival. They erected an inaugural orange gateway over the road in front of the rodeo; decorated the streets and plaza with streamers; crafted a festival schedule that left no time for rest; and hired professional musicians, riders, bulls, videographers, and photographers to make sure that when norteños came home they felt...
proud of their pueblo, were appropriately received, and approved of how their money had been spent (fig. 4.23). During the fiesta, villagers publicly expressed overwhelming gratitude toward norteños, giving them trophies and shirts and continually showering them with praise.

When the official inauguration of the rodeo took place, a trellis made out of fresh flowers that read “Bienvenidos” (Welcome) was carried into the arena. A ceremony involving speeches by and for norteños, statesmen, and others was conducted on the rodeo floor under the gaze of the audience. A migrant from another pueblo in Jalisco who was also a member of the federation in Los Angeles scanned the arena from inside its enclosure with amazement: “I haven’t seen something like this before, this is really something. No, I haven’t seen something so big in a pueblo so small.” The president of the federation congratulated the HTA members, urging them to “keep winning” by raising and spending more dollars. The diplomat from Guadalajara took the microphone to thank norteños for “keeping the tradition alive.” Priests and pastors from afar lauded norteños for “their love for the pueblo.” After hours of praise, the president of the Los Angeles and the Las Vegas HTAs, the 3x1 diplomat, and the municipal president of Autlán stood under the “welcome” sign and cut the inaugural ribbon into four pieces while the spectators cheered (fig. 4.24).

Their immaculate performance belied the many tensions that had arisen in remittance space. Women were absent from the actual ribbon cutting even though they had raised substantial funds through their hard work in the HTA and the queen competition. Yet they were not completely absent. Women stood on the side of the arena floor near their husbands. This configuration reproduced the dichotomy of men at the center and women at the periphery. However, it also challenged the limited role that women played in the public and political processes in the town; they occupied the arena for the first time as providers, not as objects of desire. Today, women occupy an ambiguous position as co-producers of remittance space in a society invested in maintaining a patriarchal social order.

The inaugural moment masked new divisions and ruptures between emigrants in the United States. The competition for Queen Lagunillas USA in 2007–8 between Los Angeles and Las Vegas was intense. Both clubs refused to accept defeat by, in part, claiming to “still be counting their earnings.” Each proclaimed to have earned over (a stunning) $50,000—made from tens of thousands of small donations. The committee in Lagunillas acknowledged, “There is a lot of tension about which queen won, fighting over who worked harder, those in Los Angeles or those in Las Vegas. The winner is the woman who made the most money, but they are disagreeing about this.” The norteños were so focused on who had won that they did not garner any satisfaction from the fact that they had made over $100,000 for the pueblo. The meaningful experience of inaugurating the rodeo and crowning queens was reduced to rivalry over who had more earning capacity and thus political power.

Finally, the conspicuous omission of ejidatarios during the ribbon-cutting ceremony reflects their position vis-à-vis norteños as managers rather than producers of these new spaces. This was manifested in a disagreement between members of the HTAs and the committee of Lagunillas over who got free tickets to attend the jaripeo events. Alarcón explained:
Now they received us with food when we came, there are people that still need to accept that we are doing something good, that’s a reality, we are the ones that did it, not them. When we gave them power, not all the power, the committee didn’t give us power. Enrique asked, “Should we charge you?” I left it up to them. They gave us twelve tickets even though we have twenty on the board. This made us feel bad. In the kermès [potluck fundraiser] we worked, from the youngest kid to the oldest adult. We both bought the goods for groups to sell and paid for them. When we saw that they didn’t give us free entrance to our plaza, we felt bad.

The fact that the norteños were not given enough free tickets to even cover the main twenty members, let alone the three hundred norteños who flew or drove down from across the United States for the pueblo’s event, was interpreted by Alarcón as the ejidatario’s way of communicating ownership over what he felt was the norteños’ rodeo. The Lagunillas committee is invested in asserting ownership whenever possible because it was their initial idea, it is on ejido land, and they maintain it daily. When addressing who should make decisions about the plaza and event, the committee president passionately exclaimed: “Here is the committee! Here is the committee! Here is the committee!”

Ultimately, ejidatarios must contend with a new social order based on the prominent position of norteños—both men and women—in Lagunillas’s public space and events. During the inauguration the role of the migrant as the future at every level of society was institutionalized. The tradition that is now being preserved is remitting. Norteños have to keep coming back, spending money, and sending money to keep their monument alive. The future that the rodeo arena welcomes is thereby defined as elsewhere.

While ejidatarios and villagers have complex responses to this societal shift, norteños’ emotions and experiences are confounding. As their responsibilities proliferate, so do their desires. They act with a certain set of known intentions and then experience several unanticipated consequences. One intention is to resurrect and preserve the jaripeo and ranchero masculinity, yet the forum they have created for acting out these ambitions and desires is the very place that reveals the destruction of that society; the place for acting out lost traditional identities is the place most emblematic of the destruction of those identities.

In this remittance forum, the professional bull rider is a deeply dialectical image. While he harkens back to an idealized recent past when men rode bulls and had land, today he is not free. He is a young man in rural Mexico making a living out of risking his life over and over again. He is the real Benjaminian “wish image” of the jaripeo: a professional working in a modern space, ushering in progress, while shackled to a fixed identity indebted to an almost obsolete mode of production. The rider, a bright star, embodies the aspirations of the men, norteños, who no longer ride bulls because they have too much to lose. While they pay for riders, talk about riders, and wear clothing that represents riders, they have too many responsibilities, too much at stake, to risk it all again. The norteños live between a rock and a hard place: the rock of desired financial stability in the United States and the hard place of not being able to protect their cherished ways of life without migrating.
This chapter addresses how the remittance mode of production challenges the political and representational spaces of the jaripeo and how this then shapes gendered identities in the emigrant village. Next I address the construction of a vastly different kind of public space, and the disjunctive cultural encounters that result from it, through the construction and use of a cultural center in the town of San Juan de Amula.
Notes, Chapter 4

2 In recognition of the unique circumstances surrounding their hire, the band gave the norteños a $500 discount because, as San Miguel resident Raul Robles put it, “We are a pueblito [little pueblo].”
3 Participant observation, Jalisco, Mexico, April 2008.
7 Michael Watts makes this argument about the new industrial and capitalist spaces created by places like the Silicon Valley in California. See Allan Pred and Michael Watts, *Reworking Modernity: Capitalisms and Symbolic Discontent* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 7.
10 Ibid.
15 The study was concluded in 2008. By that time, three 3x1 rodeos had been built in the region.
16 The fiesta was introduced to Indians by the conquistadores in the 1500s and was supported by both church and state. See Mary Lou LeCompte, “The Hispanic Influence on the History of Rodeo, 1823–1922,” *Journal of Sport History* 12, no. 1 (1985): 21–38.
18 While the ejido is discussed later in this chapter, for general information see also Wayne Cornelius and David Myhre, *The Transformation of Rural Mexico: Reforming the Ejido Sector* (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 1998).
20 See chapters 1 and 2 for historical information regarding the political upheavals in rural Jalisco in the first half of the twentieth century. Juan Rulfo’s story is in his *El llano en llamas* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1953).
Patricia Pessar and Sarah Mahler argue that the state is an organizing force whereby statesmen (who are all male) create networks of alliances based on male horizontality. See Patricia Pessar and Sarah Mahler, “Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender In,” *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003): 812–46.

*Carreria* is officially the national sport of Mexico, regulated by the Federación Mexicana de Charrería. It consists of a series of Mexican equestrian events rooted in horsemanship brought over from Spain during their conquest of the New World. More information is available at: http://www.charreriafed.com/.

*Jinete* technically means “horse rider” but is also used to mean “bull rider.” Also, while no official costume was required to participate, bull riders who could afford to, replaced overalls or daily clothing with black trousers and sombreros.

Yet despite these changes and individuals’ desire to bring tractors to farms in Mexico, the 1988 national census found that fewer than half of the country’s ejidos were using any kind of modern technology, whether improved seed, fertilizer, or tractors. Only 17 percent of arable ejido land was irrigated in 1988. In 1988, more than half of Mexico’s farms were ejidos. See Cornelius and Myhre, *Transformation of Rural Mexico*, 8.

See ch. 2 of Fletcher, *La Casa*.

Don Benjamin River, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, 2007.

In 2008, the municipality all rodeo remodels initiated by nortenos were either managed by nortenos or appeared to be defunct.

César López, conversation with author, Jalisco, Mexico, 2007.

David Harvey argues that the ejido provided the basis of collective security among indigenous groups; the privatization of the ejido is the government, in effect, divesting itself of its responsibilities to maintain that security. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101.

The original conception of the ejido had several flaws. It was not until Lázaro Cárdenas’s presidency in the 1930s that ample amounts of rural land were ever redistributed as ejidos. Even then the plan was only incrementally implemented. For decades, the sale or lease of ejido land was prohibited, and ejidatarios lost rights to land if they or their family did not directly work it, rendering them stewards rather than owners. An individual’s initial land holdings never grew and were continually divided up among future generations. Although illegal sharecropping and renting released some of the pressure created by the ejidal system, farmers implicated in this system were increasingly forced to emigrate for work. Thus, even before Salina’s policy, ejidos were under duress.

The process whereby the state follows the informal sector, institutionalizing and regulating urban practices, is explored in Nezar AlSayyad and Ananya Roy, eds., *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia* (New York: Lexington Books, 2004).

Although there are twenty-eight localities, only twenty-one have approximately one hundred persons or more.

Darío Valdés, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, 2007.
Additionally, the church and the elementary school signify two small investments, in the 1950s and 1970s respectively, but these projects are modest.


37 Felipe Quiñones, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, 2007.

38 Jorge Cortez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, 2007.

39 Fletcher, La Casa, 101.

40 Jorge Cortez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, 2007.

41 Eduardo Ramírez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, 2007.

42 Ibid.

43 Accountant in Obras Públicas, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, 2007.

44 Over the last thirty years, the population of Lagunillas has almost halved. See the Web site of the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI; www.inegi.org.mx) for population data.

45 Don Ignacio, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, July 2007.

46 Susan Buck-Morss explores Walter Benjamin’s use of the “hellish repetition” of modern life. See Buck-Morss, Dialectics of Seeing.

47 In his discussion of eighteenth-century rural Mexico, William Taylor notes that patriarchal forms date from Hispanic times. Many patriarchal characteristics in the eighteenth century—men occupying positions of social status, men having greater freedom of movement, agriculture being the primary economic activity largely in the hands of men—inform similar social relations in the first half of the twentieth century. For a discussion, see William B. Taylor, Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 108.

61 Ibid.
62 While this was a momentous occasion, many actors involved in the federation at that time argued that she was the “foot soldier” for another, more powerful, male activist who could no longer be elected to hold that position.
63 Anthropologists such as Victor Espinosa, *El dilema del retorno: Migración, género y pertenencia en un contexto transnacional* (México: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1998), and Leigh Binford and Maria D’Aubeterre, eds., *Conflictos migratorios transnacionales y respuestas comunitarias* (Mexico: Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, 2000), address gender and migration.
64 In Lagunillas, the remittance rodeo was spearheaded by a migrant who enjoys increased status and power in the United States. The president of the Los Angeles HTA eventually came to own the factory he cleaned; his economic success allowed him to contribute substantial funds for the rodeo. See Goldring, “Gender and Geography,” for a discussion of male-dominated HTA projects.
65 Matthew C. Gutmann argues that the ranchero identity as a type of rural Mexican masculinity was initially conceived of and written about by Americans. See his *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
67 Quotation from a video of the 2007–8 rodeo inauguration event produced by Club Lagunillas; this video is not available publicly.
70 Pina Hernandez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, 2007.
71 See Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
72 Quotation from the Club Lagunillas video of the 2007–8 rodeo inauguration.
73 Darío Valdés, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, 2007.
74 Héctor Alarcón, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, March 2008.
Figures, Chapter 4

El Jarípeo [The Rodeo]: Ritual, Gender, and the Economy in Village Rodeo Grounds

Figure 4.1. (shown on first page of chapter) Praying jinete (bull riders), Lagunillas.

Figure 4.2. Preremittance-era stone rodeo arena, Mezquitan, Jalisco, made of locally quarried stone under the direction of hacendados. When the hacienda was dismantled, workers took ownership of the rodeo arena and its events. The simple “corrales” (which extends to the left of the drawing) and stone wall were initially used to herd and brand animals. (Drawing by Eduardo Villaseñor).
Figure 4.3. Preremittance-era wooden rodeo arena, municipality of Autlán. This is the only remaining wooden example out of twenty-one former rodeo arenas. Most of them have been remodeled or built anew. Note the simple platform, front, at which chairs could be placed.
Figure 4.4. Remittance steel beam arena, La Cidrita. This simple and functional steel beam arena was a remittance project spearheaded by these two men. Using a hybrid of local resources (the tree trunks) and modern materials purchased with dollars (the steel beams), the rodeo now generates small profits that the town uses to refurbish the church.
Figure 4.5. Remittance rodeo arena, El Chacolito. This rodeo was built by three norteños and one nonemigrant. Two men go to the United States while the other two manage the rodeo events and construction. These two men are currently overseeing El Chacolito’s fiesta this year, for which many other norteños will return home.
Figure 4.6. Entrance sign and abandoned remittance rodeo, Chiquistlán. This arena was abandoned mid-construction. The project may be finished in the future, but townspeople say that nobody has made any improvements in several years.
Figure 4.7. Norteños in La Presidencia, Autlán. In the cabecera of Lagunillas, the two presidents of the Los Angeles and Las Vegas hometown associations met with Autlán’s municipal president. The HTA presidents gave the municipal president checks for the construction of the rodeo in Lagunillas, the money donated by migrants in California and Nevada.
Figure 4.8. Rodeo arenas, old and new, Lagunillas. Lagunillas’s old rodeo was a simple arena made from stacked stone and fired brick (above). Lagunillas’s new rodeo is made from poured-in-place concrete, fired brick, and steel (below). The old arena did not have formal seating.
Figure 4.9. Rodeo grounds site plan and detail of an addition to the remittance rodeo, Lagunillas. A site plan of the Lagunillas rodeo (left) and the detail (right) illustrate the corrales and three small rooms for the bulls adjacent to the main rodeo ring. This additional space is necessary to perform a corrido formal and was added by norteños and locals at the last minute without the state’s permission. It cost norteños $40,000 and has repositioned Lagunillas as the only rural pueblo in the municipality, if not all of Jalisco, with the capacity to perform a corrido formal. Note the ring and lines of parking spaces on the top (rear) half of the rodeo site; these were not built, and are only a fraction of the spaces needed.
Figure 4.10. Yellow house and the rodeo arena, Lagunillas. The yellow house was built at the same time as the rodeo arena. Felipe Quiñones, the ejidatario who owns the land that the rodeo is built on, built this house. The house is located several kilometers outside of town. Quiñones personally paid for the infrastructure to bring water and electricity to his home and to the rodeo. From his home, he can keep a close eye on rodeo events and construction.
Figure 4.11. “Construction manager” of the rodeo project, Lagunillas. Dario Valdes is working in an informal office. The notebooks on this table are filled with information about every financial transaction relating to the rodeo, extensive timetables for construction completion and fiesta organization, and all legal questions. The photographs he is showing me depict different phases of rodeo construction. Valdés has over two thousand photographs recording the evolution of the rodeo as it was built.
Figure 4.12. A 3x1 rodeo arena plan. This plan is evidence of a new phase in rodeo construction and rural development in Jalisco. This is most likely the only architectural plan for any rodeo in the municipality of Autlán, if not the entire state of Jalisco.
Figures 4.13. Aerial view, Lagunillas. The rodeo is to the right of the main road that extends north from Lagunillas (above), and a close-up of the rodeo and Quiñones’s house illustrates that they are both under construction (below). At this time, only the foundations were built.
Figure 4.14. Remittance rodeo parking, Lagunillas. The agricultural field adjacent to the rodeo (above) is the same field used as a parking lot during the event (middle). A close-up of a car in the makeshift lot shows its Nevada license plate (below). Most of the cars in this lot have U.S. license plates.
Figure 4.15. “La Arrolladora.” The banda is a musical form that has a fifteen- to twenty-person ensemble. La Arrolladora, a banda nationally famous in Mexico, came to play in a “pueblito” near Lagunillas called San Miguel.
Figure 4.16. Remittance rodeo arena, Ejutla. This migrant-funded rodeo arena is unfinished. From the place where the steps and tiered seating should continue is a view of a remittance house. Both the remittance rodeo and the remittance house create a landscape that accommodates norteños’ aesthetic desires and personal aspirations.
Figure 4.17. Pre-jaripeo procession, Lagunillas. These men are a part of a procession from the town of Lagunillas to the rodeo. They are trotting their horses along a road that was repaved with remittance capital. Their “ranchero” outfits—stetson hats and vaquero shirts—are in mint condition and ready to be put on display. The men will occupy the center ring before the bull riding begins to show off their horsemanship skills.
Figure 4.18. A 3x1 rodeo sign, Lagunillas. The sign on the left of the fence was posted by government of Mexico to advertise the “Programa 3x1 para Migrantes.” It is publicizing the cost in pesos of the tercera etapa or third stage of construction as a part of the government’s efforts toward transparency and accountability. Next to the 3x1 poster is a poster for “Las Reinas de la Fiesta” (The Queens of the Fiesta) showing a model wearing a charro costume without pants. The “Sol” named on the poster is a beer corporation sponsoring the event. The fence these advertisements are on was paid for by the government and migrants and is the first fence to exist in the town of Lagunillas.
Figure 4.19. Jinetes in action, La Cidrita. The young bull riders watch as one man attempts to stay on the bull *(above)*. The horsemen show off their roping and lassoing skills *(below)*. Note the informal and simple rodeo arena compared to the arena in Lagunillas. This allows the participants and audience to engage more directly.
Figure 4.20. A hillside 3x1 school site, Petra. Club Petra in Los Angeles hopes to send enough money eventually to build a school on this hillside. The frame for one room is complete and has been for several years. Note the load-bearing steel beams. They are poised for a building many stories tall.
Figure 4.21. Winner of Queen Lagunillas. This young queen is carried to the rodeo on the top of a brand-new truck that demonstrates her financial power.
Figure 4.22. Miss Jalisco USA, *Semana Jalisco* magazine. A signature part of the Miss Jalisco USA beauty contest is wearing a gown that portrays one’s own, or one’s parents’, hometown. Note the *quioscos* (gazebos) painted onto several dresses.
Figure 4.23. Inaugural gateway, Lagunillas. Constructed out of paper and plastic boards, the gateway welcomes all to the feria taurina or bull-riding festivals of 2007–8. The rodeo arena is to the left, behind the white fence. The road is repaved with government and migrant funds. The trees in the median behind the gateway are also a 3x1 refurbishment project to “beautify” the town. The sign is meant to welcome norteños, though it does not say so explicitly.
Figure 4.24. Official inauguration ribbon, Lagunillas. This ribbon for the 3x1 rodeo arena is stretched between the two sides of an arch-like welcome sign made out of fresh flowers. Shortly, key participants in the rodeo project will come out and cut the ribbon while being cheered on by the people from their town.
Chapter 5

From the Public Plaza to the Private Casa de Cultura: On Migrant Modernity and Cultural Exchange

Figure 5.1. Ocean View California, school bus in use in San Juan de Amula, Jalisco. Schoolchildren are brought to the new 3x1 cultural center in San Juan in a school bus donated by norteños from Ocean View, California.
Remittance building projects in the public realm are about a reterritorialization of space by norteños (and sometimes for norteños), and the construction of cultural difference in migrant hometowns. Analysis of one such project, a casa de cultura or cultural center, paid for by migrants and the government of Mexico, shows how remittance building disrupts cultural narratives, reformulates migrants’ identities, and challenges the identity of place. It is not that remittance architecture helps us to understand what rural Mexican culture for emigrant communities is, or that such buildings speak only to villagers’ or norteños’ identities; rather, the envisioning, construction, and use of remittance buildings demonstrate the work that ideas about culture and identity do to construct community and place.

