Migration and Family in Mexican Research:
A Recent Appraisal*

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ABSTRACT

An analysis has been conducted of the path taken by research on migration and family in Mexico in the past six years (2007-2012), with the aim of highlighting emerging lines, analytical approaches, main concepts and methodological strategies. The results point to the opening up of new fields of reflection, such as the relationship between emotion, affect and migration, and the problems of migrant children, together with the continued existence of fairly consolidated areas. They also show a degree of mainstreaming of the gender approach and a significant yet uneven presence of transnationalism as the most important analytical framework in recent decades, as well as the predominance of qualitative methodological strategies.

Keywords: 1. migration, 2. family, 3. analytical dimensions, 4. methodological approaches, 5. challenges.

Migración y familia en la investigación mexicana: Un balance reciente

RESUMEN

Con la finalidad de destacar las líneas emergentes, los enfoques analíticos, los conceptos y acercamientos metodológicos predominantes, se emprende un análisis del curso seguido por la investigación sobre migración y familia en México en los últimos seis años (2007-2012). El balance realizado da cuenta de la apertura hacia nuevos campos de reflexión, tales como la relación entre emoción, afectividad y migración o la problemática de la niñez migrante, junto a la pervivencia de áreas consolidadas. Muestra también una cierta transversalidad del enfoque de género y una presencia importante pero desigual del transnacionalismo como el marco analítico de mayor relevancia en las últimas décadas. Destaca el predominio de los acercamientos metodológicos cualitativos en las estrategias de investigación.

Palabras clave: 1. migración, 2. familia, 3. dimensiones analíticas, 4. enfoques metodológicos, 5. desafíos.

* Text originally written in Spanish.

Introduction[1]

Despite the scant attention paid to the family in the main body of migration studies, primarily concerned with the socio-economic aspects of migration, this is a critical dimension in many respects: it is usually the reason given for many displacements, constitutes an axis in the basic organization of migrants' lives in the places of reception, provides the major social networks for making the migration project viable and permitting its reproduction over time and is a basic point of reference in the allocation of the subjective meaning of the immigrant experience in migrants' life stories (Ariza, 2002).

The family also links various social levels, a fact that makes it an ideal unit of analysis for determining the impact of more inclusive processes at the micro and messo social levels. Research has usually acknowledged its mediating role between individuals and macro structural determinants, its capacity for response and reorganization for common welfare in the face of economic ups and downs, its importance as a production and consumption unit, not to mention its centrality as a producer of values and ideologies that strengthen social cohesion, including those that legitimize prevailing gender inequalities (Ariza and Oliveira, 2004).

Due to these and other factors, reviewing the path taken by national research in the specific subfield of migration studies and family, can be a valuable exercise. It is, however, a limited enterprise that inevitably includes a certain amount of arbitrariness since it is literally impossible to cover all the academic production generated, meaning that it is necessary to establish selection criteria. Our selection was based on three criteria: *1)* topic: the article should address at least one aspect of the link between migration and family, *2)* time: it had to have been published between 2007 and 2012[2];

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[1] I would like to thank all my colleagues who kindly responded to my questions about recent publications in the field of migration and family.

[2] The time criterion is due both to the need to limit the texts reviewed to a reasonable number, and to the fact that previous analyses of migration studies, particularly migration and gender, were covered in previous years (Ariza, 2000, 2007). Only Hernández's thesis (2013) confirms the exception to the time criterion, which is incorporated because of its importance in this subfield of migration studies.

3) space: the research had to have been published in Mexico, even if the publication included works by researchers living outside the country. These criteria yielded approximately 40 texts, most of which were read in their entirety.

This article comprises two sections, in addition to the conclusions. The former reviews the prevailing analytical dimensions and sub-dimensions, classifying them according to their degree of consolidation in national research. The latter compiles a list of the most important analytical approaches underlying the research reviewed, highlighting some of their methodological implications. The appraisal is summarized in the conclusions.