The conflicts surrounding the cultural center in San Juan de Amula, Jalisco, represent what Don Mitchell identifies as a “culture war.” Culture wars, according to Mitchell, are often about how meaning is made manifest in the very stones, bricks, wood, and asphalt of the places in which we live.¹ On the one hand, the center is the idealized space of its patron, the norteño, projecting and indeed building a set of values and norms about cultural behavior into its edifice, and is a literal space for the norteño to hold cultural events. On the other, the center is a contested space that abrades the daily social practices of those in the village for whom it is, at least in part, intended to serve.

The center was built during a moment when the identities of both the collective community of San Juan and the norteño him- or herself were (as they still are) in a heightened state of flux. The community of San Juan is an emigrant community that has undergone consistent demographic transformation over the last several decades. At any given moment, the so-called local population is a complex array made up of some individuals who have never left the village, others who once left but returned quickly thereafter, and still others who left for several decades and returned only to retire. Over this time period, varying levels of knowledge of, and access to, distant geographies have been incorporated into how the people of San Juan constitute community. The community is no longer rooted in or defined by local place alone. As the spaces of migration interface with local and extralocal constructions of community, compadrazgo, which traditionally creates strong alliances among village residents, is challenged and transformed.²

The norteño’s identity is most immediately a referent of his or her involvement in, and connection to, several sites: the host town, the hometown, and the growing transnational public sphere. The migration scholar Roger Rouse has interpreted emigrants’ orientation as a cultural “bifocalism,” an advantageous position whereby
norteños can choose between different ways of being on the basis of the specific context they are in.³ Norteños who come from small agricultural villages like San Juan may know about the workings of Los Angeles, and thus have vital knowledge about how to behave in different circumstances to get desired results. Nonetheless, this knowledge and its attendant actions come at a cost. Increasing affiliations or cultural identifications with one place or sphere may, though they do not have to, mean a diminishing affiliation or connection with another place. In rural Mexico, emigrants who identify with North American cultural norms—in the sense of enacting particular social behaviors expressed publicly—are quickly judged. Migrant capacities to navigate between different worlds can be interpreted by nonemigrants as a threat to the constitution of a San Juan identity based on the practices of local San Juan community members.

The extent to which norteños’ cultural orientation is influenced by (or changed because of) their time spent away from “home” causes anxiety, which Carlos Monsiváis evokes through an imagined “migrant’s prayer” to Mexico’s most important and fetishized saint:

Thank you dear Virgin of Guadalupe, for helping me be the same as I always was. It’s true, though I’m not sure if you, my Saintly Patroness, have realized the coincidence, that along with the changes in my appearance (just look at these new clothes) came another way of thinking. I am more tolerant, although I don’t always understand or agree. I have changed and I have not changed, Jefecita, but I am still faithful to you, who represents the Nation, even though now I may be Pentecostal, Jehovah’s Witness, Adventist, Baptist, or Mormon. What is always important is what I am, and I am still the same devoted person as always, the person who could not live without family, who still asks about the hometown and the dances, even though this huge radio that I have brought—I think they call it a “ghetto blaster”—plays melodies that I used to hate but that now inspire me. I swear to you, dear Virgin, I am the same as I always was, even though I can’t recognize myself in the mirror.⁴

Though imagined, this quotation captures the very real extent to which questions of identity are at the forefront of migrants’ minds. Migrant experiences of migration are culturally mediated; migrants who return home are returning with awareness of (and some ambivalence about) about how they are changing.

In the spirit of Rouse’s bifocalism, scholars warn against portraying the experience of migrancy as dividing migrants between “here” and “there,” between one set of norms and values and another, and instead suggest an emphasis on the psychological flexibility and agency that migrants embody. Academic studies refer to the spaces that migrants occupy as multifarious, bicultural, and dynamic in that migrants are not only hindered by but also capitalize on movement between places. Mary Louise Pratt refers to transnational spaces, spaces whose cultural expressions respond to intertwined economies, as sites of multivocality, of negotiation, borrowing, and exchange.⁵ They are also, however, spaces where certain cultural expressions take on fixed and calcified forms through remittance building, defining and limiting rather than unleashing the cultural and social identities of people and place.
In San Juan, the process of building with remittances reveals the extent to which norteños “other” the nonmigrant inhabitants of the village (partially as a way to “know” themselves). As norteños broaden their experience, some recast or perceive the people who remain in their hometown as provincial. At the very least, the experience of migrancy contributes to the intensification of binaries: migrant/nonmigrant, have/have-not, cosmopolitan/provincial. Some norteños idealize inhabitants of San Juan as more connected with the land and closer to God. Others view inhabitants as lacking in the critical perspective that comes from knowledge of life in disparate localities. Thus remittance building can be about norteños’ desire to correct, amend, or try to preserve “local” ways of life newly perceived as different—indeed, building difference into the heart of place.

Norteños are actively producing culture in their hometowns. They are what Sharin Zukin and Pierre Bourdieu refer to as the makers of the “critical infrastructure” of the cultural economy of place. As Don Mitchell puts it, the job of these actors is to “implement ideas about culture, and to solidify ways of life in place, by showing taste and style, by producing the things by which we come to know ourselves and our place in the world.” The spaces of San Juan’s cultural center are one part of built-environment change that creates pathways for being, and shapes cultural participation and daily life.

Not only do remittance architecture and its attendant spaces construct ideas about culture, but they also destabilize the local hierarchy of social relations that constitutes place. Hierarchically organized spaces, according to Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, culturally construct community. The spatial hierarchy of San Juan is destabilized by the norteño, who has a new authority and power to make decisions that affect the construction of public space.

Key to this is an understanding of institutional spaces themselves. According to Anthony King, institutional buildings reflect the obsolescence of the past, yet they remain with us and continue to be a part of the society that produces them. They express, by their existence, changing cultural institutions. Therefore, on one level they are the “white elephants” of the past while on another level they remind us of the power of human thought and the transformative aspect of our culture: they are “changing places.” San Juan’s cultural center, if successful, no matter how contentious at the moment of its inception, will continue to be a part of the social construction of the community. It is, and will continue to be, a changing place. The impact that the erection and maintenance of the cultural center will have on the people of San Juan reveals norteños’ agency and the processes which shape the emigrant community.

The Hierarchical Nature of San Juan’s Public Space

San Juan is an agricultural village of no more than five hundred inhabitants that has endured centuries of Mexico’s political and economic upheaval. The identity of the place—as both a physical space and a clustering of social interactions—has been reinforced through the history and legacy of its built environment. The village, at the base of the Amula valley, is composed of a cluster of adobe houses surrounded by small agricultural fields. The housing reflects a communal and distributed building process that symbolically and materially interlocks the families of San Juan.
A modest cluster of institutional buildings around the Catholic church constitutes the village center. In a town of lowly and homogenous structures, the sixteenth-century Spanish church stands out as the most important building (fig. 5.2). The town was once identified by the Spanish crown as an outpost for colonial operations, and the church, its adjacent church garden, the plaza, and an incipient street grid are remnants of San Juan’s colonial past (fig. 5.3). Since the turn of the twentieth century, various institutions have competed with the primacy of the church to make decisions at the community level. A one-room civic office, the Casa Ejidal, DIF (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia), and the Casa de Cultura create a ring of institutional, communal, and civic spaces around the original institutional space of the church and the church garden (fig. 5.4). The civic office houses a local delegate (under the jurisdiction of the municipal president in the cabecera of El Limón) who makes some decisions about the use of public space. The Casa Ejidal—once a meeting hall for the members of the ejido—is now defunct and houses tractors, reflecting the weak position of ejidatarios in the community. The marginal position of the ejido is partially a result of the strength of San Juan’s Catholic church. The priest argues that the church has assumed the real responsibilities of helping the people of San Juan, who have historically been neglected by governmental authorities.¹⁰ At the other end of the plaza from the church is the casa de cultura, newly erected by and partially for norteños who are staking a new claim over the management of the village’s public spaces.

Despite the encroachment of these groups, the current priest, Fernando Santigo, has continued to be the town’s most important leader, spearheading material, social, civil, and religious reforms. The priest used material changes in San Juan to inspire social changes and strengthen the dependency of the people on the church for vital leadership. The plaza remodeling project, starting in 1961, illustrates this relationship. Using the structure and regularity of church sermons, the priest repeatedly motivated the people of San Juan to save pesos to buy and make bricks that they would then use to build up their town center. For several years, brick by brick, with an outpouring of donated labor from men and women, the plaza and quiosco or gazebo were erected.

The priest in the 1960s captured the symbolic significance of these renovations in his personal photo album. Handwritten captions below snapshots of the new plaza and quiosco read: “Shaking off its poverty, San Juan is reborn by its own power. It is the start of a new stage in our history: the construction of the quiosco.” Emphasizing the pueblo’s autonomy, he wrote: “Without help from the government, with its own power, it made a dream into a reality: the plaza” (fig. 5.5).¹¹ According to the priest, the new plaza and quiosco were “a place to reunite the pueblo” and “the start of a new stage in our history,” one characterized by fraternity as opposed to poverty and by peaceful gatherings rather than violent conflict. Repeating “its own power,” the priest emphasizes the town’s agency and strength amid debilitating poverty and limited growth.

According to the historian Richard Kagan, the plaza, as the “the town’s chief ceremonial center, site of religious processions . . . and the place where visiting dignitaries were customarily received, . . . served both as a school and a theater where the rudiments of [society] were taught.”¹² Still the geographic and symbolic center of pueblo life, the plaza is the most critical social space in San Juan, in part because of the historic role of the fiesta.
Fiestas, whether familial (a wedding or quinceañera) or communal (a holiday such as the local saint’s day or the Dia de los Madres), are notorious for spilling out from the church to take over the church garden, the plaza, and the surrounding street (fig. 5.6). Repeatedly, townspeople assert that the fiestas are “open to all” and that “the whole pueblo comes together” to collectively break from interminable toil. Fiestas also rely on the compadrazgo system; comadres and compadres provide assistance. In San Juan, where it is noted that “everybody is family,” an system of interdependent favors and debts binds community members to each other. Fiestas serve as a social arena for extending and reinforcing ritual kinship relations.

Fiestas, one of the most important spatial expressions of community, also unveil the hierarchical spaces that reinforce community. The priest controls the use of the church, the church offices, the courtyard, and the church garden. Some families have stronger alliances and more resources than others, allowing them to orchestrate more lavish parties. While the fiesta is traditionally “open to all,” access to church space and families’ capacity to provide food for the whole town means that the kinds of parties that families can hold vary.

Rouse’s study of a disparate group of rural Mexicans affected by transnational migration concluded that in rural Mexico concepts of personhood emphasize not autonomy or self-expression but occupation of a particular place in an existing field, not “who am I” but “where I stand” in a social field of relations. Similarly, in San Juan, the building of the quiosco and jardín and the fiestas that take place there are collective efforts that have served to reinforce the role of the priest as community leader—and thus bolster the hierarchy of the church—as well as the centrality of men in the building process. While women played a critical role by making food to raise funds for bricks, their participation is not memorialized in the priest’s album or in local discourse about how the town has maintained its public spaces. The hierarchy of rural Mexico defined by patriarchy, age, gender, and dependency has been enacted and solidified through its vernacular building traditions.

While according to the priest the 1961 plaza remodeling reflects the community’s ability to come together to work on and meet a shared goal that benefits everyone, the town’s discontinuous network of roads and water discloses the limits of community participation (fig. 5.7). When projects benefit only certain individuals, not everybody in the community participates. Consequently the roads—built and maintained by the families whose houses occupy each section of the street—are often only partially built or repaired, and large sections remain impassable. Running water currently reaches only half of the homes in San Juan, leaving some to use wells or carry water from working pipes. Church members and town leaders have not had the manpower or the will to remodel and maintain the roads or to create a potable water system in San Juan. Those people defined by the priest as “the community” who supported the erection of the plaza and quiosco still lack the institutional support needed to get major public works projects under way.

The Rise of the Norteño in Public Space and Cultural Production

Since the early 2000s, “norteños” as a constituent group have been directly involved in the development and refurbishment of the hometown’s public places. Because of their
formation into a social club in the United States, legitimized by the Mexican government, their role in the town has expanded beyond familial remitting to serving as distant comadres and copadres. Collective remittances and club organization contribute to migrants’ new role as civic leaders in San Juan, destabilizing the social hierarchy that previously defined place.

The geographic distance that norteños maintain from San Juan and the logic of their club’s organization have created lopsided and hierarchical leadership roles. According to the HTA president and the club Web site, the hometown organization in the United States represents over 150 families from San Juan. Inhabitants in San Juan estimate that roughly half of the pueblo (five hundred of the pueblo’s one thousand people) live in the United States, with the majority in the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. While roughly one-third of San Juan’s diaspora participates in the club, it is managed by a handful of key figures. Four men—Juan Zamora, Vicente Rubio, Ramón Murillo, and Roberto Gallegos—invested for personal reasons. With varying degrees of financial success, they drive the club. Their devotion results in the incremental and limited participation by scores of other emigrants from San Juan.

The club organization places a disproportionate amount of responsibility on those norteños at the top of the HTA hierarchy. The institutionalization of the club—both through the 3x1 program and through built-environment change—puts other club members and San Juan inhabitants at risk. Most glaringly, if any tragedy were to strike one of the core members, or if conflict emerged, the club’s larger missions and goals, now put into motion in San Juan and affecting the daily lives of hundreds of villagers, would be endangered. Marital trouble, immigration status, and job insecurity influence norteños’ participation in the club and their ability to donate dollars.

The core members have developed strategies to cast a wider net around San Juan’s diaspora so that they can accrue more remittances. To cast this wider net, key norteños in the greater Los Angeles region have appointed delegates in satellite cities. These delegates were then asked to host and organize fund-raising events in their cities. In an attempt to minimize the amount of time key norteños and delegates spend fund-raising, and to ensure the continuation of collective remittances, the key members initiated an automatic club membership donation of ten dollars every month. They began with twenty dollars, but according to Murillo, “People cannot commit to such an expense.”15 Zamora, the club president, acts as a collection agent, harassing friends and family for their contributions. “Juan,” another club member said affectionately, “is like a fly. He doesn’t leave us alone.”16 The automatic donation requirement attempts to create security around a system that has none.

While these methods have allowed key club members to collect more money, the club has not effectively dispersed control over how the money is spent. Its inability to do so reflects a lack of consensus among norteños about remittance projects. Ultimately, one’s ability to make important decisions is linked to one’s ability to invest money and/or time. Those individuals who can afford to fully participate also get to exert the most influence over remittance projects. Once critical decisions are made, key participants garner support and approval from the diaspora at large.

In this respect, the club is very different from San Juan’s initial U.S. social club formed in the 1970s, whose fund-raising was more informal and incremental. One of the key norteños in today’s club, Vicente Rubio, recalls that no more than a dozen gardeners,
construction workers, and restaurant workers sent what money they could to San Juan to help out with local needs. Back then, the club never tried to reach the wider San Juan diaspora. Emigrants who were geographically close to the key motivators, and often family, were involved. Today, phone calls, letters, and even a San Juan Web site are necessary tools for constructing a diaspora network that participates in collective remitting. Also, the first club did not decide what to build. They gave their money to the priest, who decided and managed the building process. For instance, the social club paid for the restoration of the *curato*, or church offices, which had fallen into disrepair because of a large earthquake in 1985. Ultimately, the priest maintained the *curato*’s architectural form, but fragile adobe was replaced by fired brick.

The unreliability of remitting in the 1970s and 1980s eroded trust between club members and inhabitants of San Juan. According to Ramón Murillo:

> Always when they do something [in San Juan], we send money from the U.S. Somebody [in San Juan] is in charge, but we don’t have clear bills, and so rumors start, they robbed us, this or that . . . There was a time when people didn’t want to hand over money. Once they [norteños] got together there [in the United States] and bought a car for students here [in San Juan]. The pueblo had a new car, but in the end they didn’t use it and they sold the car, or . . . Rumors started about people robbing the money, and the people here didn’t want to cooperate or do anything.17

When norteños decided to donate the car that Murillo mentions, they bought it in the United States and drove it to Mexico as an informal insurance against the misuse of their dollars. But the absence of the transnational policing of remittance corridors foiled their attempts to control the situation. The remitted car could be stolen or sold. Ultimately, the unreliability of collective remitting and inability to control its impact resulted in the demise of the original club.

Almost fifteen years later, some of the same norteños from the earlier club started Club San Juan because the management of the financial transactions and the use of their dollars in Mexico were now receiving formal and institutional attention from the government. The 3x1 program creates a layer of bureaucracy and records remittance flows. More norteños also have residency papers or U.S. citizenship and can personally monitor the use of their money.

Today, key norteños can also control how the new objects bought or buildings erected with remittances are used. They have a binational perspective, the cultural capital that comes with knowledge of faraway places, and an intimate understanding of migration streams. In addition to their financial remittances, norteños also have *cultural* remittances that they feel obliged to impart, and they are doing so with vigor.

**The Role of Architecture in Cultural Remittance**

In three years a small group of organized norteños implemented a transformation in San Juan’s built environment that previously would have taken decades and hundreds of volunteers. Eager to capitalize on the 3x1 *para Migrantes* program, decades of accumulated knowledge from time spent in the United States, and the church’s weakened
position due to persistent emigration, norteños have brought a new vision to San Juan by rebuilding the plaza and quiosco, landscaping a children’s garden, remodeling the church, installing running water in a section of town, repaving two key roads, and building a brand-new cultural center. Ramón Murillo notes:

Since we started the club, when we met, we agreed that the most basic part of a pueblo is its nucleus, its center. To have a good quiosco, plaza, and church. These are the most important things to have. If you are in a pueblo, it is bad if the jardín is neglected . . . The plan was quiosco, change it. The plaza is in bad conditions, change it. The church is falling down, for what? And now with the casino or Casa de Cultura—the idea is to make a change in the youth, the children . . . And moreover, it is a present to the pueblo.  

The club members started with aesthetic concerns: they remodeled the very quiosco and plaza built by the priest and his followers that had once represented the unity of San Juan and the centrality of the church (fig. 5.8). After knocking down the old quiosco and replacing it with up-to-date materials and expensive detailing, they resurfaced the plaza, repaved the main road with adoquine (the tile of choice), and remodeled the facade of the damaged church (fig. 5.9). Once the town center was beautified, they moved on to a more ambitious project. The casa de cultura is a completely new building with no architectural precedents in San Juan or any other pueblo in the region. And beyond emblematising architectural transformation, it is meant to serve as an institutional space that will change the culture of the youth.

The goal of changing the town’s youth through a new civic and institutional space, however, was an afterthought. The initial idea to build the center combined logistical possibility with a highly personal and anachronistic vision. Club members felt that what they called the casino, an open walled lot with no roof or bathrooms, was not an adequate space for holding fiestas, though occasionally it was used for this (fig. 5.10). Rubio told me that one night, when he had the shortcomings of the casino on his mind, he dreamt of a beautiful Spanish-style building in the center of San Juan. From the balcony of this building he enjoyed a cold beer and looked out onto San Juan’s verdant hills clustered with fruit trees—much as he imagined the hacendados would have in the nineteenth century. The next day, in the shop of his carpentry business, Rubio crafted a miniature wooden model of a modern structure with a Neoclassical facade whose serial Doric columns create a two-story Spanish colonial style gallery that wraps around a two-story building (fig. 5.11). According to Rubio, “I have seen this sort of thing in Mexican plazas and thought, why not in San Juan?”Rubio’s personal transformation from poverty to financial success contributed to his belief in San Juan’s capacity to dramatically transform. For Rubio, Spanish architecture did not symbolize colonial oppression; rather, it represented wealth and national pride. Building a neocolonial-style center, in his view, would be a major accomplishment for both the norteños and the village.

Consensus among key norteños in the United States to build the center was reached through informal discussions at club reunions, inspired by Rubio’s model of the building. Murillo notes: “He made the model, and when we saw it we thought, Wow, this
is nice. Well, we all agreed. This appears very big, but finally we said why not? And as a present for the pueblo, to change the culture of the children and youth.”

In part, the youth would be transformed through the introduction of a series of architectural spaces.

Notably, the center is the only two-story building in town (fig. 5.12). This is partially because for other buildings, locals lack funds and are building with fragile adobe brick. The center, made with reinforced concrete, steel beams, and fired brick, now stands higher than the church. The second story does more than announce its grandeur; it also refers to urban localities and creates rooms that norteños hope will house a virtual college class. Upstairs an interior balcony wraps around the primary auditorium, allowing events to be viewed from a bird’s-eye perspective, creating hierarchical and private spaces in an otherwise open auditorium (fig. 5.13). The exterior balcony allows individuals to gaze down on those occupying the street or plaza. Before the center was built, the church bell tower offered the village’s only panoramic view. Otherwise, one had to hike up to nearby mountains.

In the auditorium, San Juan’s first formal performance stage and changing room encourage planned performances rather than the ad hoc performances that used to spill out onto the plaza and street. The auditorium is also outfitted with a drop-roof ceiling, chosen by norteños as a “showpiece” of the modern and up-to-date amenities of the center.

The center has San Juan’s most modern bathrooms on both the first and second floors. Automatic faucets, electric paper-towel dispensers, and liquid soap, “like the ones you see over there [in the United States],” have resulted in “state-of-the-art” bathrooms inspired by restrooms found in the Los Angeles airport. While they succeed at impressing inhabitants, they present a bizarre discontinuity between the local context—half of the town is still without potable water—and norteños’ aspirations. Additionally, these bathrooms are more than showpieces; they are meant to change social custom and routine by deterring locals from the habit of “asking neighbors to use their bathrooms” during community events.

First- and second-floor kitchenettes allow events to be professionally catered so that food doesn’t have to be prepared and served out of people’s homes. The kitchens, along with the bathrooms, make the center a more autonomous and self-reliant space. In a radical reversal of how fiestas have been prepared in the past, those holding an event at the center do not need to rely on the kitchens and bathrooms of neighbors, comadres, or family throughout town.

Finally, a formal entrance creates a new threshold where people can be monitored during a private event, tickets can be sold, and behavior between the inside and outside the building can be regulated. These spaces introduce new possibilities into the town and contrast with the open and informal spaces of the plaza (fig. 5.14).

The center, norteños argue, provides a qualitatively better event space and creates social alternatives for the town’s youth. Murillo explained:

Much of what characterizes life is that at a certain age you either go to the U.S. or you like to drink beer. This is something practically automatic. What we are trying to do in the auditorium is put classes upstairs, not just an auditorium. But the auditorium is also important because before if you wanted to have an event there wasn’t a place to have it. They were held in the school, or church, or jardín,
but there wasn’t a place big enough to hold events like Dia de los Ninos or Dia de los Madres, or weddings. We used to have weddings outside, but there was no place to go to the bathroom; people would have to ask to use the restroom at people’s houses.\textsuperscript{22}

As suggested by Murillo, the pueblo youth struggle with alcohol abuse. In this context, educational facilities are imagined as a way to provide new opportunities for youth. Additionally, migrants who have lived in the United States gain a new perspective on alcoholism. Zamora notes, “There is a lot of alcoholism in the pueblo. We were that way too, but we came here [the United States] and our lives changed. We all drink but we were worse. We are trying to help.”\textsuperscript{23} In a sense, norteños’ transformation has inspired the building of the center: it is a “gift” they are giving to those who have not benefited from the experience of migrancy. One of the primary functions of the center, however, is to house fiestas, which still involve heavy and communal drinking.

According to norteños, the building itself is not enough to get people to transform their behavior. Thus HTA members have drafted rules to instruct the inhabitants of San Juan. There is no smoking in the building and no drinking on the balconies, and food cannot be carried outside or eaten on the sidewalk or in the plaza. According to Murillo: “Those are the rules like when you go to a swimming pool you can’t bring in food, or you must have a bathing suit, rules to maintain something.”\textsuperscript{24} These rules introduce a new regulatory regime into San Juan.

These rules, however, are also associated with public spaces in American society, which has social configurations and economic logics fundamentally different from those of Mexico. With the erection of the center came a small poster that hangs in the central auditorium space and reads: “No Fumar [Don’t Smoke].” David Henkin’s study of antebellum New York points to the introduction of signs and public posters as a marker of the encroachment of modernity.\textsuperscript{25} The population of New York had become disparate and fragmented enough so that general instruction was needed to direct social behavior and construct a cohesive norm. Today, San Juan’s spaces are already modern, characterized by economic relations that span distant geographies and the encroachment of technologies. Yet until now the rural pueblo of San Juan has lacked instructive public text. The need to identify common values and direct disparate instincts or desires has not been necessary. The only public signs or text in San Juan, and in many small towns throughout Jalisco, have been painted commercial or political advertisements on crumbling brick walls and occasional street signs (fig. 5.15). “No Fumar” stands in for an agreement that does not exist and exposes the fracturing of community and consensus about public space.

Ricardo Negrete, once a norteño but now living in San Juan, acts as a mediator between club members and townspeople:

\begin{quote}
It is distinct, what they think in the United States versus what we think here . . . They want to put many laws or rules on the way people here live. For example, they want to have festivals without beer. But that is impossible, then it wouldn’t be a party . . . They don’t want people to walk with their food or drinks outside of the building during a party. Here it is common that after people get their food they will take it somewhere else . . . The club wants people in the cultural center to
\end{quote}
stay in their seats, like a restaurant . . . They want this door [points to the main entrance] to be the limit that people can’t pass. We like to be outside, but the bad thing about it is that we throw trash on the ground, and then the neighbor has to pick it up or it stays there. That is their point. In the U.S., I would be chewing a piece of gum and would look for a trash can to throw it out in, or a piece of paper to put it in. Here, no way.26

These rules affect how people socialize, which is an integral part of establishing the social hierarchy of place.27 They are also adopted from a particular context: in the United States, municipal systems strictly regulate trash, and drinking in public space is illegal. But these spatial regulations do not exist in San Juan, leaving transformation up to individual choice rather than institutionalized pressure.

Often it is precisely through individual interactions that San Juan inhabitants are taught how to behave. During the inauguration of the center, Zamora went up to a group of kids and told them not to spit their peach pits on the floor. He then turned to me and explained: “They lack education, they need to change their style of living. Nobody tells them what is right and wrong. Their parents do the same. When I am here I can tell them, but I am not always here.”28 Zamora asserted his role as cultural mentor when judging the youth as lacking both formal and familial education. Through social interaction he articulates and emboldens his own identity as a norteño who “knows better.” Zamora’s judgment also reflects a larger discussion that occurs in norteño circles about the backward culture of the pueblo and people’s resistance to so-called positive change.29

Beyond new spaces and their regulation, the center introduces an entrepreneurial spirit to the community by privatizing social events. Families who want to hold weddings, quinceñeras, and other events in the center will be charged a 5,000 peso ($500) rental fee. This fee has raised suspicion about norteños’ intentions. A young woman, Mónica Maldonado, asks, “How can they put a price of 5,000 pesos here? Nobody can pay it. They say it is a benefit for the pueblo, but what is the benefit? They built themselves a place to have a party.”30 Families who rent the space are also being asked to rent tables and chairs and hire waiters rather than serve the food themselves or rely on close family and friends to assist. This shift is not just an unaffordable expense for local families, some of whom earn less than ten dollars a day. It is also a shift that reorients the community away from the compadragzo system of extended familial networks and toward a more entrepreneurial, privatized, and individuated system supported by remittances.

Murillo defends the club’s position: “Now there is an event, and the same people who are holding the event are bringing things to the tables, the father and mother and compadre, and they really don’t enjoy the event . . . . If the people say, ‘I will work and have people here who will do the work,’ well, [we will say] no . . . because that is how it is going to be and those are the conditions.”31 Here Murillo declares his, and the club’s, authority over the people of San Juan who elect to use the center.

The club also asserts its authority through its jurisdiction over the public versus private use of the center. For certain occasions, such as the municipal tradition of the reina de tercer edad (or crowning of the elderly queen of the municipality), the club has donated the use of the center to the municipality, allowing it to function like a civic hall. But for familial occasions, community members have to rent it. Currently, no other space
in San Juan can switch between being accessible to all at no cost at some moments and being accessible to some for a fee at others. The priest has historically been the only person who has had say over how certain public spaces are used and for what, but he has not charged a formal fee to use the church offices or church garden. Now, when the center is used for the town’s benefit, the delegate or municipal president—not the priest—oversees the event in the norteños’ absence.

The repositioning of the priest, Fernando Santigo, vis-à-vis the state is fraught because of recent memories of the Cristero War. Santigo, born during the Cristero War of 1926-1929, is deeply suspicious of the Mexican government because of the costs of that war. Churches in towns near San Juan were destroyed, and priests were maimed by the government’s army. In many ways Santigo views himself as protecting the people of San Juan from the government and filling a vital role as civic leader in the state’s absence. Norteños’ alliance with the government through the 3x1 program destabilizes his construction of the community.

The priest’s absence from the three groups that are supposed to constitute the “3” of the 3x1 program (the municipality, the state, the federal government, and norteños) has resulted in his exclusion from decision-making processes regarding 3x1 projects. Offended by the norteños’ decision to knock down “his” quiosco and jardín, a church leader and close friend of the priest protests: “The decisions are made between Rubén and the hijos, and nobody in the pueblo is asked or told what is going on.” Rubén Parra works for the municipality as treasurer and manages the 3x1 money. Statements made by norteños that the old quiosco was “ugly and dangerous” demonstrate just how far removed they were from its embedded meaning.

Since the church had been scarred by both natural wear and tear and an earthquake, the priest accepted norteños’ proposal to remodel it using 3x1 funds, on the assumption that he would be in charge of the funds. Government pesos and norteño dollars, however, directly flow to the treasury office in the municipality, and Parra was in charge of the money. Aside from being the municipal treasurer, Parra is also the president of the local club that works directly with the Los Angeles club. He is thus obligated to carry out norteños’ wishes rather than the priest’s. At the end of the project the priest refused to sign a form that would give Parra the authority to carry out the renovations and to assure the state that the money was properly spent. Signaling desperation, he even accused Parra of purchasing fake marble for the church floors. Today, this estrangement between norteños and the priest and his followers lingers. However, as remittance development continues in San Juan, the priest’s protest can be little more than symbolic.

The priest’s discontent is expressed spatially in the village. The church garden directly in front of the church is the priest’s domain. It is next to the public plaza and quiosco, which have been historically managed by townspeople. After the norteños remodeled the plaza (which the church had remodeled in the 1961), which is about five feet lower than the church garden, they asked the priest if they could build a sweeping staircase connecting the two outdoor spaces. But the priest, asserting a modicum power over remittance construction, refused to let them do it. Today, the open and outdoor spaces of the pueblo are divided in two, with the church and the priest’s followers having jurisdiction over the upper garden and the norteños and their delegation having jurisdiction over the lower.
Inaugural Fault Lines

The inauguration of the Casa de Cultura, ostensibly a festive event to mark the completion of a historic building project, exposed the conflicts implicit in the creation of public spaces and amenities with remittance dollars. Several tensions between norteños’ vision and local realities challenged the logic of norteños’ efforts. Norteños, because of their investment, felt locals owed them a debt—both of money and of gratitude.

During the inauguration Zamora organized a fund-raising opportunity for one evening with a set of expectations that were out of touch with local economic constraints and cultural norms. Zamora’s idea was to convert the center into a formal dance club with an entrance fee. He hired a band from Ciudad Gusman that cost 30,500 pesos, the most expensive band to ever come to San Juan. With a cost of 100 pesos per person and 50 pesos per Corona, some three hundred people were needed to cover the cost of the band alone.\(^\text{34}\)

The “gift to the pueblo,” as impressive as it was, became a space of contestation and cause for new controls on the populace. The dance concert—and first ever pay-to-participate event—meant that the entryway was used to check tickets. The entryway became a threshold that divided people into disparate groups. Hundreds of locals who came from surrounding towns to see the center did not actually enter the building because of the fee. Rather, they looked in from the doorway and milled about the plaza. The fiesta—historically open to all—was spatially divided into the public space of the plaza and the private realm of the center and dance concert. In the doorway, people loudly debated the entrance fee, exclaiming, “I can’t afford it!” Others who might have been able to buy tickets chose to remain outside where “it is more fun.” Some stayed home in disgust, remarking, “I was not invited.” This space divided people along nascent class lines. The center had become a space of migrant modernity, an emergent space in a little village linked to the increasing reliance on remittance capital to sustain daily life.

While locals criticized the private fiesta, norteños and their families were confused and offended by the apparent lack of appreciation for their efforts. Rubio’s family from California attended the center’s inauguration. His daughter Verónica remarked:

My dad has worked so hard for this town—he plays it down, but he has. I used to come here every summer until I was twelve, then every couple of years, now it’s been eight. They work really hard, but the people here don’t understand, they want everything for free, and that’s not gonna happen. Juan gives a lot when he himself is needy. He is hard up in L.A. The people in the club are working menial labor jobs, getting paid little, and they still give to the club and their town. The people here will understand this eventually . . . I think the people here are upset because they think—Who are these guys that are making decisions from so far away, from the United States? The club might need to slow down and get everybody on board first. These changes have all happened very fast.\(^\text{35}\)

Verónica addresses the rapidity with which the changes in San Juan’s public spaces have occurred. She also exposes a genuine disconnect between norteños and locals that is based on a misunderstanding: local inhabitants of San Juan view all norteños as wealthy.
when in fact several of them are economically struggling. For migrants who struggle, remitting is a sacrifice, not an act of philanthropy. The sacrificial nature of remitting contributes to emigrants’ sense of entitlement about exactly how their contribution is used and what it means. But while the people of San Juan welcome norteños’ dollars, they often experience norteños’ cultural remittance as an imposition. The fundraiser, meanwhile, did not make any profits and even put key norteños deeper in debt.

FRACTURING DISCOURSE AND REPRESENTATIONS OF PLACE

Building with remittances has contributed to a proliferation of discourses about who and what constitutes the community of San Juan precisely when the place-boundedness of “community” has been weakening as a result of persistent emigration. As this occurs, the idea of place, and of cultural belonging, takes on new salience.

People who occupy various sites—the local community of San Juan, the spaces of the HTA, and the transnational public sphere—all debate and interpret how the center should be used and what it means. While some of these participants are interested in the center’s daily use, others are more invested in the symbolic meanings associated with it. The center, as both a material place and a representational space, gives a specific, concrete form to the emigrant community of San Juan, which has increasingly been defined by geographically dispersed social relations. As a representational space of modernity and success, the center is idealized as emblematic of progress. Yet it has also become the focus of conflicts, between norteños, inhabitants of San Juan, and the priest or other persons with authority and power; these conflicts, in turn, breed mistrust, jealousy, and disappointment. The history of the arguments that emerged during the building of the center reveals the contested spaces of the center in the community of San Juan, which were eventually obfuscated by the building itself. Discourses surrounding the center expose the fracturing of consensus even within the purported groups or categories created by local and state constructions of emigration.

In the municipality of San Juan, the value of the center is debated among townspeople, many of whom view it as a missed opportunity for much-needed productive investment. An elderly man in town who had been involved in managing projects and civic affairs throughout his life remarked: “That white elephant . . . they spent close to 450,000 pesos. They should have spent that money on sources of work. We don’t have a panadaria [bakery] here, or there are lots of women who sew, we could have a sewing factory or a canning place for the mango and ciruela that rot . . . They shouldn’t have spent so much money on that when we are hungry for work, for sources of employment.” For him, the center, rather than being an admirable state-of-the-art building, represented wasted dollars.

An editorial written by a young man in the neighboring pueblo of La Ciénega suggests that the cultural center in San Juan has evoked widely divergent reactions among locals: “The town is building an ostentatious and pompous house of culture, shows, festivities, and many more things, thanks to the united clubs, the government programs, and the people here. . . . For the representatives and the engineers it will be cause for reverence and elevated pride. For modernity and development it will be a further step toward the triumph of the present over the past. For the peasants, the unemployed, the housewives, and other people, who knows what it means!” Here, a
center that represents modernity and development widens the class divide between engineers and peasants.

Indeed, it is through the center and the activities of the HTA that some local inhabitants have come to perceive others in the pueblo as “backward.” Parra, the municipality treasurer, explains: “The people [in San Juan], some are mad. They don’t understand why [the Casa de Cultura] has to be so big, what for. Here there is everything, they don’t look for more. The fruit is free, we have tomatoes, watermelon, and people don’t pay rent. For two hours of work you have enough money to eat, and so that’s all they want to work. Those who go to the U.S., it changes their mentality. They have to pay rent, they are a part of a larger system.” Parra’s comment contains an implicit critique of the people of San Juan who do not look for more. This is a fault that he feels keeps San Juan stagnant. Without having to go to the United States, Parra gets to benefit from the way that migration motivates and energizes former inhabitants to achieve more. Remittance development may allow him, a twenty-five-year-old man who has no desire to emigrate, to stay in San Juan as the manager of building construction and migrant remittances, rather than to be merely a farmer without resources.

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In the spaces of the HTA, representations are used to define the center as a success and to motivate future donations. Slideshows shown at club reunions in Los Angeles, a calendar that highlights the HTA’s built projects in San Juan, and a Web site managed by a key norteño frame the building projects as picturesque. During a club meeting in Los Angeles, Rubio held up the calendar and explained: “The photographs only show the center of town, which now looks okay, but everything around it is ugly. Little by little we will remake the entire pueblo.” Club reunions in Los Angeles or other U.S. cities are attended by people from San Juan who have or who have not been able to visit the hometown since their initial departure. Representations or remittance projects are shown to provide those who cannot return the satisfaction of knowing what their hard work (and monetary donations) have produced. These photographs are shown alongside historic photos of fiestas in San Juan, days at the river, picnics in the mountains, and local pilgrimages. Photographs of celebrations and daily life evoke norteños’ nostalgia, which ultimately contributes to their desire to give money to the HTA. Donations justify the distance they endure and the longing they experience.

The Federación de Jaliscienses and the government of Mexico also idealize remittance development. In federation literature, and in meetings that bring together important actors in the 3x1 program, the center is used as an example of the possibilities of the program. A complete project, architecturally sophisticated, and intended to perform a social (and educational) benefit to a “pueblito” in need, it is evidence of the success of the remittance development model at large.

The representation of the center as a success in HTA circles and in federation and state literature is a willful denial of the discord that the project has produced in San Juan. The power of narrative effectively motivates remitters and propels the production of more remittance-funded development projects.

The New Hierarchy: The Cost of Cultural Remittance

The norteños’ role as leaders of the town and managers of its public spaces comes with burdens and responsibilities, including substantial financial debt. At first, key norteños
saved what money they could and set it aside for the center. As the cost of the project grew, they began to borrow money they did not have from the American bank and from norteños who were not managing the club or project but who had some money saved. According to Ramón Murillo, key norteños agreed that getting the building right was more important than adhering to a strict budget: “The project [cost] of the Casa de Cultura was $240,000. We started with $30,000, then $120,000, and now $240,000 because it is a question of details. We started with something, but then people have ideas, and we say, ‘Let’s do it. If we don’t do it, it will be built in any old way, but if we work for these details than it will be made better.’” One critical detail was an air-conditioning system, the only one installed in the municipality of El Limón. It is currently broken because the town lacks the technical expertise to operate it.

At this point the key norteños who invested in this project owe approximately $30,000 to other emigrants and to a North American bank, and their debt has diminished whatever circumscribed financial freedom or mobility they achieved while in the United States. Furthermore, key norteños now owe money to other migrants in the HTA. Consequently the HTA has changed from a fraternal space involving voluntary donations to a financial space involving accountability and trust. Debts owed between HTA participants are partially contributing to a loss of solidarity among club members. According to Zamora, 120 members used to contribute monthly to the HTA pool, but after the cultural center was built that number dropped to under 100. In addition to the influence of debt on HTA membership, kermés or potluck fundraisers are losing their popularity as norteños in California increasingly choose to spend their limited capital on other pressing needs. Further, the club president and key participants are starting to express an interest in helping those from San Juan who are in Los Angeles rather than in the pueblo. This is a geopolitical shift in their activist orientation.