Migration and Family: Thematic Areas and Analytical Dimensions (2007-2012)

According to their trajectory, the research published in these six years can be grouped into two thematic areas, by to their level of establishment in national research: consolidated and emerging, each with their respective analytical dimensions and subdimensions. Areas of consolidated reflection include: migration, gender and family roles; and migration, household structure and family strategies. Emerging areas include: migration, affect and emotion; and children and migration[3]. Below is a description of the fields to which they belong, new lines and concepts and certain key empirical findings.

Consolidated Fields of Reflection

Among the areas of consolidated inquiry, studies on *migration, gender and family roles* dominate production during this period, accounting for almost half the texts registered between 2007 and 2012. Two analytical subdimensions can be distinguished in this group: *1)* those focusing specifically on the links between gender and migration; *2)* those highlighting the performance of family

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[3] Several of these obviously combine thematic areas.

roles. Although gender is an important axis of reflection in both, the emphasis and empirical orientation are different.

In keeping with previous lines of research, most of the studies on the subdimension of migration and gender (Loza *et al.*, 2007; Córdova, 2007; Del Ángel and Rebolledo, 2009; López, 2012) examine the extent to which changes in authority relationships do or do not favor the women who remain in their places of origin once the male provider has emigrated. Some broaden the spectrum of observation to include intergenerational relationships between grandmother caregivers and grandchildren (Córdova, 2008) or between mothers and their offspring (Marroni, 2009; López, 2012), highlighting the tensions invariably caused by the absence of the male authority figure in intrafamilial dynamics. Other cases analyze the way in which cultural norms regarding sexuality are relaxed to allow some degree of tolerance in the surveillance of women whose husbands live in the North (Córdova, 2008).

This line of thought contains a new vein that inquires about the transformation of gender relations in situations of return migration by male heads of household (Córdova, 2012) or the women themselves (D'Aubeterre, 2012). These studies show the complexity of return migration as a social process and the difficulties entailed by its conceptualization and analysis. Research findings describe the tense nature, which is not without conflict, of the reintegration of the migrant, whether male or female, into the family and community setting[4]. They emphasize the permanent expectation of migrating again in the near future as a means of coping with the difficulties of readjusting to the family and community of origin.

Carolina Rosas (2008) conducts the only study of its kind within this thematic area, through the analysis of the tensions caused by the migration process in masculinity. Although migration endorses some of the social mandates of hegemonic masculinity in the eyes of the migrant and the community, such as ensuring

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[4] As attested to by the work of Aznar (2011) and Clairgue (2012), located in other analytical dimensions.

the economic provision of households and flaunting one's bravery, being consistent between what one says and does and not being intimidated by the risks involved in travelling North, it creates tensions that are difficult to resolve in a third, no less crucial mandate: the need to control women and their sexuality.

Authors are usually cautious about assessing the impact of the migration process on the possibilities of women's empowerment and autonomy. Most of the studies reviewed highlight the readjustments that take place in intrafamilial dynamics as a result of migration as well as the difficulties faced by women in maintaining the brief moments of autonomy afforded by their status as heads of household and administrators of remittances (Marroni, 2006; Loza *et al.*, 2007; Del Ángel and Rebolledo, 2009). At other times, the impact of the migration experience on women's status is understood as part of broader changes in Mexican rural society. From this point of view, the experience of migration, together with factors such as access to paid work, have encouraged the modification of female migrants' subordinate status (Arias, 2009).

Research focusing on the performance of family roles, the second of the subdimensions highlighted by this author in the field of migration and gender studies, has a different analytical concern. The aim is to document the experience of long-distance family interaction from the different positions or family roles (mother, father, offspring, spouses, grandmothers and grandchildren) to account for the degree of plasticity they show and families' adaptation to the challenges of migration (Mummert, 2009, 2010a). The analysis usually emphasizes the tension between the constraints imposed by migration on a normative performance of family roles and social representations (*ideology,* inevitably expressed from a gender perspective) prescribing what proper behavior should entail. The discrepancy between these two levels—practical and normative—causes enormous suffering in migrants' life experiences.