Several unintended consequences have resulted from the norteños’ decision to use remittances to build a huge cultural center. The president of the municipality has reevaluated and threatened to reduce the already constricted flow of state funds from the cabecera to the localities or surrounding pueblos in light of norteños’ demonstration of their financial capacity through the building of the center. According to village inhabitants, the municipality feels that its responsibility to help the pueblo financially has been entirely fulfilled by its participation in 3x1 projects. San Juan currently receives all of the money to run a small school and the local delegation or civic office in charge of meager public funds from El Limón. El Limón’s municipality also dispenses a small monthly stipend that allows San Juan to provide food daily for twenty elderly people who cannot cook for themselves and have no money. The municipality may reevaluate its financial obligation to San Juan (which has managed to build a center that outshines all buildings in El Limón) even though the municipality failed to contribute its portion of the cost of the center during the first stage of construction. The municipality’s abdication of its responsibility remains unreported to the 3x1 state officials. Any club that has conflicts with its cabecera can be blacklisted and prevented from receiving funds for future projects. Rather than address the issue with state officials, norteños paid for El Limón’s portion out of pocket, contributing to their already rising debt.

Ironically, the norteños’ position in this financial quagmire has contributed to their choice to privatize the center and thus to introduce a sociospatial model for events that is antithetical to the compadrazgo system. “We built it so fast, and at first we didn’t
know how much we would need to spend for the lights. We still have to see how much we spend on electricity, we have to put rules because if there are imperfections we have to pay for them, and where is it [the money] gonna come from if we are only spending? Renting the salon will allow norteños to ensure a flow of capital that is not dependent on migrant organization in the United States. Ultimately this is necessary because the emergent hierarchy of San Juan with norteños at the top is not fully supported by the state and because norteños lack the necessary funds and authority to oversee the management of public space in San Juan from cities in the United States.

* * *

A critical investigation of the spatial and social consequences of the norteños’ emergent role as the managers of semipublic spaces reveals challenges to the people of San Juan’s social, cultural, and spatial construction of community. For norteños, building with remittances requires arduous effort and sacrifice and results in a host of unforeseen responsibilities. This underscores one of the dangers of the remittance model of development, in which individuals who send money to build public projects are also required to make decisions about architecture and space. In San Juan, norteños were determined to build, at whatever cost, a center that replicated Rubio’s model. Dispiritedly, Rubio admits, “If we had known the center would cost so much, we wouldn’t have built it.”

The building, regulation, and use of the cultural center introduce a new logic of economic versus social capital into the pueblo’s social structure. A model based on “paying to participate” challenges how the people of San Juan think about public or communal spaces—whom these spaces represent and are represented by. The interlocking and interdependent system of compadrazgo is challenged by a North American model based in the idea that access to spaces is not about where you are from, your position in the social hierarchy, or the strength of your familial networks but about how much money you have.

The cultural center competes with the plaza as the site of town fiestas and gatherings and offers a different social space that is closed and has controlled access and a designated use. The center also seeks to become self-sufficient; the kitchens and bathrooms allow events to maintain autonomy rather than to rely on the surrounding houses. This competing vision of space actively creates a space for norteños in their hometown even if their social ties to the place are weak on account of their extended absence. This allows individuals who might not have family, comadres, compadres, or friends that they can rely onto come to the town to get married or to hold the quinceañera of their daughter (who most likely is a U.S. citizen) in San Juan.

It is interesting to note that migrants’ limited participation in the construction of public or semipublic space in the U.S. contributes to the need for an event space in San Juan. Migrants have surplus capital and want to invest but often cannot afford, or are not allowed, to invest in the United States. Some migrants mentioned that they wanted to have a place to hold a large party without worrying about police breaking it up because of noise or an immigration raid. Furthermore, renting dance halls in the United States is often economically impossible.
While it is tempting to look at norteños as detached inhabitants—imposing their desire to hold fiestas in another’s town, their ideology about culture onto a distant relative, or their economic model of space in another’s territory—the center is also about norteños’ attempts to build bridges with village inhabitants and with their past. The center is intended as a place for the youth and a gift to the pueblo. Such benevolence is supposed to resolve tensions that linger between norteños and those they left behind, since leaving is not only an attempt to forge a better life but also an implicit rejection of the life lived in the village. Changing the youth and giving a gift to the pueblo is a social act that is personally motivated. It is about amending norteños’ loss, incurred from their initial emigration. Through building, norteños attempt to be at home. Zamora is conflicted: “I miss my pueblo. I yearn for it. But when I go back, the people are changing, the kids are drinking and doing drugs, and all these things we used to do as a community are lost—I feel bad because I was of the first generation to leave, so it is partially my fault that it is not like it used to be.” Zamora’s “feeling bad” contributes to his desire to change the culture of the youth—back to how he remembers himself as a child before he (and most of the other grown men in the pueblo) left. Zamora is not alone in his nostalgia for aspects of his childhood, specifically those aspects that cemented his participation in a larger community and his place in a larger field of social relations. The loss of specific practices such as breaking the piñata or playing soccer contributes to his desire to build.

The whole irony of remittance space is that many norteños have no other place where they are recognized as full citizens. The town is their town as much as anywhere else, and it is the place that many norteños consider home. Norteños want the center to be both a gift to those they left behind and a space that reflects who they have become because of the experience of migrancy. Norteños want the center to resolve the social and cultural disconnect occurring in San Juan due to emigration, yet the center itself is a spatial articulation of that disconnect. It literalizes the disconnect by essentializing social life and “community” into old ways versus new ways of doing things, the community of the past versus the community of the future. However, the hierarchical spaces that constitute the community of San Juan persist; it is just that now those spaces are unsustainably extended across disparate geographies. The center, resulting from norteños’ efforts to really be in San Juan and become an integral part of the community, actually impedes their ability to be there and creates fractures in the emigrant community. In this case, remittance architecture jeopardizes the fragile construction of a geographically extended community linked to the place known as San Juan.

The next and final case-study chapter explores how transnational migrants negotiate aging and death through formal and informal remittance projects.
Notes, Chapter 5

2 *Compadrazgo* is defined by Robert Kemper as a system of ritualized personal relations established between two sets of individuals: the child and his godparents, and the parents and godparents. The compadrazgo is usually associated with life-cycle rites within the Catholic Church, such as baptism, first communion, and marriage, but its ties are also performed on other occasions such as emergency loans and graduations. For rural communities, migration to both Mexican cities and American cities has affected the moments when, and ways in which, compadrazgo is performed. For a discussion of rural versus urban compadrazgo, see Robert Kemper, “Compadrazgo in Urban Mexico,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (January 1982): 17–30.
10 According to village inhabitants, during the first half of the twentieth century when the government was offering campesinos ejido land and roles as ejidatarios, the priest of San Juan warned that an alliance with the government would damn them.
11 Fernando Santigo, the priest of San Juan, personal photograph album, my transcription and translation, Jalisco, Mexico, 2007.
14 Francisco Moto, an albañil or vernacular builder who lives in San Juan, estimates that out of two hundred households approximately eighty contribute labor, materials, food, and/or money to public works projects. Since the inhabitants cannot rely on outside labor or funding, Moto has a hard time understanding why more families do not contribute to the building process.
15 Ramón Murillo, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
16 Miguel Ortiz, informal conversation, California, August 2008.
17 Ramón Murillo, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
18 Ibid.
19 Vicente Rubio, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
20 Ramón Murillo, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
21 Paco Velázquez, informal conversation, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
22 Ramón Murillo, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
23 Juan Zamora, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
24 These rules were printed and posted in the main civic office in the village. Murillo, interview by author, June 2008.
26 Ricardo Negrete, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
27 Gupta and Ferguson’s notion of place-making in “Beyond ‘Culture’” draws on the structures of feeling that bring space, time, and memory into the production of location.
28 Juan Zamora, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
29 My observation of an HTA club meeting, Los Angeles, California, August 2008.
30 Mónica Maldonado, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
31 Ramón Murillo, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
32 Raquel Maldonado, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
33 Vicente Rubio, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
34 The cost of the event, 100 pesos, is equal to what many inhabitants earn per day in San Juan for manual labor. I went to the dance with a young man, his fiancée, and her sister. As is customary, he paid the 400 pesos for our tickets and the 200 pesos to buy us four beers. The total (600 pesos) amounted to the maximum he can earn in a week’s wages for six days of work.
35 Verónica Rubio, informal conversation, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
36 Félix Maldonado, conversation with author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
37 Rodolfo González wrote an unpublished, untitled article for the community of La Ciénega in the municipality of El Limón about the building of the cultural center, dated 2007.
38 Rubén Parra, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, September 2007.
39 Vicente Rubio, informal conversation, California, August 2008.
40 Ramón Murillo, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
41 This figure is an estimate given by the leaders of the HTA.
42 This drop in membership could also be caused by the downturn in the economy affecting many migrants’ incomes.
43 Several inhabitants of San Juan voiced this opinion. In part the municipality feels that it has exhausted its obligations to San Juan through the center because while the project accounted for only 5 percent of the Public Works Department’s annual budget, municipal officials who worked on the project say that it consumed at least 50 percent of their time and increased their work hours. The public works engineer Hugo Galindo was supposed to be dedicating 95 percent of his budget and time to other projects throughout the municipal region, which includes not only San Juan but also the pueblos of San Miguel,
El Palomar, La Ciénega, and the cabecera El Limón. Other pressing projects such as road construction, water leakages, and school remodeling have been deprioritized.

44 This stipend is money allocated by the federal government’s public agency Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF). It is the closest program to a social welfare program for the elderly in this community.

45 Ramón Murillo, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.

46 Vicente Rubio, informal conversation, California, August 2008.

47 Juan Zamora, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
Figures, Chapter 5

From the Public Plaza to the Private Casa de Cultura: On Migrant Modernity and Cultural Exchange

Figure 5.1. (shown on first page of chapter) Ocean View, California, school bus in use in San Juan de Amula, Jalisco. Schoolchildren are brought to the new 3x1 cultural center in San Juan in a school bus donated by norteños from Ocean View, California.

Figure 5.2. Aerial view of San Juan de Amula in 2003, before construction of the community center. Note the church, which at that time still stood out as the most prominent building in the village.
Figure 5.3. Plan of San Juan de Amula. An earlier migration—that of the Spanish—has left an indelible mark on the built fabric of San Juan with the rectilinear street grid and colonial-era church.
Figure 5.4. Public buildings, San Juan. In the center of town, a 3x1 road, 3x1 children’s garden, 3x1 plaza, and 3x1 quiosco (above) are replacing or remodeling the older institutional and civic buildings of the town, such as the Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF) office (below left) and the Casa Ejidal (below right).
Figure 5.5. Photographs from the priest’s album show the quiosco and jardín under construction in the 1960s.

Figure 5.6. The plaza, San Juan. The majority of San Juan’s communal events take place in the plaza.
Figure 5.7. A village road, San Juan. Note that the sidewalk in this photograph ends at the boundaries of the remittance house wall. With the exception of some communally funded or 3x1-funded road remodeling projects, families whose homes are adjacent to particular sections of the street build streets and sidewalks incrementally.
Figure 5.8. San Juan’s new and old quiosco. The priest’s remodeled quiosco of 1961 (left) can be compared to the norteños’ much larger quiosco (right), which replaced the older version and was completed in 2003.

Figure 5.9. San Juan’s church. The old church facade was cracked and deteriorating. The 3x1 project of supplying a new church facade included reconstructing the church bell tower. Note the space in front of the church, the church garden, which is adjacent to the main plaza.
Figure 5.10. The walled empty lot or *casino* once used for fiestas and the site of the new cultural center, San Juan. The buildings that line the other side of the street can be compared with the walled lot to get a sense of the casino’s scale (*above*). The cultural center was built to exactly fill the trapezoidal space of the casino.

Figure 5.11. Vicente Rubio’s wooden architectural model of the new cultural center. The model was crafted in Rubio’s carpentry business in Los Angeles. Note the Neocolonialesque facade.
Figure 5.12. Casa de Cultura, San Juan. The completed casa de cultura and stone paved road with concrete strips are both 3x1 projects.
Figure 5.13. Formal and hierarchical performance space in the Casa de Cultura.

Figure 5.14. Two events in San Juan. Note the informal use of the spaces of the church garden during a festival *(left)*. The center’s auditorium space requires a more formal arrangement *(right)*.
Figure 5.15. “Prohibido Fumar” (No Smoking) sign, San Juan. This is the first public, instructive sign to appear in San Juan. Heretofore, public signs were limited to political or commercial ads painted on the sides of houses. This sign is prominently placed in the main auditorium space of the center.
Figure 6.1. The Holtville Cemetery in California, where about six hundred migrants are buried without caskets or tombstones. Activists have come to place flowers and markers that read “not forgotten” at the graves of the nameless migrants. Unmarked graves are littered throughout the United States, near farms and cities where migrants have come to work. The unmarked grave in the United States along the U.S.-Mexico border captures the drama of transnational life. Photo taken by Steve Hise, November 11, 2007, www.flickr.com/photos/steev/2033513555/.
Author: Where do you want to be buried?

Javier Villaseñor: I don’t know. I have never thought about it. I really don’t know.

Mexico.

Interview in Berkeley, California, 2007

A lifetime of migration complicates end-of-life planning, even for migrants who have achieved some measure of financial success. Armando Juárez, a migrant from Quila, Jalisco, was sixty-five years old in 2008 and contemplating retirement. At age fourteen, Juárez had begun a life of manual labor farming the land near his hometown. At age seventeen, he embarked on a life of migration that included picking cotton and lettuce in border towns, working in hotels and restaurants in the greater Los Angeles area, and driving trucks across the United States. Juárez’s most stable job was working at Martin Marietta, an airplane-manufacturing plant in Los Angeles, for thirteen years. After his tenure there, he worked another thirteen years as a licensed truck driver. Throughout his life, he has maintained a connection with his hometown by visiting family approximately once a year for one month. At sixty-five, Juárez must decide where to settle down: “I have been working for fifty years. Fifty years of coming and going. I am tired.”

Juárez is one of those lucky migrants who has an income in retirement. Juárez’s job at Martin Marietta was a union job. Consequently, he is now collecting a full pension at $485 a month. Also, because Juárez obtained legal status during the Amnesty Act of 1986, he was able to use a real Social Security number and is now collecting Social Security checks for $1,500 a month for a total monthly retirement income of $1,985. His pension and Social Security make him rich in rural Mexico, where the cost of living is minimal. In Quila, Juárez, who owns his own house, does not pay rent or a mortgage, food is cheap, and participation in pueblo life is not associated with spending money in a major commercial center. Juárez’s checks can easily be deposited in Bank of America in the United States and then withdrawn at Santander Serfin, Bank of America’s sister company, in a town near Quila. Additionally, in Quila Juárez “feels more comfortable” and passes the time with family. While the choice to retire in Quila seems clear, Juárez’s wife, Lupe, cannot imagine leaving her children and grandchildren who live in Los Angeles. Lupe met Armando in Quila and then followed him to the United States in 1970. Lupe notes: “The first two years I was in the U.S., I was in shock. I thought, this is the U.S.? But afterwards I adapted to the life here and I have never left it. After thirty-one years I am thinking of returning to Quila. My husband is retired and wants to rest. But all my kids were born in the U.S. . . . and I have seven grandkids. I am accustomed to the American system where you have your house and work. It is hard to imagine leaving.”

Transnational migrants like Armando and Lupe Juárez, who have been building lives on both sides of the border for decades, are faced with particularly difficult choices in retirement. Their lives have been defined by their ability to move, by the location of their family versus community, by their contributions to the American labor force, and by their need to provide for their children. In old age, migrants like the Juárezes must
prepare for decreased mobility, the reality of illness, the need for medical care, and ultimately death. The topic of transnational migrants’ strategies for coping with old age and the effects of age on identity, migrant clubs, and the spaces and landscapes of migration remains largely un researched. This chapter addresses the landscapes and spaces of transnational aging and death to explore the following questions: How do migrants transition from active remitting to retirement? How do migrants build structures and institutions to help them manage aging and death? What assistance do the governments of Mexico and the United States provide to aging and deceased migrants?

Migrants’ strategies for managing aging and death are motivated by the structural conditions that define their lives, conditions defined by migration itself. At the federal level of the Mexican and U.S. governments, there is no formal, coherent, structured system in place to assist either rural inhabitants or transnational migrants in old age. In rural Mexico, people generally live without such elements of a North American safety net as subsidized health care, Social Security checks, pensions, unemployment benefits, or farm subsidies. The Catholic Church has been the main institution to assist rural inhabitants and the poor, instead of the government, but the scale of migration and its impacts on rural Mexican society are overwhelming the ability of the church to address the needs of the elderly. In the United States, migrants’ informal status and their criminalization allow the U.S. government to exploit their labor at low cost while avoiding the cost of health care and Social Security. Of almost twelve million unauthorized Mexican migrants in the United States, approximately seven million receive no public benefits from the United States, and almost 50 percent have no regular medical care at all. Migrants who are undocumented pay into a U.S. Social Security system under false identification and never receive Social Security checks. Over $21 billion in Social Security payments has not been tracked to potential beneficiaries. Most migrants also fail to collect any pension from past employers: in 2000, only one in five Mexican immigrants received a pension from his or her U.S. employer. Those who do receive pensions or Social Security checks often receive them for only a portion of their work history, since many migrants do not begin their working lives with formal and continuous employment, yet they consider themselves fortunate. These retirement statistics coupled with the lack of services used by migrants reveal the vulnerable position many aging migrants find themselves in.

In response to the absence of a social safety net for migrant workers, informal and grassroots strategies to assist migrants in old age have developed in both rural Mexico and the spaces of migration. In Mexico, the family unit and coparenting relationships sanctioned by the church and known collectively as compadrazgo fill in the gaps created by the state and are instrumental to the health and survival of the elderly. Families live together or in a network of connected dwellings and provide one another with mutual assistance and care. Families pool resources for celebrations and in times of crisis. While the compadrazgo system has also led to envy, jealousy, and conflict among community members arising from broken alliances, forsaken duties, and other conflicts, compadrazgo provides critical assistance to individuals in moments of need. In the United States, diasporic alliances and formal social clubs or Hometown Associations (HTAs) have developed to create structural assistance for migrants who live without a basic safety net. In the 1920s, Manuel Gamio recorded migrants’ plight: “I have left the
best of my life and my strength here [in the United States], sprinkling with the sweat of
my brow the fields and factories of these gringos, who only know how to make one sweat
and don’t even pay any attention to one when they see that one is old.”

Because “gringos” did not pay attention when one got old, other migrants did, reformulating
the compadrazgo system for migrants hundreds or thousands of miles from their hometowns.

Today, the Mexican migrant diaspora has had to contend with both the increasing
fragmentation of the family due to migration and the absence of social networks. As
argued by the anthropologists Roger Magazine and Martha Areli Ramírez Sánchez, who
conducted a study of life stages in transnational migration, babies and the very young can
be taken care of by grandparents in Mexico or by parents in the United States or Mexico,
but the end of life, as much as the beginning, requires the assistance of another, and the
very old, who are as needy as the very young, are not yet planned for. In the United
States the role of community is distinct; neighbors are not generally comadres or
copadres who feel it is their duty to watch over one another. Transnational migrants who
have maintained close ties to the social networks of their village must choose between
living with their immediate family (who are often in the United States) and living with
their extended family and community in the village. Not all transnational migrants,
however, have robust social networks in villages to return to.

Organized transnational migrants are attempting to create a structure for
transnational retirement. The first way that migrants have organized is by funding so-called
traslados or shipments of cadavers back to Mexico from the United States, an
increasingly popular trend among migrants. HTAs, businesses, and Mexican
government policies are institutionalizing the practice of migrant burials in one’s
homeland. More recently migrants have expanded their activities beyond providing a
dignified burial to providing for a comfortable retirement, nursing, and hospice care.

Primarily, norteños’ difficulties with creating a remittance landscape of retirement
are linked to the role of the state in assisting and constructing a transnational civil society.
The state, while eager to ally with norteños through the 3x1 program, is not eager to ally
with old or sick migrants—or rural inhabitants—who are incapable of taking care of
themselves. I argue that it will be necessary for statesmen, transnational civil society, and
village inhabitants to expand their notion of the transnational public if they are to
transform the largely symbolic landscape of aging and death into a place where migrants
can return and grow old in comfort—should that continue to be a purported goal.

In this chapter, by combining a discussion of migrant burial practices with
analysis of one asilo anciano (old age home), I am able to compare migrant strategies for
dealing with end-of-life issues, as well as to understand the position of the Mexican
government toward migrants at different stages of life. An examination of migrant life
stories in relation to the cultural landscapes of aging and death exposes both the
ambiguous role of the state toward norteños and the ambiguous role of norteños in their
communities of origin. Additionally, built landscape elements such as memorials and
tombstones and the material culture of funerals, cemeteries, and retirement homes
represent and embody the struggles migrants face when trying not only to represent their
evolving needs but also to leave a lasting legacy. I analyze the construction of one asilo
in Los Guajes to chart migrants’ successes and challenges when making preparations for
retirement in Mexico. I argue that building a transnational old age home raises questions
regarding who constitutes the public in rural Jalisco and the role of private funding, the municipality, and other institutions as the compadrazgo network frays and migrants shape their own futures.

The transnational landscape of aging and dying calls our attention to some of the inherent paradoxes and contradictions of remittance space. Remittance space is largely about building aspirations, desires, and hopes into the Mexican landscape. Migrants are building a better future and a brighter alternative not only for themselves (as represented by the remittance house) but also for their communities, and especially the youth of the community (as represented by the cultural center). Efraín Jiménez Muñoz, a self-identified migrant philanthropist and the executive projects director of the Zacatecan Federation of Southern California, argues that the most successful remittance projects are the ones that are “based on a commonly identified need and are a priority for both the community in Zacatecas and the HTA in California.”

The spaces of aging and death in rural Jalisco, more so than other remittance spaces, challenge the logic of remittance space and remittance projects, since they are spaces produced by remitters but intended for former remitters who are no longer able or willing to work.

The Rise and Logic of the Traslado

Traslados—the “remitting” of cadavers over long distances for burial in the home country—are on the rise between the United States and Mexico. Being buried in one’s hometown is a small measure of certitude, a dignified final act bringing closure to a life of uncertainty. The return to one’s hometown (though after death) finally allows migrants to resolve an ambivalence central to a life of transnational migration: the ambivalence concerning where one belongs. Migrant burials in hometowns also allow migrant families to participate in burial rituals that reinforce their position in the hometown despite their physical and temporal distance from it.

Today traslados are on the rise and are becoming a significant flow in and of itself. Françoise Lestage, who conducted a study of traslados in 2008, estimates that one out of every six Mexican migrants who dies in the United States is repatriated to Mexico; Mexico’s Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores reports an average of thirty deceased Mexican migrants repatriated from the United States daily. Customs service agents in the Guadalajara International Airport (where the bodies are subject to inspection) estimate that between thirty and fifty bodies are shipped to Guadalajara’s airport each month. These bodies are then distributed throughout the region; families in Zacatecas, Michoacán, and Nayarit all collect their dead from Guadalajara’s airport. This flow of the dead requires cooperation and logistical support of funeral homes and mortuaries on both sides of the border. Carolina Díaz, a woman who works in Funeraria Latino Americana, one of California’s first and largest transnational funeral homes, estimates that they ship between nine hundred and one thousand bodies to Mexico and Central America annually, five hundred of which are destined for Mexico. She believes that “the number of bodies has increased in the last five years because the number of Latinos living in the U.S. has increased. The big increase started about five years ago.”

According to funeral directors and migrants in both Jalisco and California, a gradual increase in traslados has occurred since the 1970s as the required money,
technology, and social networks have been made widely available to migrants and their communities. This increase demonstrates a fundamental shift in the logic of migration. By addressing one of the most problematic aspects of transnational life—uncertainty over the loss of loved ones—traslados alleviate migrant suffering. Yet at the same time traslados are normalized and made more pervasive. For most migrants, the opportunity to finance a transnational burial is a great improvement compared even with the recent past. In the 1950s, Armando Juárez’s father, a bracero working in Texas, passed away. “Back then, it took a month to send a letter, if they ever got it. We couldn’t imagine sending the body home.”

Juárez believes that his father was killed and is buried in Yuma, Arizona, or “somewhere close by” but has never been to visit his grave. Juárez’s inability to view his father’s body in a funeral service contributes to his suspicion that his father was killed.

A lack of closure at the moment of death has been one of the costs of migration for migrant families. A funeral director in Autlán, a town that provides services for rural communities throughout the south of Jalisco, concurred with Juárez’s description of the recent past: “Before 1975 things were very different. There was little communication between here and there: children would leave and people wouldn’t know what happened to them. People found out about deaths much later. There was only one public telephone.” Because of the uneven development of migration, certain communities still have only one telephone, and certain families still never learn about what happens to sons and daughters who leave. In the south of Jalisco, however, families now not only learn of deaths but also find ways to bring their loved ones back home.

The traslado is desired because it is a fundamental act of self and community identification as well as a means to resolve the both symbolically and socially ambiguous status produced by continuous migration. Through the burial practice, migrants confirm their allegiance to and identification with their hometown and Mexico. In a transnational magazine called El Tagüinchi, a villager asked a migrant, “What year did you abandon your pueblo?” to which the woman responded, “I never abandoned the pueblo—daily I carry it in my mind and heart.” Migrants’ allegiance to their pueblo is further confirmed when they elect to be buried in the pueblo. This role of the traslado has been recognized in the cultural form of the corrido or popular ballad. Jorge Negrete, in his famous ballad “Mexico Lindo y Querido,” sings, “México, lindo y querido, si muero lejos de ti que digan que estoy dormido y que me traigan aquí” (Pretty and beloved Mexico, if I die far from your soil, may they say that I am asleep, and have them bring me back to you). This song, well-known among the Mexican diaspora, describes migrants’ longing for and attachment to their ancestral lands. The following lines from the same song instruct the community with regard to the burial itself: “Que me entierren en la sierra al pie de los magueyales y que me cubra esta tierra que es cuna de hombres cabales” (Bury me on the mountain at the foot of the cactus and cover me with this earth that is the womb of valiant men). Here, the imagery of the land is associated with men, and by extension the male migrant—where one comes from makes one who one is. Through the imagining and romanticizing of both the traslado and Mexico, migrants’ identity as truly Mexican and Mexico’s identity as truly masculine are confirmed—despite migrants’ prolonged absence.
Choosing to be buried in Mexico also allows the families of migrants to partake in mourning and funerary rituals, which are a very important aspect of rural society. In rural Jalisco, these rituals typically begin with a viewing for a minimum of one full day, during which the deceased remains in the familial home and is on display for townspeople to pay their respects. This viewing is followed by a public procession from the family’s house to the cemetery. All members of the village walk behind the immediate family, who follow pallbearers carrying the coffin. Many parties participate in the management of these events. Neighbors and extended family strengthen bonds with the bereaved by arranging the viewing of the dead. They also prepare food for guests, clean the bathrooms, maintain an all-night vigil with the immediate family, arrange for a coffin (which may also include pooling funds to buy it), plan the procession, and coordinate with the priest who performs the service. The community functions as both a mortuary/funeral home and an extended family. Participation in events is expected and demonstrates respect. For some communities, failure to attend a funeral procession is akin to disrespecting the family of the deceased. Conversely, when a family ships a cadaver to the hometown, the management of the viewing and procession affirms the place of the deceased migrant and the migrant’s family’s in the community.

In the transnational context, the funeral in the hometown is one of the few times when families dispersed across geographies reunite. Adrián Félix’s ethnographic study of traslados, or what he calls “posthumous transnationalism,” finds that when a body is repatriated to Mexico, living family members travel back with it to Mexico for the funeral. A villager in El Cargadero, Zacatecas, interviewed by Félix recalled the funeral of his son’s father-in-law, who died in the United States. Félix records, “It must have been fifteen or twenty people [who traveled back to the United States].” According to Félix, the man then added, “But two months ago, one of my sons died over there, and fifty-two people came. Ten of my children who reside in the U.S. came, and all of their children and grandchildren . . . The entire airplane was full.” A funeral director in El Grullo, Jalisco, notes that the moment of death is “when you see family unity.” In this sense, for transnational migrants, the moment of death is tied to the social and symbolic production of identity, a time when a family’s most vital relationships are affirmed and acted out and when the family physically reunites.

**Government, Corporate, and Social Institutions for Transnational Death**

Government programs, corporate businesses, and social institutions are formalizing transnational aging and dying in an incremental fashion. The institutionalization of traslados in effect normalizes transnational death and creates a market for end-of-life services readily available to migrants. The formalization of traslados and binational funerals has historical antecedents that date back to the turn of the nineteenth century. Research on the migrant clubs of the 1910s to 1930s by Stanley West, Paul Taylor, and Manuel Gamio notes that one of the main purposes of migrant clubs (founded by Mexicans with membership drawn from the laboring Mexican class) was to assist migrant families who had lost a loved one or individual workers who became ill. At that time, migrant families had very limited access to government services in the United States. Most laborers did not have savings that would allow them to buy medicine or pay for a
proper funeral. For example, Taylor notes that the Sociedad Mutualista Benito Juárez of El Centro, California, founded in 1919, and the Sociedad Mutualista Hidalgo of Brawley, California, founded in 1922, “primarily assist with doctor bills, medicines, care, and a family allowance for those who lose their job and a funeral benefit.” Some migrant social clubs gave migrant families dealing with a death $100 in addition to a collection of $1 per club member. Assisting Mexican families during the mourning process was so important that a voluntary collection was taken among club members for Mexican families who did not even belong to an association. This money was used to bury individuals locally in the United States—shipping them back to Mexico was not feasible.

Today, HTAs use both formal and informal channels to assist migrant families who send their dead to Mexico. Informally, upon the notification of a death of an HTA member or their family member, the club will pool money and donate it to the family of the deceased. A relative of the deceased who is in the United States may also remit additional funds to family in Mexico to help pay for funeral services there. At the same time, government officials in Mexico, Mexican consulates in the United States, and the migrant federación in California are creating more formal ways to structure the giving that takes place at the moment of death. Jaime Garibay, the director of the Jalisco state government’s Secretaría de Desarrollo Humano, which spearheads the 3x1 Estatal program, personally developed a pilot subprogram within 3x1 to assist families in mourning. When a very poor person dies in Mexico, one whose “family can’t even afford the coffin,” the clubs from that region and the state will help buy the family a coffin. This same program also pools funds from club members and the state for migrant families who cannot afford to ship bodies home.

Garibay’s pilot program within 3x1 Estatal is emblematic of the Mexican government’s orientation toward traslados more generally. Félix’s research records the involvement of Mexico’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and U.S. Mexican consulates in facilitating traslados. A consul in Los Angeles interviewed by Félix believes that the ministry began providing consulates with money for traslados in the 1980s but really committed substantial funds toward the dead starting in 2004. Surprisingly, almost half of the funds dedicated to the consulate in 2004 were designated for the dead. Today, HTA members from Jalisco note that when a member of the HTA dies the family immediately contacts the consulate to obtain financial assistance. The Mexican government is institutionalizing traslados. Assisting migrant families in times of death allows the Mexican government to make a symbolic demonstration of its dedication to the diaspora in an arena that is relatively straightforward and involves predictable onetime payments (fig. 6.2).

The consolidation of HTAs through the federación has also made HTAs a magnet for businesses that offer services to transnational migrants, including end-of-life services. Funeraria Latino Americana in Los Angeles, in business since 1970, provides a funeral service for migrant families in the United States and plans and executes traslados for a cost of $2,000 to $4,000. Migrants who belong to HTAs and federaciones get a discount of approximately 10 percent. Formalization has resulted in a more efficient and timely process for those migrants networked through HTAs and the federación. Daniel Gutierrez, an inhabitant of a small town in Mexico, notes that before migrants formed the HTA it took them one month to send a body back but that “now it takes eight days or
Funeraria Latino Americana pays considerable attention to migrants from Jalisco because the Federación de Jaliscienses is one of the largest migrant federations. Funeraria Latino Americana uses Jalisco migrant networks to increase business by buying advertisements in federación publications and by receiving business through referrals among club members (fig. 6.3).

Funeral services for Mexican families in the United States and traslados to Mexico and Central America are now being offered by mainstream corporate American funeral homes as well. In Colorado, Service Corp. International, one of the largest funeral businesses in the United States, has pioneered an office called Funeraria Latina to target this emergent market. Unlike Funeraria Latino Americana in Los Angeles, which was started by a family of Mexican funeral providers from the state of Nayarit, Service Corp. International is an Anglo-American-owned and operated business. The company is adding Mexican flags to the American flags displayed in specific branches to welcome the Mexican immigrant, who is now a valued customer.

The United States–based businesses that help families organize traslados are mirrored by and collaborate with small family businesses in Mexico. Funerarias, or funeral homes, in Mexico complete the transnational mourning process by assuming all of the responsibilities for the deceased once they arrive at the Guadalajara airport. Funerarias pick up the body, check its identification, prepare the body for viewing, and dig the grave in the village. They then work with the local priest who performs the service.

Traslados appear to be an economical option: even with the added expense of buying plane tickets to ship bodies to Mexico, Mexican funerals cost less than a third of comparable American services. However, the net effect of the institutionalization of traslados on migrant families is unclear. For example, family members living in the United States must pay for their travel expenses to return home to Mexico with the deceased. This creates an additional burial expense that is distributed among comadres, copadres, and family in the United States. Also, the relationship between sending cadavers home and risking one’s life at the border is unknown.

The Material Culture of Transnational Death

Remittances have transformed the cultural landscape of death and dying in rural Mexico. This is particularly evident in cemeteries, where families dispersed in life can reunite in death and where migrants rest after a lifetime of movement. Cemeteries re-place the displaced, and for this reason they are sites of critical importance for transnational communities.

The burial of migrants in Mexican cemeteries has material consequences revealing new class divisions in death as in life; new marking and memorializing strategies reveal a rise in disposable capital, changing tastes, and an increase in personal and familial expression. In rural cemeteries in the south of Jalisco, migrants’ tombstones are generally large, highly ornate, and made of the best-quality materials available to migrant families (often marble instead of concrete) (fig. 6.4). These tombstones are often adjacent to modest markers made of concrete or wood, emblematic of a different era and socioeconomic status. More recently, migrant families have begun adopting an urban and
upper-class Mexican tradition by building small *capillas*, or chapels, with the capacity to bury multiple family members. Building a capilla is significantly more expensive than setting up traditional grave markers. Whereas grave markers range in cost from free (if built by the family or friends with found materials) to hundreds of dollars for engraved marble headstones, capillas can cost many thousands of dollars (fig. 6.5).

Migrant remittances and traslados are linked to an increase in consumer choice regarding the material culture of death. Local funerarias in the region of Autlán have incrementally improved the quality of their hearses and widened the range of coffin selections available to families. One business in Autlán, Funeraria Gomez, has four hearses, of which three are American cars that were driven to Autlán by migrants. The most recent is a luxurious SUV (fig. 6.6). The desire for certain types of cars and services in Autlán is influenced by the information flows that accompany migration. As remittances continue to pour into rural communities, the number of expensive coffins sold by funerarias to rural constituents increases, and the selection expands.

Tombstones and capillas are also important ways for families to claim—or reclaim—their status of belonging to the society of the hometown. In the cemetery of Quila, a small pueblo near the cabecera of Magdalena, a notably large capilla was built for a young man born in Chicago whose parents had been born and raised in the pueblo. While he was an American citizen, the parents could not imagine burying him in a city they experienced as hostile and foreign despite the years they had spent living there. Ionic columns mark the facade of his small chapel, crowned by a bell tower that houses a cast stone sculpture of an eagle that is not either clearly a bald eagle (America’s national icon) or a golden eagle (portrayed on the Mexican flag). The choice to commission a generic eagle allows this family to acknowledge important alliances it has with both nations—for what both nations have given them and taken from them (fig. 6.7).

Migrants also seek to transform burial spaces generally through cemetery design and layouts. In the south of Jalisco, several rural cemeteries have been redesigned or expanded by migrants. Migrants’ exposure to North American cemeteries, as well as gardeners’ work manicuring yards, contributes to the desire to modernize town cemeteries. The president of Quila’s HTA, Lupe Juárez, explains why her town is going to remodel their cemetery: “There is no system here. It is not like this in your land [the United States]. Here, each person just uses whatever piece of land is not occupied. There is no control. We want more control. We want the whole world to do it in a certain way, or at least we want to make it well organized. Now, there is a body on top, one underneath, another over there . . . It is not pretty how it is.” According to her, the changes are meant to bring “order and planning” to what she sees as “disorganized and chaotic” places. In Magdalena, the ex-municipal president has been working with a prominent norteña to renovate and remodel the existing cemetery. The “ideal” cemetery, which they now have in architectural plan, includes a new wall around the perimeter, a formal entrance, a grid of clearly marked interior roads, and plots organized according to principles of geometry, symmetry, and a central axis (fig. 6.8). Cemetery renovations are popular 3x1 development projects initiated by migrants who imagine they will one day be buried there. This legitimizes migrants’ intervention in rural cemetery layouts.

As with other 3x1 projects, the execution of Magdalena’s new cemetery plans has exposed a disjuncture between nonmigrants and nortenos. While the wall has been built,
the ground leveled, and the north wing of the cemetery marked for plots and roads, locals continue to bury their dead without regard to the indications, plans, or requests that are posted throughout the cemetery. The ex-municipal president explains: “They don’t follow the rules. They continue, despite our efforts, to put people wherever they want without regard for our markings and warnings.”

Creating an idealized cemetery plan is not enough to get rural inhabitants to change long-standing burial rituals and practices.

The cultural landscape of death in rural and small-town Mexico is also about social and cultural dissonance between traditional practices and the building of new spaces by and practices of migrants. Migrants and villagers are exhibiting different mourning practices. In San Juan de Amula, when an elderly woman and matriarch of the Rubio family, died, her children came from Los Angeles for the funeral, but a local woman, Raquel Maldonado (not a family relation), was shocked to see their behavior. In San Juan, she told me, all close friends and family stay up all night with the bereaved, “no matter how tired [they are].” She stayed awake; meanwhile, the deceased woman’s own son, a norteño from California, went to bed and flew back home the next day after the service. She described his behavior as “out of touch” with the way things are done in San Juan.

Today, as the social fabric of the village unravels, ceremonies at formal salas de velación (wake rooms or visitation rooms) are replacing village traditions. The sala de velación is owned and operated by a professional funerary director who manages the entire mourning process, from a one- to two-day viewing to the burial ceremony. Ubiquitous in both American and Mexican cities, it is novel in rural Mexico. The hiring of professionals commercializes death rituals and weakens both the system of social reciprocity and the bonds between family and neighbors.

Nonetheless, the sala de velación directly addresses migrants’ needs. Salvador Luis, owner of a sala de velación in El Grullo, a town that provides services for surrounding villages and ranchos, recognizes that many families overwhelmed by the passing of a loved one are simultaneously burdened with the logistics of reuniting family members who are all over the United States and Mexico. With this in mind, his sala includes a taxi service to the Guadalajara airport, a drive that is approximately five hours.

According to Luis, having the casket viewing in a sala de velación creates a structured, efficient, and dignified mourning process as opposed to the emotionally taxing social ritual of holding the viewing in the familial home. Luis explains: “About 30 percent of my customers want the sala de velación, otherwise it is in their house. It is a psychological problem. People are crying, and it is harder if the body is in the house where you lived and shared all your memories—‘That’s the tree he fell out of.’ And you have to sleep there, with the body, while people are constantly around, needing to eat, drink. For your health it is better to have the sala.”

While families who have viewing practices in their homes may be emotionally burdened, this tradition allows families to strengthen alliances in the community. Aware that the sala de velación, despite its logistical advantages, imposes an additional cost that rural families are not accustomed to paying and requires families to abandon an important social ritual, Luis does not send his customers a bill for over six months. “I need to get them accustomed first, then I will charge.” While rural families can choose to have their service “for free” at home in the village, some norteños do not have a familial home to hold a funeral in, or their
connections to the townspeople may have weakened. In such cases, a sala de velación becomes necessary if migrant families in the United States are to achieve a migrant burial in Mexico.