Two of the most frequently studied family roles are transnational motherhood and conjugality at distance. Regarding the former, studies indicate the difficulties involved in its exercise and the little scope for maneuver sometimes allowed by the transnational space (Asakura, 2012). Foremost among these is the emotional tension experienced by women-mothers who are often prey to profound feelings of guilt (Asakura, 2012; Ariza, 2012). The experience of long-distance motherhood seems more problematic than transnational fatherhood and is the target of greater moral sanctions (Mummert, 2010b). Whereas women are criticized for "leaving" their children, remittances allows men to strengthen their role as financial providers. As for conjugality at distance, these studies examine the perception of women migrants who remain in the communities of origin regarding the support provided by absent spouses in various facets of family life, frequency of communication between partners, and women's level of consultation of their absent husbands as an indicator of subordination or independence (Ariza and D'Aubeterre, 2009). Clairgue (2012) undertook a novel study in this line of analysis, collecting empirical data on both partners and examining not only long-distance partnership but also the experience of the reunion between husbands and wives following the return. The author highlights the difficulties of reinsertion in migrants who return on a permanent basis—in both the family and the community setting—due partly to the mismatch between the expectations of those returning and those of their relatives in the place of origin.

In contrast with transnational motherhood and conjugality at distance, other family roles have received less attention in national research on migration and family. On the basis of previous ethnographic work, Mummert (2010a) reviews the various relational dyads that can be revived in the long-distance family experience (fathers/mothers-children, grandmothers-grandchildren, siblings) highlighting the negotiation processes they involve. Estrada (2008) undertakes a similar review, emphasizing the way the experience of migration can simultaneously stimulate detachment, the reorganization of family ties (between parents

and children, offspring and parents, and between spouses), and strengthen them despite separation. In a subsequent study, Mummert (2011) draws attention to the emergence of formal and informal practices of adopting migrant children, which, from her point of view, constitute parallel systems of recognition of rights outside the laws concerning custody of the children.

Only one of the studies reviewed focuses on the systematic performance of the filial role in transnational contexts (Hernández, 2013), examining the nature and type of exchanges that occur between absent children and parents residing in the towns of origin. This research provides a dynamic perspective on transnational family life through the prism of the different needs governed by the family life cycles of parents and children and the difficulty of reconciling them. Results indicate that performance of the filial role not only depends on the support of family and fellow nationals' networks, but also on the limits set by immigration status and the stage of the family cycle on the possibilities of exchange.

Whether explicitly or implicitly, authors dealing with the study of long-distance family roles highlight the need to grant them legitimacy to combat their frequent stigmatization in official discourse, the media and the field of family relationships, when they are classified as "abnormal" in relation to the normative model of family roles (Mummert, 2010b; Asakura, 2012).

Analysis of the *structure and reproduction of households* and *family strategies* is the second consolidated thematic area in recent academic production on family migration (Arizpe, 1980; Szasz, 1993; Ariza, 2007). The texts comprising this thematic subfield focus on one (or more) of the following objectives: *1)* characterize household structure and composition in the places of origin or destination (D'Aubeterre, 2007; Rojas, 2012; Terrazas, 2012), *2)* describe how migration affects the conditions of reproduction of households, *3)* highlight the role of family strategies in the reproduction process (Del Ángel and Rebolledo, 2009; Mancilla and Rodríguez, 2009; Jardón, 2011).

When household structure and composition are discussed, authors often highlight the variety of household formations (transnational/cross-border) encouraged by international migration, particularly in contexts of reception (D'Aubeterre, 2007; Rojas, 2012)[5], and their systematic differences from non-migrants households (Terrazas, 2012). Whether from a qualitative or quantitative approach, they highlight the flexibility of the family structure in responding to the constraints and opportunities of the context, preserving and modifying traditional domestic forms (D'Aubeterre, 2007), and the way in which their composition by age and sex, together with other demographic characteristics, may accentuate the relative vulnerability of immigrants in adverse socioeconomic settings (Terrazas, 2012).