The architecture of the sala de velación is an important part of its appeal to migrant families. In El Grullo, Luis’s business, Funeraria de San Jose, is not more than five years old. Built in a Spanish Neocolonial style, the elegant entryway includes arches, a fountain, and green grass. The viewing room for the mourning family is simple and modern, with marble floors and a table where fresh coffee and Kleenex are kept. The funeral director wants to appeal to the “norteño aesthetic.” He attended a convention on viewing rooms held in Las Vegas, Nevada, to get ideas for his sala de velación in El Grullo. While most of the things he learned “are not applicable here because of how we do things,” he did replicate a silent water sculpture, now in a garden adjacent to the mourning room, that is supposed to calm nerves (fig. 6.9). This sculpture as art—indeed, the entire sala edifice—differentiates the new mourning practice from the old one by creating an aesthetic of mourning and an argument about the necessity (for one’s mental health) of luxury.

The new memorials and tombstones, desired cemetery changes, classy funeral services, and salas de velación have begun to outline a new spatial order overlaid onto the existing order. There is friction between social life and spatial change as primarily norteños and migrant families initiate spatial changes that correspond to their changing socioeconomic status. Managing death, burial, and mourning practices provides insight into the contradictions of remittance space—the plight of migrants, the creation of new cultural forms, and tensions with tradition. These conflicts and tensions are further illuminated by the broader spectrum of retirement, aging, and end-of-life services. An analysis of one village’s project of building an asilo de anciano or old age home exemplifies norteños’ efforts to expand their influence not only over the spaces of their hometowns but also over their own futures.

**Actualizing Utopian Space for Transnational Aging**

This second half of this chapter addresses the envisioning, building, and use of an old age home in a small emigrant village. The contrast of the old age home to the burial practices in the same region in the south of Jalisco exposes the logic and pitfalls of remittance development and the challenges of retirement for migrants. For decades migrants have saved money, used small American pensions, and built remittance houses so they could return to their hometowns in old age. More recently, in Jalisco, migrant clubs in the United States have been using the government’s 3x1 program to fund the erection of asilos de ancianos to house both migrants and elderly inhabitants of rural places. These homes reflect a more coordinated and systematic effort on the part of transnational migrants to manage aging and retirement for themselves and for family members who have remained in Mexico. By doing so, norteños are asserting agency and contesting a history of state neglect. At the same time, they are also creating new dependencies and allegiances between rural communities, the Mexican diaspora, and the Mexican state that complicate the notion of “public services” by creating spaces in which transnational migrants can be the beneficiaries of Mexican public services. I argue that the migrant-led
old age home project reveals the extent to which the government’s role toward transnational civil society and transnational civil society’s role toward the hometown remain undefined.

With a history of approximately eighty years of circular migration to and from the United States, Los Guajes is a village of approximately one thousand local inhabitants. Residents estimate its migrants living in Guadalajara, Mexico City, and the United States number three to five times the population of the town itself. Migration from Los Guajes has been persistent and increasing since the 1920s because of the inhabitants’ extreme poverty. The town is far from the cabecera, leaving it politically and economically disenfranchised. Also, two powerful hacienda families owned the majority of the land in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; in Los Guajes, a particularly fierce battle waged over land rights during the Mexican Revolution created a class of small-scale private property owners. Peasant farmers in Los Guajes did not form an ejido. Following the Mexican Revolution, in the 1930s, Los Guajes underwent a protracted drought. During this tumultuous period men began to head north, to both Guadalajara and the United States, to ensure the survival of their families.

Migrant remittances and migrant involvement in civic affairs have contributed to the development of the town at least since the 1970s. At that time certain migrants (without structural or institutional encouragement from the state) “returned to put into practice what was learned [in the United States] to benefit the community.” The history of migration as development has been shaping people’s roles in the community for decades. The building of a retirement facility in Los Guajes is occurring in the context of ongoing community development and management funded by its inhabitants. Remittance development has been a generally hierarchical process with a single individual motivating local material change. In Los Guajes, the first man to assume the roles of entrepreneur and booster, Pipián Camacho, is credited with bringing electricity to the pueblo, enlarging the school, and building the dam near Agua Escondido and the road that connects Los Guajes to Juchitlán. These infrastructural projects have transformed daily life in Los Guajes. In 1955, when several local families pooled money to buy the town’s first truck from the United States, it took nine hours to travel on the road from Los Guajes to Juchitlán. Those who made this journey recall, “We made the road as we went along,” by collecting and placing rocks in front of the car to allow passage over muddy terrain. In 1995, when the new road to Juchitlán was completed, the commute between towns was reduced to just fifteen minutes. Camacho is credited with “causing the wind of the progress to blow” by partially funding these projects and fighting with the authorities in the cabecera for resources to implement them; he has been lionized by villagers as “a saint.”

While Camacho is credited for bringing these improvements to the town, a strong migrant community that has been engaged in improving the material conditions of life in Los Guajes has aided his work since the 1970s. For over thirty years, the diaspora of Guajeños have maintained a strong migrant social club based in Los Angeles, “Guajeños Unidos U.S.A.,” with a formal structure and membership and an emigrant directory (fig. 6.10). Yearly, they hold two major reunions, one in California and the other in Guadalajara. The reunions or convivencias de hijos ausentes were created to “mantener
unidos los lazos de amistad y fraternidad entre todos los terráneos y con el anhelo de seguir cultivando valores y tradiciones que nos distinguen” (maintain the ties of friendship and fraternity among all Guajeños and with the wish to continue cultivating the values and traditions that distinguish us). In the last fifteen years, the reunions have served as vehicles for social and cultural reproduction as well as important fund-raising venues. With the funds raised at their meetings, the HTA has remodeled the village’s civic offices, built public bathrooms, installed a quiosco (gazebo) in the town plaza, and fixed the church roof, bathroom, and interior finishes. Once the 3x1 program became available, tripling the club’s contributions, norteños from Los Guajes paved roads, added new pipes for water, and completed the retirement/old age home. Local inhabitants have also facilitated construction projects in cooperation with migrants and other boosters. While local Guajeños do not have dollars to contribute to the building process, they do have valuable time and knowledge of the local construction industry, essential to the execution of transnational building projects.

The spirit of unity that Guajeños pride themselves on has given rise to—and is now shaped by—a unique publication called El Tagüinchi (The Firefly), geared toward creating an “imagined community” of Guajeños. Since 1993, El Tagüinchi, a community-based monthly magazine, has been written by Guajeños in Mexico and abroad, printed in Guadalajara, and sent to Guajeños throughout the diaspora. Each issue presents a biographical history of an individual Higeño, emphasizing the challenges of poverty and migration and the triumph of the individual over these difficult circumstances. In addition to these heroic and historic narratives, the pages are filled with local sayings or dichos, recipes, vernacular words used in the pueblo, photos of the village’s buildings, and poems and songs written by Guajeños fill the pages. A time capsule capturing local cultural traditions as the place of Los Guajes dissolves into a diaspora of Guajeños, the magazine (rather than merely romanticizing the past) helps to produce a cultural identity in the context of globalization, social change, and new transnational lifestyles.

**Envisioning an Institution**

Los Guajes’s asilo de ancianos project was conceived in this framework of a unified diaspora capable of meeting its own needs through infrastructure and other building projects. The asilo project demonstrated the local/migrant collaboration that defines many remittance-funded projects; migrants’ roles as nascent developers and locals’ roles as project managers have evolved for over thirty years. Ramón Camacho (the brother of the norteño Pipián Camacho), a contributor to the production of El Tagüinchi, left the town as a teenage boy but permanently returned to live in Los Guajes in his forties. Regarding his return, he remarked, “I saw the town becoming sad as more and more people left, so I came back.” The initial idea to build the asilo resulted from Ramón Camacho’s unique position as both an inhabitant of Los Guajes and somebody familiar with the spaces of migration. Camacho recognized, on the one hand, migrants’ and their families’ increasing need for retirement assistance due to increasing migration and the transnationalization of family life and, on the other, the very limited role of the Mexican state in providing facilities and services in small towns. Typically, asilos in the state of Jalisco are located
in the capital, Guadalajara, or in midsized cabeceras, not in small villages like Los Guajes. Additionally, asilos are geared toward the mentally and physically disabled, not toward elderly people who need general assistance or who no longer care to prepare their own meals or maintain a household, as is the case with American retirement homes.

Ramón Camacho described the perceived need as follows: “We [Guajeños supporting the project] thought always of helping the people of Guadalajara and the United States that are from here. There are people who want to return but don’t have a place to go. They don’t have family here but they want to die on their land. So it is important to offer them a house of rest here and to let them live out their last years happy.” The idea came to Camacho when he was visiting a Higeño in Guadalajara: “Don Naranjo died in a one-room house alone.” 50 As one of Naranjo’s only visitors, Camacho was motivated to create a space that would prevent other Guajeños from sharing his fate.

The asilo project has required long-term collaboration—over fifteen years—and organization by project sponsors. In this effort, *El Tagüinchi* has played a pivotal role by providing a vehicle to build consensus among the geographically dispersed community of Guajeños about how to invest their collective remittances. The magazine also creates public accountability by recording who invests and what projects they invest in and by publishing images of project results. Thus *El Tagüinchi* creates a historical record of remittances in the absence of other cultural archives. Magazine subscriptions (paid by approximately five hundred people) have also created a continuous revenue stream, which has been combined with the profits from “Guajeños Unidos U.S.A.” fund-raising events to fund the construction of the asilo. Individuals who make additional donations to support the asilo are thanked in the magazine’s pages.51

In addition to providing a fund-raising vehicle for the asilo, *El Tagüinchi* has been used to build awareness and an emotional connection between the migrant community and the project. That emotional connection is based on rhetoric designed precisely to engage migrants’ sense of ambivalence regarding the management of retirement and to appeal to their longing to return home. For several years the back cover has featured a photograph illustrating the asilo project’s progress, accompanied by a quotation, poem, or other text. Specifically, in 2002, a photograph of the building’s brick frame was juxtaposed with the following poem (fig. 6.11):

“Solo busco una vida feliz”
sin tener qué preocuparme por mi alimento de hoy
ni por lo que he de vestir mañana.
No habré de torturarme la memoria
tratando de recordar los rostros de mis parientes idos,
ni sus gustos, ni sus disgustos.
En mi conciencia no cabrá remordimiento;
lo que hice o dejaré de hacer
pertenecen a una parte del libro que ya escribí . . . y gocé a plenitud.
Sólo busco ser feliz los días que haya por vivir.
Y esperaré en santa paz.
[“I only look for a happy life”
without having to worry about today’s food
or what I will wear tomorrow.
I will not torture my memory
trying to remember the faces of my relatives who are gone,
nor their tastes, nor their misfortunes.
I will not feel remorse in my conscience;
what I did or what I will leave undone
belongs to a part of the book already written . . . and enjoyed to my fullest.
I only look to be happy the days that remain to be lived.
And I will hope (or wait) in saintly peace.]^{52}

The poem, authored but unattributed, associates the asilo under construction with the promise of a “happy” retirement. The building is sometimes personified: “I am maturing for you so that you enjoy me totally; when the time arrives I will be your nutritious food. At that time you will come to me demanding a deserved vacation; with me you will find shade where you can leave or abandon your fatigue.”^{53} The building as a person provides justice to those who deserve rest after a lifetime of migration. On several occasions the poem or phrase below the photograph cut right into the heart of migrant ambivalence by asking, “Cuándo vas a volver para quedarte?” (When are you going to return for good?)

Despite the revenue from the publication as well as a relatively generous and unified HTA, project sponsors were not able to fund the completion of the project without government assistance. In 2005 Guajeños joined the 3x1 program and began receiving government funds. Before government assistance began, the building had already been under construction for twelve years, and norteños (and to a much lesser extent the pueblo) had spent approximately $190,000. The total 3x1 budget for the 2005–6 year was approximately $60,000, of which the migrants were responsible for $15,000. By 2006 the project was nearly completed, for a total cost of approximately $250,000 spent over a period of fourteen years. This cost can be compared to the $30,000 to $50,000 that families typically spend to build a new house. At $250,000, the asilo is the most expensive building in the village.

An analysis of the building’s plan reveals the embedded aspirations and desires of this transnational project. The asilo utilizes a courtyard dwelling plan, essentially a ring of cellular individual units surrounding an open-air courtyard. The courtyard plan is typically used to build asilos throughout the south of Jalisco, but this one departs in two major ways from traditional plans.^{54} First, each room is equipped with its own bathroom and sink, creating a more self-sufficient dwelling space. Second, the courtyard itself is roughly square and primarily designed to draw in light and air, as opposed to serving the functional uses associated with traditional courtyard dwellings; no well, fruit trees, brick oven for communal cooking, or other features for outdoor living connect the units to the yard. Instead, the modern facilities of the asilo replace these functions. Aside from the individual rooms, the building plan includes a storage unit, a dining room, a kitchen, a laundry room, a medical exam room, and offices for a psychologist, social worker, and secretary (fig. 6.12). That is, the building is designed as not only a retirement home but also a facility that offers medical services.
As built, the size, materials, and amenities of the project are out of scale with existing construction in the pueblo and incurred a financial cost that the project sponsors could not bear. With the exception of the church tower, the old hacienda house, and a few remittance houses, all of the buildings in Los Guajes are single-story houses of either adobe or fired brick, built by albañiles or vernacular builders, not architects (fig. 6.13). At two stories, the asilo is the largest building in town; located at the top of a hill, it towers over the church, which traditionally is the tallest and most imposing structure in rural towns (fig. 6.14). This location also creates rooms with views of the pueblo below. The building is finished with metal windows and doors and floored with expensive Spanish tiles. In terms of amenities, each bathroom is equipped with new porcelain sinks and toilets. This is a major accomplishment in the context of Los Guajes’s housing, where installing bathrooms to replace outhouses or old bathrooms is difficult and expensive and where about 20 percent of houses are still without running water. However, the cumulative costs of the building’s size and details required project sponsors to seek alternative sources of funding.

The New Player in Los Guajes’s Remittance Development: The Municipality

Like other remittance development building projects, the building as completed has not fulfilled the original hopes and visions for what it could and should be. Remittance project implementation reveals challenges to migrants’ efforts to address social needs through building projects, despite enthusiasm, financial support, understanding of the local context, and local partners. Migrants could not control the costs and were forced to apply for funding through 3x1. Once the asilo became a 3x1 project, cabecera government engineers and officials replaced project managers. The architectural plans were altered, and the people who were invested in the project felt displaced. Corruption and disorganization in the cabecera meant that funds were not provided as promised. Because of this, migrant sponsors are now in debt. Finally, and most detrimental, norteños did not anticipate the costs and complexity of running an institution, and the 3x1 takeover created ambiguity about who was responsible for project maintenance and care. Despite a collective and continuous investment of time and money, at the time of this study the project remained unfunded and the asilo had been empty for over two years. As a result, the building had been vandalized (fig. 6.15).

While the asilo’s incorporation into the 3x1 program provided a framework for project completion, 3x1 introduced the municipality into Los Guajes’s development process, heavily politicizing the project. There is long-standing contention between Los Guajes and Juchitlán, as cabecera officials and Guajeños have struggled over resources, power, and authority. Rural constituents in pueblos outside the cabecera have repeatedly complained that the head town controls the region’s budget and leaves the pueblos without any funding. As noted in El Tagüinchí, the “municipal administration continues serving its town from one purse.” According to local inhabitants, the asilo, which is the largest and most modern building in the entire region, not just in Los Guajes, has created envy among municipal officials. Ramón Camacho believes “they are jealous, so they don’t want to help us, and now they are making us pay for 3x1 projects in Juchitlán.”
tensions between the village and municipality have exacerbated as the project has become more technical and complex.

While the introduction of 3x1 created a structure for project completion, the lack of municipal accountability at the state and federal levels of the program resulted in norteño debt and financial risk. In 2005, when 3x1 stepped in, the community members of Guajeños had exhausted their resources, and both those managing the project in the village and those sponsoring the project in the diaspora were hopeful. However, the municipal government did not allegedly pay their portion of the $60,000 3x1 budget. As has occurred with other 3x1 projects where the municipality failed to pay their portion, norteños paid for the municipality’s portion so as not to be blacklisted by 3x1 program managers at the state and federal levels of government. In this case, one norteño, José Ochoa, the president of Guajeños Unidos U.S.A., personally donated $20,000 to the project to pay for the cabecera’s $15,000 and $5,000 out of the $15,000 that the HTA had not raised by the 3x1 payment deadline. Ochoa’s investment is uninsured, receives no tax benefits, and greatly increases his stake in the success of the project.

Also, municipal officials’ roles as managers of the project for the years 2005 and 2006 displaced previous managers without addressing who would be responsible for future management and maintenance of the project. Once the 3x1 funds were spent, municipal officials were not willing to contribute to the cost of running the asilo (which is technically a public service), but it was not clear who was responsible for this cost. Additionally, according to Guajeños, the president of Juchitlán will not approve more 3x1 projects for Los Guajes unless Los Guajes donates money to Juchitlán for their own 3x1 projects. Thus the 3x1 program has cost norteños future funds that will not be invested in Los Guajes. Norteño investment in Los Guajes has repositioned the town as wealthy in the eyes of neighboring towns at a moment when HTA members and the town are faced with increasing debt to support their own remittance developments.

While the asilo itself was completed in 2006, its nonoperational status for over two years was the result of the inability of norteño project sponsors and municipal officials to account for and manage the costs and logistics of operating a retirement home. During the final stages of the construction process, the original project builder, Jorge Muñoz, a man from Los Guajes who provided design and construction management services pro bono, was replaced by an engineer from Juchitlán whose main job was cutting project costs. Muñoz describes his design process: “The norteños said build an asilo but didn’t explain specifics. I adopted the estilo de pueblo (style of the pueblo). What I like is colonial Mexican architecture. When Juchitlán came in they pushed me aside and did what they wanted.” There have been consequences: “The original project had three stories but they only built two. The plan has a kitchen, eating room, medical room; all of their needs were taken care of, but this was not how it turned out.” While the ornate finishes, wooden doors, and arches that were supposed to create an estilo del pueblo were stripped from the project, revealing a stark rectilinear form, the main reason the architect’s design “was not how it turned out” was because the money and expertise needed to fill these specialized rooms with the medical equipment, desks, and nurses and other staff essential to transforming a building into an institution were not available. Unlike previous remittance development, which repaired an existing building or erected infrastructure, the asilo represents a novel attempt to produce social change
through institution building. Operation of the facility requires technical expertise, professional knowledge, and a clear assessment of who is responsible for project implementation, maintenance, and care that is lacking in 3x1 program guidelines. These requirements were not anticipated by norteños. Only when the building was erected and in need of further attention did the issues at hand become recognizable.

The conflicts between municipal officials and project sponsors, the scale of the project in its local surroundings, and the ambiguous future of the asilo based on its nonoperational status have subjected the building to local vandalism. Ironically, the apparent socioeconomic distance between the asilo project sponsors and locals in Los Guajes is being acted out. The main targets of such vandalism are the asilo’s toilets and sinks, the amenities that distinguish the facility from most houses in the town. Local vandalism can be understood perhaps as a rejection of norteños’ increasing presence in the management of daily life of Los Guajes. However, according to Ramón Camacho, “kids” who “have nothing better to do” come and smash the porcelain toilets and sinks and break the windows and doors at night. In addition to rapidly diminishing the value of the nearly completed building, this behavior is the final insult in a process that has shown migrants the limits of their ability to transform their community and their futures.

The White Elephant

Debates and conflicts surrounding the dormant asilo building outline divergent positions taken by people in the community of Los Guajes and other nearby towns and villages. Mainly, the debate concerns the cultural suitability of the project and its intended purpose. As with the overlay of new burial spaces and the integration or separation of migrant burial practices from local customs and norms, the asilo has led locals to question the degree to which it represents a cultural divergence between norteños’ and locals’ visions of old age.

The conspicuous abandoned asilo has inspired criticism from those who serve the elderly in the region, criticism that provides insight into the cultural and systemic destabilization of rural Mexican society due to pervasive and continuous migration. Silvia Macías, the director of the only operating asilo in Juchitlán, faults project sponsors for not taking steps to learn more about operating a home for the elderly. Despite her experience, she said, “they [the norteños] never asked me for advice . . . They need to get people in there; it doesn’t need to be perfect or finished; many elderly are not even washing themselves. Whatever they want is fine—a retirement home, a hotel, a home for someone with money—but they need to say so. They need to set the rules so that people know what the house is about.” Calling the building a “white elephant”—a possession whose high cost is out of proportion with its worth, especially in terms of its upkeep and maintenance—Macías discussed the high standard of living embodied in the project, which she perceives as a sign that it is not for the people of the region but only for rich norteños themselves. The asilo she runs in Juchitlán is a basic courtyard-type dwelling that houses approximately ten elderly people with mental and physical disabilities and is funded by individual donations and a small monthly quota from the government (fig. 6.16). The people in her old age home cannot take care of themselves, yet she struggles to find money to pay for nurses or helpers to assist them.
Macías feels that the Los Guajes asilo represents a missed opportunity to address the ways in which persistent emigration is causing major strains on the reproduction of social customs and norms regarding the elderly. Communal caregiving is challenged by the emigration of immediate family members. Signs of this strain are evident in the increasing number of elderly people simply abandoned in their homes, without any family members remaining in the towns to care for them. The municipal president of Magdalena, another town building an old age home in the north of Jalisco, notes, “I visited a woman who was without water for two weeks; she was going to the bathroom in her bed.” A teacher from the cabecera Ejutla who oversees their asilo project had a similar story: “An old man who is now dead couldn’t walk. He had his water nearby, but he went to the bathroom in his pants, in his bed. That is why we need to bring the people from the ranchos here [to the asilo]. Also, families are in the North, and people are now returning with pensions, but who will watch them? Those who can pay somebody will have somebody to watch them, and those who can’t pay will not.”

Even though elderly people are culturally important in traditional society, and even though some are financially supported by remittances, they still face isolation and neglect, which demonstrates the depth of the crisis in the community due to the fracturing of families across geography. In Los Guajes, Josephina Ochoa, the mother of José Ochoa (one of the main donors to the old age home), lives in a remittance house and is provided for by her children, who are in Guadalajara, California, and Colorado. Josephina concluded, “I have everything I need, but I am alone.” Josephina endured hunger and homelessness, and the assassination of her husband, to raise her children and live in Los Guajes. She misses her seven children but cannot imagine leaving the life she fought so hard to achieve. Josephina lives down the street from two sisters in their eighties who are in a similar predicament. One sister explained that although she has eleven grandchildren, thirty-five great-grandchildren, and two great-great grandchildren, there is nobody to take care of her because all of her offspring live in Guadalajara and the United States.

Distance and isolation have been taken up in cultural production as normative categories of experience. In an El Tagüinchi story entitled “El abuelo y la distancia” (The Grandfather and Distance), a child asks his wise grandparent, “What is distance?” The old man explains what it is literally—the measurement from one point to another—but then begins to describe distance in more metaphorical and ontological terms. Distance, he says, can separate one person from another, but “there are certain ways to overcome distance” by using the telephone, or even by looking at the same moon. The grandfather concludes: “Distance is relative like time or space; people can feel alone or distant with company, or together when they are alone.” Then he asks the child, “What would you like to feel?” The child answers, “I would prefer to feel accompanied!” In this story, distance is presented to the youth of Los Guajes as a feeling that can be internalized and normalized, as something that has more to do with one’s personal outlook than with realities of familial fragmentation.

There is a degree of disconnection between this real need among the elderly people of Los Guajes and surrounding communities and the asilo project itself, demonstrated by the fact that local elderly people state a preference for staying in their own homes regardless of the realities of their lives. Ramón Camacho notes: “The asilo is for all Guajeños, but those who live here don’t have the desire to live in an old age home.
They feel forgotten, it is not their culture.” An albañil in his eighties who lives in Los Guajes offers a critique: “It is very good that there is an asilo, but why do they want it? Who is going to take a person from here to the asilo? Nobody, I think that nobody would.”**66** Another woman in her seventies from a small pueblo to the north of Los Guajes who lives alone told me: “It is not necessary to have an asilo. People here are looked after, and the old ones are the ones who suffer. To go to an asilo is like being kicked out of the family, castigado [punished]. It is not proper.”**67** It appears that although the old people of the village see compadrazgo systems as challenged by emigration, they see living in an institution as a stigma and as disrespectful of the elderly and resist it as an option for themselves.

While Macías faults norteños for not building an asilo that addresses locals’ needs, and while local elderly criticize the project sponsors for imposing a foreign custom on local traditions, the real issue is that the project (meant to house norteños) was and is imagined as a building and not as a social space. That is, project sponsors have not figured out how or if they will charge for the rooms. Also, not all norteños are in a position to rent a room or pay for services. The sponsors of the asilo need to negotiate who will get to live there, who will pay, and how much. Despite the asilo’s nonoperational status and these unresolved questions, Ramón Camacho is optimistic: “The asilo is for all Guajeños, but those who live here don’t have the desire to live in an old age home. . . . Here [in Los Guajes] I think the asilo will have a good outcome because there is a waiting list, and it will fill up. There are thirty people on the list; all of them live in Guadalajara or the United States, with two or three living here. For us it is a source of happiness that there are people who have lived outside Los Guajes for a long time and are still nostalgic for their land.”**68** Guajeños have a waiting list but lack an organizational system that will govern how the space will operate and who will benefit.

The failure rates of similar projects in nearby towns suggest that the difficulties of establishing new institutions go beyond immediate logistical constraints. In the south of the state, there are three notable migrant housing interventions for the elderly—in the pueblos of Los Guajes, El Limón, and Ejutla. All three asilos were built with 3x1 funds, have a courtyard plan, and at the time of this study were nonoperable. El Limón’s asilo was abandoned because of lack of funding to create an institutional space and poor site planning and design. The asilo’s location just outside the town’s built fabric would further isolate its patrons and not allow them to participate in town life, even by watching activities taking place outside their window (fig. 6.17). Thus “nobody wanted to move there.” Ejuta’s asilo, in 2008, had not yet secured funding to have elderly guests live in it full time, but the building was being used to prepare and serve meals. A need in all of these places has been identified, yet no consensus has been reached on what the solution is or how to implement it.

Despite the conflicts associated with building remittance asilos and the realities of the projects on the ground, state and federación representations of asilos have created a discourse that presents such large-scale projects in a favorable light. The 3x1 program directors in concert with the federación hold annual meetings in Jalisco to motivate municipal presidents and nascent HTAs to join remittance development. In 2007, the meeting in Degollado showcased several large-scale projects such as Los Guajes’s asilo.**69** In 2007, before embarking on my field research, I interviewed the past president
of the federación, Salvador García, to inquire about the impact of the 3x1 program on the ground. At that time he told me to go visit the asilo in Los Guajes, alongside the hospital in Ameca and the cultural center in San Juan, to get a better understanding of what the federación was capable of. José Ochoa claims that the former governor of the state of Jalisco, Governor Acuña, came to Los Guajes in 2006 to see the asilo—a rare and unprecedented visit. Apparently, the governor “didn’t even stop in Juchitlán.” Not only is the asilo represented in federación and 3x1 promotion materials, but it has increased the visibility and voice of Guajeños vis-à-vis the Mexican state.

* * *

This chapter has examined two different spatial practices—one set linked to migrant burials and another to migrant retirement—that together represent migrant attempts to address social and institutional gaps by preparing for their own futures. This chapter also addresses the impact of these efforts on the spaces of rural communities.

Migrants’ success in carrying out traslados and providing dignified burials in hometowns sharply contrasts to their failure to establish communal or cooperative retirement spaces in rural Mexico, and provides insights into the limitations of migrant remittances as a basis for social and spatial change. The outcomes of these projects show that while the state in Mexico, at both the federal and state levels, is invested in high-profile and symbolic efforts to assist migrants, it is falling woefully short of providing them even the most basic retirement and end-of-life support.

Migrant burial practices and migrant retirement pose two very distinct sociospatial dilemmas for migrants, their families, and communities that follow distinct logics. The production of the traslado is immediate and small scale and involves a one-time payment. Its incremental and finite requirements produce a highly symbolic practice that reinforces the identity of migrants as Mexicans, strengthens their ties to the land, and is historically established through the informal activities of migrant social clubs. Traslados also provide funding streams for related businesses to emerge. The finite nature of the traslado and its symbolic value among the Mexican diasporic community make it an arena in which the Mexican state is comfortable and indeed eager to participate. In contrast to these logics and meanings, the production of retirement or old age homes requires substantial financial investments in a place, not a migrant family; further, the project is large scale and requires ongoing, long-term funding to operate. There is no established precedent for how the migrant asilo would function. Financially, and while the building is symbolic, the day-to-day operating of the asilo is not. Finally, the migrant asilo affirms migrants’ transnationalism as a living condition, recognizing migrants’ needs for services and medical care in life. In sum, the levels of accountability, responsibility, and investment for traslados versus asilos cannot be compared. Building a migrant asilo would represent both an expansion of Mexico’s social welfare concept along North American lines and an expansion of the Mexican government’s responsibilities toward transnational migrants.

While the scale of the asilo, as demonstrated by the Los Guajes case study, requires assistance from the Mexican government, the Mexican government is ambivalent about the extent of its indebtedness to, or responsibility for, the transnational
public sphere. Transnational migrants are allowed to apply for dual citizenship and Mexican voting rights but are not fully incorporated into Mexico’s public sphere and are not recipients of public protections. This ambivalence is reflected in the structure of the 3x1 program, which addresses social needs through construction projects, not social services. In the case of the Los Guajes asilo, the government was happy to assist in the final stages of construction, eager to put up an iron plaque on the front entrance to the building with the names of Mexico’s president and the 3x1 program, and ready to show representations of the building to large audiences of migrants and statesmen at conventions about transnational building in both Mexico and the United States (fig. 6.18). However, because the program privileges things over people, relationships, and services—and because project completion and management are not a part of 3x1—the building has been abandoned.

For the Mexican state to fully engage in development projects such as the building of asilos for migrants, expanded notions of public space and the public good are required. These expanded notions must correlate with the expansion and institutionalization of transnational civil society. The migrant must be incorporated into local, national, and translocal infrastructures. This requires different notions of development and progress and different ways to measure them.

For the time being, ornate and expensive tombstones and capillas rather than old age homes dominate the remittance landscapes of aging and death. This landscape is largely symbolic and representational. Reunification with family and homeland is possible in death, and almost half of the Mexican consulate funding is being directed toward the realization of this migrant desire, while the living, as recorded by Gamio, “continue to go on unnoticed.”
Notes, Chapter 6

1 Armando Juárez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
2 Lupe Juárez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
3 The migrants who face particularly difficult choices in retirement are those who have been remitting for several decades. According to a Pew study, while men aged twenty years and younger have the highest propensity to remit, one-fourth of those involved in the study remit even after twenty to thirty years in the United States. Suro, Beyond Small Change, 25.
4 Academics have focused on migrant health as it relates to old age and on migrant “generations” but not on how aging influences identity and space.
7 Coffey, “Second-Generation Mexicans.”
8 Throughout rural Jalisco, government-sponsored programs and funds to support the elderly are incremental and unreliable.
9 For one of the first ethnographic accounts of the compadrazgo system, see George Foster, Tzintzuntzan: Mexican Peasants in a Changing World (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).
10 Gamio, Mexican Immigration, 147.
12 While the term traslado means “transfer,” in the context of migrant burials it is used to represent the movement of cadavers.
15 Customs agents, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, March 2008.
16 Carolina Díaz, phone interview by author, California, August 2008.
17 Armando Juárez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, March 2008.
18 Fernando Gomez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, July 2008.
During previous research, in 2004, I visited a small pueblo in Guanajuato that had only one public telephone.

Rita Álvarez, *El Tagünichi*, January 1998. This magazine is available only by subscription.

“*Mexico Lindo y Querido*” was written by Chucho Monge. For a discussion of how this song reflects the culture of death in Mexico, see Adrián Félix, “Posthumous Transnationalism: Postmortem Repatriation from the United States to México,” *Latin American Research Review*, forthcoming.

Several interviewees in the towns of Quía, Los Guajes, and El Naranjo affirm the importance of attending not only the funeral service but also the procession from the familial home to the cemetery.


West, *Mexican Aztec Society*, 140.


According to Garibay, his program does not have an official name and it was not officially presented as a part of 3x1 Estatal, indicating that it is still in the experimental phase in the pilot program. Garibay himself was born in the United States and once served as the president of a social club in California for many years. It is because of this experience that he received his current position with the Secretariat. His unique position as both an immigrant in Mexico and a government official gives him a role as a voice for the emigrant community at large.


Félix, “Posthumous Transnationalism,” 17.

HTA members, interviews by author, California, 2007–8.

Carolina Díaz, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, August 2008.

Daniel Gutierrez, interview by author, April 2008.

On the flags, see Bruce Finley, “Immigrants’ Final Trip Home,” *Denver Post*, March 28, 2008. Also, often Mexican entrepreneurs are at the forefront of transnational businesses. Funeraria Latina is owned not only by a family from Nayarit (Jalisco’s neighboring state) but also by a family of migrants who come from a long line of funeral directors still working in Mexico.

Five different funeral home directors in the south of Jalisco repeated this estimate. However, it is hard to compare the costs of Mexican and American funerals, since the standards and desired amenities are distinct.
Migrants’ experiences in the United States contribute to the expansion, renovation, and rearticulation of cemeteries in rural Mexico. In Sylvia Stevens’s documentary film Oaxacalifornia (1995), a migrant describes his desire to organize the cemetery of his hometown. As a gardener in the United States, he is responsible for maintaining orderly spaces. In the film, he describes his desire to bring his skills to his village cemetery.

Lupe Juárez, interview by author, June 2008.
Arturo Salazar, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, July 2007.
Raquel Maldonado, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.
According to a funeral director in El Grullo, the body is now kept on view longer as the family waits for norteños to arrive.
Salvador Luis, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, July 2008.
Ibid.
Ibid.

El Tagüinchi, August 2002, 11.
Village inhabitants, informal conversation with author, Jalisco, Mexico, December 2007.

El Tagüinchi, October 1997, 6.


Ramón Camacho, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, March 2008.
Ibid.

Donations are often noted in the magazine’s front pages. Otherwise, they are given stand-alone announcements.

El Tagüinchi, April 2002.
During my fieldwork I was able to visit eight asilos, all of which followed a courtyard plan.

El Tagüinchi, August 2002, 11.

For context, the annual public works budget of Tapatlán for the head town and all of its surrounding localities was 2,148,000 pesos in 2005–6. State budget office at the municipality of Tapatlán, June 2008.

Jorge Muñoz, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, March 2008.
Also, poor design decisions are evident in the building’s garden, which is not illustrated in the architect’s original plans. The unplanned garden space adjacent to the building’s west wing is large and was expensive to build. Ornate iron benches and lampposts are stationed adjacent to fixed planters. However, poured in-place concrete was used to make the patio floors, planters, and an over-six-foot wall that isolates the space from both the inhabitants’ rooms and the fabric of the town street.

The only other institutions in Los Guajes are buildings that have the support of either the government or the Catholic Church. The government has funded the Casa de Salud.
(which allows Guajeños to receive medical vaccinations but does not house a doctor) and a school that uses television-based learning in lieu of teachers, who are too expensive to support.

60 The only asilo in the cabecera of Tapatlán opened in 1982 to treat the local inhabitants with disabilities, several of whom have nobody to look after them because all their children are in the United States.

61 Silvia Macías, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, January 2008.

62 The director waits every year to find out if their annual funding will come through. So far, the municipality gives them two thousand pesos a month, and the rest is from donations. Fortune would have it that the producer of The Godfather, Net Tanen, has an assistant who is from Tapatlán. Mr. Tanen came to visit the town and has been giving $300 a month to the asilo since 1998.

63 Arturo Salazar, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, August 2007.

64 Benicia Fontana, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, January 2007.


66 Gustavo Chávez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, January 2008.

67 Birdy Velásquez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, September 2007.

68 Ramón Camacho, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, January 2008.

69 I attended the 3x1 conference in Degollado, Jalisco, in 2007.


71 The Mexican government attempts to assist migrant retirees primarily through indirect channels. In terms of migrant health, the government supports aging migrants through the Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior (IME) by educating the diaspora about how to take advantage of U.S. health services that are already available to them but underused. The IME’s Binational Health Week started in 2001, and another program, Ventanillas, started in 2003. The state is also promoting a “totalization” Social Security agreement with the United States, which would allow workers with employment histories in both Mexico and the United States to qualify for benefits in the Social Security system based on the sum of their work in both countries. The Mexican government has also advocated on behalf of migrants by pressuring the United States to allow workers to obtain credit for working even if they are employed under false Social Security numbers. These measures, however, do not solve the problems created by the challenged compadrazgo system. See Laureen Laglagaron, “Protection through Integration: The Mexican Government’s Efforts to Aid Migrants in the United States,” National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, Migration Policy Institute, January 2010, www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/IME-Jan2010.pdf. Also see “Mexico: Agriculture, Remittances, Social Security,” Migration News 10, no. 1 (2003), http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=23_0_2_0.
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Figure 6.1. (shown on first page of chapter) The Holtville Cemetery in California, where about six hundred migrants are buried without caskets or tombstones.

Figure 6.2. “Certificado de Tránsito de Cadaver” stamped by the Consulado General de Mexico Los Angeles, California. Shipping cadavers require paperwork from the county department of public health, the state department of health services, the Mexican consulate, a funeraria in Mexico, and a funeraria in the United States (that will provide an embalming certification). This documentation normalizes traslados or the shipping of migrant cadavers and international migration.
Figure 6.3. Full-page ad for Funeraria Latino Americana in the Los Angeles federation magazine, *Semana Jalisco*. The ad shows a funeral director holding a glass globe with the white silhouette of a bird traversing the globe. This imagery collapses the white dove of peace and tranquillity with the role of the airplane in facilitating traslados, the main service Funeraria Latino Americana provides for federation members.
Figure 6.4. Remittance tombstones in rural Jalisco. Remittance tombstones are often distinct from older peso tombstones in rural cemeteries. They include tombstones paid for by migrants for migrants as well as those paid for by migrants for migrants’ family members who stayed in the hometown.
Figure 6.5. A migrant capilla or small chapel in Jalisco. Capillas have greatly increased the scale of marking and memorializing family plots in rural cemeteries. In this photograph, the capilla (to the right) was built by a migrant family, but they did not use it when they buried their son, who unexpectedly died of a drug overdose in the United States. His cadaver was shipped to Mexico for burial, but he was buried outside and adjacent to the capilla with a separate headstone. The son was punished in death for the shame he had brought his family in life. The increased variety, specificity, and importance of markers in this era of remittances allow families to articulate distinctions in death regarding familial bonds and relationships, successes and failures.
Figure 6.6. A luxury hearse belonging to Funereria Gomez, Jalisco. Funereria Gomez has purchased several hearses from the United States. This SUV was driven to Autlán from the United States by a migrant and then remodeled into a hearse.
Figure 6.7. Large migrant capilla, Quila. This is the largest memorial in the cemetery of Quila. One can enter the chapel and gaze at photographs of the deceased. The choice to build an expensive capilla in the hometown must be viewed in the context of the family’s loss of a young son in the United States.
Figure 6.8. New cemetery plan, Magdalena. The plan features orderly rows of cemetery plots and a roundabout for both cars and people.
Figure 6.9. Silent water sculpture, Funeraria San Jose. The owner of El Grullo’s Funeraria San Jose is standing beside a newly purchased water sculpture that mimics those he saw at a convention on funeral homes held in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Figure 6.10. Emigrant directory, Los Guajes. A picture of the hometown is on the cover of this emigrant directory started in 1999. This directory is a part of Guajeños Unidos USA’s efforts to expand their reach and catalog the Los Guajes diaspora.
Figure 6.11. Poem, in *El Tagüinchi*. The magazine finished dozens of issues with an image of the asilo under construction juxtaposed to a poem or song.
Figure 6.12. Asilo plan, printed in *El Tagüinchi*. The plan labels the courtyard as “espacios multiusos” (multiuse space). Also note the odd shape of the building, which like many remittance projects conforms to the shape of the lot. In this plan, this approach has created awkward garden spaces and a diagonal, off-axis entryway.
Figure 6.13. Vernacular architecture, Los Guajes. The scale and materials in the vernacular architecture of Los Guajes are coherent.