Depending on the research objectives and the orientation of the discipline, analysis of the process of household reproduction may focus on socio-economic or socio-cultural angles. A novel issue in the first of these aspects is the study of the impact of the 2008 crisis on the status of migrant households, in either the country of origin (Jardón, 2011) or destination (Terrazas, 2012). Jardón's qualitative study shows the extent to which international migration has become relatively weaker as a reproduction strategy for the Mexican rural households analyzed and has remained in a sort of *holding pattern* given the prolongation of the recession.

These data are consistent with the findings of Terrazas (2012), based on the US Current Population Survey, in the sense that the arrival of new immigrants in that country responds more to the recession (because it is more elastic) than do departures from that country, while the impact of the crisis has been proportionally higher in households with foreign-born than US-born population. Both studies confirm an increase in poverty as a negative result of the economic downturn resulting from the crisis.

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[5] D'Aubeterre (2007:243) lists four transnational household formations: *1)* male clusters (houses with men only), *2)* coresident groups of nuclear families, whether or not they are related, *3)* groups with a predominance of nuclear-conjugal or extended families, *4)* domestic formations comprising conjugal nuclear households.

In contrast, research focusing on the sociocultural dimension of reproduction emphasize the way features of the so-called Mesoamerican family system remain (Robichaux, 2002)[6], are modified or are strengthened in the context of international migration, giving rise to situations of heterogeneity. One aspect of continuity is the prevalence of extended families on either side of the border (Mancilla and Rodríguez, 2009; Del Angel and Rebolledo, 2009). Conversely, change is reflected in the trend towards more flexible patterns of union formation and post marital residence (D'Aubeterre, 2007; Córdova, 2007; Mancilla and Rodríguez, 2009; Lestage, 2009). Disruptive effects of migration include the fragmentation of domestic groups, higher frequency of spousal abandonment and the propensity of male migrants to form a second family nucleus with the acceptance of family members, including the wife, and the community (Del Ángel and Rebolledo, 2009; Córdova, 2007; López, 2012). Several of these processes have resulted in what D'Aubeterre (2007) calls a kind of *acceleration of the traditional domestic cycle.*

Emerging Fields of Reflection

Migration, emotions and affectivity, and *children and migration* are areas of reflection that address analytical dimensions hitherto overlooked in migration studies[7].

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[6] Among other aspects, the so-called Mesoamerican family system comprises: *1)* initially, the early patrilocal residence of sons and the departure of daughters to live with their in-laws; *2)* subsequently the establishment of a new residence by the sons near the husband's parents home; *3)* the permanence of the last-born in the paternal home (Robichaux, 2002:18).

[7] Two different aspects in the analysis of the link between migration and emotions are reflected in the work of Hirai (2009) and Ramos (2009, 2012). The former examines the various forms of nostalgia experienced by Jalisco migrants in California. The latter analyzes hope and sadness in Mexican immigrants in Minnesota and Chicago, as well as the role of hegemonic discourses in shaping the identity of migrants who are victims of social exclusion in the U.S. These studies are classified as parallel aspects to this field of study because although they address emotions, they are not strictly part of the research on migration and family.

The emotional management of physical absence and distance, and the subjective well-being of family members (whether or not they are migrants), are the main concerns of this research. A significant proportion analyze the feelings of the women who remain behind—the so-called women in waiting *(mujeres a la espera)*—in contexts with high male migration (López, 2007; Martínez, 2008; López, 2012). Adopting more of a mental health perspective, López Castro (2006) has grouped the myriad of feelings identified under the concept of the "Penelope syndrome."[8]

A subset of research highlights the ambiguous, complex nature of long-distance affective relationships, the fragility of family links that can be caused by prolonged physical distance, the existence of situations of emotional disconnection (defamiliarization) and feelings of resentment among migrant family members (Mummert, 2009; Asakura, 2011; Ariza, 2012; López, 2012). As can be inferred, this research focuses more on examining the dynamics of long-distance interaction and the feelings it evokes, rather than the emotional state of women in waiting (*mujeres a la espera*).