Figure 6.14. Asilo in Los Guajes. This is the main facade of the old age home.
Figure 6.15. Asilo vandalism, Los Guajes. The asilo was nearly completed but had not been used for approximately six months when vandalism began.
Figure 6.16. Main courtyard space in Tapatlán’s asilo (above). This resident’s children all live in the United States (below).
Figure 6.17. Asilos de ancianos in El Limón and Ejutla. The asilo in El Limón is removed from the town center and faces a cornfield (above). It has been abandoned for over two years. The asilo in Ejutla also follows a courtyard dwelling model (below). Both the El Limón and Ejutla asilos are 3x1 development projects.
Figure 6.18. The 3x1 plaque for the Los Guajes asilo. The plaque is prominently displayed on the entrance to the asilo, even though the 3x1 program did not join the project until it had already been under construction for over ten years, and even though it contributed only a small portion of the cost.
Figure 7.1. Envisioning change in Vista Hermosa. Daniel Gutierrez, who lives in Vista Hermosa and oversees remittance construction projects, points to the sugar cane valley while explaining his vision for Vista’s state-of-the-art sports complex. During the construction of the basketball courts, Gutierrez discovered underground water. “We will build a natural pool and spa. An infinity pool, like in the Olympics.” Daniel Gutierrez, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, April 2008.
I began this study long before embarking on my dissertation field research, when my co-workers at a café in Berkeley, California, described their newly-built houses in Guanajuato, Mexico. Intrigued by the fact that they lived in small apartments in Fruitvale, California, while their new homes stood empty in Mexico, I began to ask them questions about how this had come to pass. But, as a historian of the built environment, I was also curious about the homes themselves. What did they look like? Who built them? How did my co-workers (undocumented Mexican migrants who did not travel home) manage the construction process from a distance?¹

Upon beginning my dissertation field research in 2007, I was drawn to the Mexican state of Jalisco, and to specific pueblos (small villages) throughout the state, because of the extent to which the built environment of Jalisco has been transformed by remittances. Migrants have funded modest remittance construction in Jalisco since the 1920s and 1930s, and today the architecture of migration is impressive and impossible to ignore. I was also drawn to Jalisco because of the extensive organization of Jaliscienses’ migrant social and civic clubs in the United States. Migrant activists, hometown association presidents, and members of the Federation of Jaliscienses invited me to their pueblos to see what they had accomplished, acting as town boosters. The president of the Federation de Jaliscienses in 2007, Salvador García, identified eight towns for me to visit that had particularly impressive remittance projects. During my first two months in Jalisco, I visited twenty-three pueblos of which only two appeared to be unaffected by remittance construction. Out of the twenty-one pueblos with evident remittance construction, I was drawn to three in the south of the state that had ambitious, distinct, and well developed remittance projects. The rodeo arena in Lagunillas, the cultural center in San Juan, and the old age home in Los Guajes—all on Salvador García’s list of impressive projects—were dramatic and compelling interventions into otherwise homogeneous and continuous traditional building fabrics. These public “architectures,” unlike my co-workers’ dream homes in Guanajuato, were not only modern homes, symbolic of the success of migration, but also spaces consciously intended by their patrons and sponsors to bring about social and economic change in their hometowns. It is heretofore unprecedented that economic migrants—many of whom work service sector jobs in the United States—have assumed the responsibilities of planners, architects, and developers for their hometowns.

After my ten months in Jalisco, it became evident that the prized trophies I had been instructed to visit, the architectures of remitting, were problematic for those who sacrificed the most to build them as well as for those who they were intended to benefit. The unanticipated consequences of building with remittances frequently cause conflict, disappointment, and disjuncture in the communities these projects are intended to preserve, sustain, and improve. The reasons for these adverse or ambiguous outcomes are difficult to identify as the migrants, political leaders, and policy makers most invested in remittance construction also spearhead the discourses explaining remittance development to a broader public. Analyzing the remittance landscape itself elucidates individual and collective experiences ignored or obscured both by official discourses as well as migrants’ own stories about their roles in and perspectives on building projects. Ethnographic research on the architecture of migration reveals the many ironies and paradoxes inherent to migration and remitting as a way of life, which the construction of remittance projects tends to exacerbate instead of resolve.
Paradoxes and Costs of Village Remittance Space

The term remittance space frames remittance building projects, together with their origins and implications, within a larger discourse on migration and cultural exchange that occurs in multiple locations spanning national territories. Remittance space is the sum of individual migrants’ and their communities’ building and building-use practices and narratives, as well as the macro processes, institutional regimes, and symbolic and spatial transformations that are collectively shaped by and shaping remitting as a way of life. Remittance space in rural Mexico is a common point of reference for the emigrant community of migrants and non-migrants, but experienced differently depending on one’s position within the spectrum of migration.

For those who are “stay-at-homes” or non-migrants, remittance space brings a new set of norms, practices, and even ideologies to the hometown. Some of the most critical consequences of these spaces are the effects they have on children who acquire tastes, aspirations, and desires that can only be satisfied by migrating north. Miguel López Covas, a priest in a small rural village respectfully referred to as Señor Cura, commented about his childhood in a Mexican village just outside of Zamora, Michoacán: “Now [migration] is more of a question of ideology than work and money. The United States is Superman. The clothes are better, the houses are better, the money is better. The people around me when I was growing up all had those things. I watched Walt Disney, Superman, and it wasn’t the reality that I lived.” Growing up watching American films and television, and seeing the material results of migration—better clothes, houses, and money—have manufactured desires for increased material wealth that reinforce the perceived backwardness and limitations of the hometown. Señor Cura was more fortunate than his peers. He was able to travel to the United States and satisfy his curiosity without committing to a dangerous border crossing or living in the United States. Today, as the priest of a rural village, he hears the daily confessions of those less fortunate than himself. Migrants who journeyed to the United States to acquire a better life for themselves and their families have become entangled in pervasive and cyclical migration. In my interviews of migrants and their family members throughout Jalisco, it was evident that cyclical migration breeds regret, loss, nostalgia, and heartbreak due to the sustained separation between family and friends.

For migrants, the primary producers of remittance construction, the most common characteristic of all remittance projects is a chasm between stated intentions and project outcomes. In part, regardless of project type, these consequences result from the urgency with which remittance construction projects are executed. According to historian Dr. José Refugio de la Torre Curial, “The culture of the pueblo is on the one hand to socialize, to do it tomorrow, to leave it in God’s hands, while on the other it is about doing something now to show us. But, the idea of doing something now is largely about making an impression.” Migrants are driven to do something now, to build, without planning or preparation for the day-to-day use, maintenance, and management required of public spaces. Newly erected buildings stand-in for absent sons and daughters. However, in addition to representing hoped-for progress or development, remittance construction conjures the limits of migration as a way of life. This is evident in the divisions,
dependencies, and destructions associated with remittance building projects in the south of Jalisco.

In the three case studies addressed in chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this work, sponsors intended projects to benefit the people of the pueblo and instill hope in the emigrant community. However, the projects they sponsored undermined their stated intentions by increasing the rural communities’ dependencies on the diaspora and creating relative disparities between and amongst community members who compare fortunes, successes, and failures against one another.

In Lagunillas, the migrant hometown association used remittances to build a large-scale venue for an existing cultural activity, the jaripeo (an event defined by riding bulls). The project is intended as an economic engine for the town. However, Lagunillas is not the only town employing this strategy. The rise of remittance rodeos throughout the region as a cultural enterprise and economic engine begets competition between towns. Such competition appears to be a race to the bottom as the region’s development is increasingly dependent on and competing for a fickle flow of remittance capital. As a result, lack of planning at a regional scale leads to overproduction of venues and many towns waste resources trying to capture a market for migrant dollars.

In San Juan de Amula, migrants invested handsome sums to build a new public space for the town. The cultural center would “benefit to the pueblo” by allowing villagers and migrants alike to hold elegant fiestas and cultural events. However, due to the particular ways in which norteños oversaw the construction of the center, and their ideas about how the center should be managed and used, the “gift to the pueblo” has fragmented and fractured the community. Rather than excitement, villagers expressed disapproval. The space is viewed as private, expensive, and exclusive. For some, the center is perceived as a personal threat—what they have to offer others during a fiesta is their humble home, their time cooking in their kitchen, their open door. Now, this formal space for dining with public restrooms creates an alternative to practices that help define individuals’ roles in the community structured by the compadrazgo social system. Comadres and copadres who cannot afford to rent the center feel displaced. Other villagers who work directly with migrants view the center as an opportunity to bring in revenue and modern forms of entertainment. In migrants’ attempts to build a place for themselves in their pueblo that would also benefit the people, they created new binaries and oppositions between its members.

In Los Guajes, the old age home is intended to benefit the pueblo by addressing the burgeoning needs of the elderly (both rural inhabitants and elderly migrants.) However, the temporal and geographic distances embedded in migration as a way of life have created divergent points of view regarding what it means to be elderly for migrants and rural inhabitants. Similar to disparate notions of the public in San Juan, migration itself has introduced new and divergent ideas about aging and death. For some migrants, old age is an opportunity to return to the hometown and rest after a life of labor. For locals, old age is a critical life stage that begets a prominent position in the social hierarchy. Highly respected, the elderly are cared for by family and community members. Thus, old age homes carry divergent meanings. Migrants view the home as a possible place of retirement where they might pay for care. Villagers view the old age home as a place for the mentally impaired or those castigado or others expelled from their families.
Even as migration uproots families, stripping the elderly of their social networks, elderly villagers resist the notion of living in an old age home.

In all three case studies migrants have built spectacles of remittance. This is most clearly articulated in the Lagunillas rodeo arena and jaripeo event, where the commercialization of the jaripeo recasts the performance (the public expression of a hierarchical social order defined by male leadership) as a spectacle now requiring professional bull-riders and bulls. In Lagunillas, young men are no longer available or willing to risk their lives riding bulls. Their masculinity is achieved by migration itself, which has become a rite of passage. The hiring of the male performer is an inversion of the original intent of the jaripeo. While norteños have built an arena to maintain jaripeo culture, they have not achieved a cultural continuity. Rather, the commercialization of the tradition preserves the image of the bull-rider at the expense of the jaripeo’s traditional cultural content.

The cultural center in San Juan and the old age home in Los Guajes make a spectacle of norteño difference. Village inhabitants referred to both projects as “white elephants” for their perceived financial expense but lack of actual value to local community members. Dramatically out of scale with their surrounding built environment, both projects display modern architectural aesthetics and amenities, while housing ambiguous programs. Despite the investment, the old age home in Los Guajes is abandoned and the cultural center is rarely used. In sum, the majestic buildings rise out of modest landscapes to remind locals of how distinct norteño ambitions and achievements are from their own.

Aside from dependencies and difference, the remittance landscape and remittance development are also, and ironically, about the destruction of place and community. Migrants want to preserve the pueblo of their childhood and to improve it; their vision of a tranquil, pastoral life that is better, cleaner, and more beautiful motivates building projects. According to historian de la Torre Curiel, “Migrants want elegant vacation spots, places of luxury that will also feel like home to them.” The intention invites a paradox of preservation and development. Migrants do not want their hometowns to fall into further disrepair and abandonment, but leave to gain the resources to protect and alter them. In doing so, they incur very real personal costs. Their absence also reveals the extent to which the social life of towns provides for towns real vitality. As previously noted by Juan Zamora in chapter 5, president of Club San Juan, “I miss my pueblo. I yearn for it. But when I go back, the people are changing, the kids are drinking and doing drugs, and all these things we used to do as a community are lost—I feel bad because I was of the first generation to leave, so it is partially my fault that it is not like it used to be.” Remittance construction is one of the many ways that migrants address their own ambivalence about their own role in the globalization of rural communities as well as their extended absence from the hometown.

Viewed together, these building projects clearly demonstrate migrants’ newfound roles in their hometown and increasing political and economic agency. In some cases, migrant investments have had very positive effects on local standards of living. The paving of roads and installation of water infrastructure greatly increases the quality of life for rural inhabitants. However, as my case studies show, migrant groups that take on broader roles as boosters, who attempt to provide their townsmen with services normally associated with institutions provided by the state, larger businesses, or non-profits face
unforeseen challenges. The difficulties associated with executing these projects raise questions about who the projects are for and how they fit into a long term development strategy for the villages or Jalisco. Inevitably, without the skills and knowledge of professional developers, planners, or engineers, migrant attempts to implement lasting change in their hometowns require them to make decisions and assume responsibilities that they are not necessarily prepared to handle. The dominant force of change in these hometowns is the absence of the migrants. Rural Mexico is being drained of its youth, and perhaps no amount of investment or planning can fully counter the effects of this loss.

The Role of the State in Remittance Space

Beyond its local meanings, the remittance landscape is also a barometer of the state’s investment in and position towards both rural Mexicans and the Mexican diaspora. In contrast to (and despite) migrant ambivalence regarding their roles in hometowns, from the perspective of national policy, the Mexican state is committed to a uni-directional push toward remittance development. Remittance development as a subset of the remittance economy is one of the ways that the state addresses rural poverty and endemic migration. The state, however, is advancing the aims and agendas of remittance development without analysis of the impact of migration as a way of life—and sustained distance—on families and communities. The limitation of the state’s vision for the development of rural communities is evident in public projects where 3x1 has been effective at stimulating and sponsoring public projects but ineffective at giving emigrants real tools to address endemic poverty or cyclical migration. The state’s reliance on entrepreneurial individuals as economic engines in rural Mexico constitutes the basis for a nascent Remittance Development Model. In this model, the state endorses migrants as civic benefactors with its attendant rewards, risks, and responsibilities.

Despite its support of the remittance economy and the clarity of Tres Por Uno guidelines (the primary remittance development program), the state’s role in remittance development is ambiguous. The case studies presented in chapters 4, 5, and 6 illustrate challenges to and problems with the government’s “democratic” and “transparent” remittance development agenda. First, the state has not clearly addressed what it means to appropriate ejido and indigenous lands for development projects. Second, 3x1 guidelines do not outline how long-distance management of remittance projects could or should function. Third, there is no commitment to the maintenance of remittance projects after they are built. Exacerbating these other problems, there is no real accountability regarding the municipal government’s participation in the 3x1 schema.

The 3x1 rodeo arena in Lagunillas was built without taking the complexity of ejidal land ownership laws and the social meanings associated with owning land for ejidatarios into account. According to state actors, the state owns 3x1 projects and its lands because the state contributes three-fourths of the project costs. Individuals in rural communities that have struggled for decades, if not centuries, to build and strengthen their land holdings and resources are caught between welcoming remittance development (and by extension the state) and holding onto traditional notions and ways of organizing their community that have largely excluded the state. The rights of the pueblo’s ejidatarios are undermined by the rules associated with 3x1 remittance development.
In the case of the cultural center in San Juan, the transparency of 3x1’s financial structure did not translate into accountability. During the construction of the cultural center, the municipal government of El Limón (essentially the county seat of San Juan) did not pay its share of the project costs. According to migrants from San Juan, 3x1 projects have strict deadlines implemented by the Federal government that must be met. An incomplete project or a project behind schedule is grounds for “black-listing” or prohibiting a particular migrant club from participating in future 3x1 projects. In lieu of this, the migrant club gathered the funds that the municipal government had promised but failed to pay. Key club members acquired personal debts that will take them years, if not decades, to resolve.

In the Los Guajes old age home project, the precise responsibilities of the state remain ambiguous. From the perspective of municipal political leaders, it was the state’s financial contribution that allowed the decade-old project in Los Guajes finally to be completed. They rescued what appeared to be (due to incremental construction) an obra negra [black project], or abandoned work. However, the 3x1 policy and those municipal and state-level actors implementing it, failed to address the necessary requirements to manage and maintain an old age home. The now-completed project has been abandoned once again.

The 3x1 policy encourages migrants to assume the mantle of rural development without investing resources, planning, or professionals in development projects or addressing the particular social issues that such developments are intended to alleviate. In part, migrants built an old age home to address the vulnerabilities of elderly migrants who can no longer work and remit. Due to their extended absence from hometowns they have compromised their relationships to individuals who might have otherwise cared for them. Also, undocumented migrants do not have retirement benefits or adequate medical care in the United States. 3x1 program funding for an old age home does not assist elderly migrants in any lasting or meaningful fashion.

The shortcomings of Tres Por Uno as a model for remittance development as evidenced in these case studies have galvanized politicians and migrant activists to improve the Remittance Development Model, not to question its logic or assumptions. Policy makers, governmental agents, and migrant activists express concern that remittances are not being used effectively enough. In 2004, at an annual conference on global philanthropy held at Stanford University entitled Conference on Borderless Giving, the Project Director of the Zacatecas Federation, Efraín Jiménez Muñoz, who is a migrant himself, was asked to speak about migrant development practices. Muñoz notes:

Remittances sent by migrants to Zacatecas are a powerful economic force for economic development…which promotes community development. The sad part of this is that the use of remittances for consumption may alleviate problems caused by poverty, but, it does not necessarily provide the means to leave poverty. Rather, these families can become dependent on the remittances to sustain themselves. For this reason, the Federation along with the Federal government will introduce a program this year (1x1) for productive projects that generate jobs and where another goal is to Bank the Un-Banked and to help communities understand that they have to learn to save and to eventually fund their own businesses and therefore sustain themselves.
The nascent 1x1 program is intended to solve the inequities of 3x1 remittance development. In 1x1, project budgets are equally divided between migrants and the federal government. The program is geared toward “productive projects” which, according to Muñoz, are “projects that can generate income, produce new jobs in our communities so people there can improve their life quality and skills.” Non-migrant villagers echo Muñoz’s interest in remittance businesses and factories. Félix Maldonado of San Juan could not understand why migrants built a cultural center instead of a factory which would create jobs for the people of San Juan. Muñoz and Maldonado’s argument for a different and better use of remittance funds suggests the lack of a perceived alternative for rural inhabitants and migrants. Yet, the 1x1 program will fail at alleviating poverty and endemic migration, even with a focus on job creation, if the costs of migration and remitting as a way of life, and the real needs of rural inhabitants, are not addressed.

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Today, the transnational person or cyclical migrant is becoming a permanent feature in an evolving global economy. Such individuals provide essential labor for the United States and now essential remittances for rural Mexico. The state is willing and even eager to assist in rural remittance development, to help put little towns like Vista Hermosa “on the map” by contributing to state-of-the-art buildings and infrastructure. However, both the Mexican and U.S. governments are not willing to challenge the logic of remittance space itself by addressing the social and psychological costs of sustained distance between and amongst family and community members, integral to remitting as a way of life. Mining remittance space (its logic, materiality, and costs) for lessons about globalization’s effect on all people exposes the twenty-first century’s reliance on a flexible and mobile labor force for what it really is. Employers and governments are increasingly normalizing distance between family and community for the world’s poor without regard to the longing, loss, and ambivalence that such distance produces. What is worse, distance is institutionalized as the way up and out for rural Mexicans at their own expense. The remittance landscape holds out a promise that migration leads to a new and better life. Sadly, its spaces temporarily absorb people’s hopes, dreams, ambitions and dollars without directly increasing material possibilities and social wealth for emigrants and their families. These spaces represent progress, but create discord for those who sacrifice the most to produce them. By the time the costs of remittance space are understood by migrants and villagers, migrants are deeply invested and embedded in the projects’ (and by extension the pueblo’s) success or failure, and another generation of youth has been inspired to embark on their journey north. As more migrants leave, more migrant hometowns inadvertently become, in a sense, the distant hinterlands of American cities.
Notes, Chapter 7

1 My initial answers to these questions can be found in Sarah Lynn Lopez, “The Remittance House: On the Cultural Landscapes of Mexican Migrancy” (Master’s thesis, University of California, Berkeley) 2006.
2 Miguel López Covas, interview by author, Michoacán, Jalisco, August 2008.
3 Dr. José Refugio de la Torre Curiel, informal conversation, June 2008, Jalisco, Mexico.
4 Dr. José Refugio de la Torre Curiel, informal conversation, June 2008, Jalisco, Mexico.
5 Juan Zamora, interview by author, Jalisco, Mexico, June 2008.