The only study focusing on the role (functionality) of a particular emotion is Nayeli Clairgue's original study of nostalgia (2012), before and after the return in situations of marital reunion. It is also the only one to include both members of the couple as the unit of analysis. This research shifts the analytical focus from the subjectivity of migrants to the role played by a particular emotion in long-distance family interaction regarding marital reunion. The findings reveal that two of the functions of nostalgia as an emotion inherent in transnational affect are: *1)* providing a sense of belonging in situations of uncertainty (Cerase, 1970, cited by Clairgue, 2012:29); *2)* triggering return at times of adversity. Nostalgia fuels expectations of a pleasant reunion and may be used as a means of rationalizing return for financial reasons. The

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[8] This refers to the somatic and psychological disorders women may suffer when subjected to severe emotional and physical burdens in contexts of high male migration (López, 2007).

author proposes a typology of types of nostalgia based on the socio-cultural circumstances that generated it[9].

Using a more socio-cultural than economic perspective, research that analyzes emotions and affect reveals little-known aspects of family life in migration contexts. If one takes the case of monetary remittances, for example, an aspect that has frequently been studied in research on migration, the prism of affect can enhance its symbolic value as an expression of love and caring by those absent towards their relatives in the place of origin. It also serves to measure the affective link, since the cessation of remittances often precedes the break-up of the marital relationship (López, 2012). Far from contributing to idealizing transnational family life, these studies reveal its dark side, since they show the difficulties involved in the attempts to bridge the emotional distance created by long periods of separation, even after having successfully completed the process of family reunification (Asakura, 2011; Ariza 2012)[10]. Giving this situation, several of the authors consulted have called for social intervention programs (López, 2007; Clairgue, 2012).

The last of the analytical dimensions identified during the period (2007-2012) is *children and migration*. This in turn has two subdimensions: one focusing on the effects of migration on migrants' children of, either in the place of origin (Meza and Pederzini, 2009, Rodríguez and Santander, 2011) or destination (Galindo, 2009); and another focusing on the situation of migrant children who travel alone or accompanied[11], or have been repatriated (Ramírez *et al*., 2009;. Girón, 2012). The latter is referred to in this paper as *children, transit and mobility*.

[9] It comprises: *1)* interpersonal nostalgia, based on the need for companionship and affection; *2)* instrumental nostalgia, referring to situations that were useful for coping with previous difficulties; and *3)* spatial nostalgia, evoking the contrast between the place of residence and origin (Clairgue, 2012:85).

[10] Asakura (2011) notes that while family reunification reduces physical distance, the emotional distance resulting from long periods without face-to-face interaction leaves an indelible mark on affect.

[11] According to the UNHCR, an unaccompanied minor is a "person who has not attained the legal age and is not accompanied by his parents, his legal representatives or the people usually responsible for him" (2001:130).

The three studies comprising the subdimension of migrants' children use educational attainment as an indicator of the impact of migration on children's welfare. Pederzini and Meza (2009) use a solid quantitative approach to evaluate the indirect effect of migration on educational attainment in rural Mexican communities[12], assuming that a higher household income from remittances would encourage parents to gradually invest more in their children's human capital. Rodríguez and Santander (2011) examine differences in the school performance of migrants' children in rural areas in the state of Hidalgo, whose parents were residing outside Mexico at the time of observation. Based on quantitative sources from the U.S., Galindo (2009) takes school performance indicators as an expression of the relative degree of acculturation of Mexican-Americans. The three studies establish a negative link between migration and schooling, regardless of the indicator used (attendance, dropout, performance, high school diploma) or the context of reference (rural Mexican communities or residents of the United States)[13].

The *children, transit and mobility* subdimension is undoubtedly one of the most striking lines of research to have emerged in recent years. The studies included in it reflect the complexity of the childhood/youth-migration link, its relative invisibility and the bleak picture they provide (Ramírez *et al.,* 2009; Girón, 2012; Capps, Chaudry, and Pedroza, 2012). Three aspects are directly or indirectly highlighted by the authors: *1)* the heterogeneity of situations involved in the different migration contexts according to their geographical location, *2)* the vulnerability of children, called the *vulnerable of the vulnerable*, in the environment of increasing social violence that plagues Mexico, and *3)* the need for urgent social intervention measures to protect their human rights.

[12] The authors also include an analysis of the differential impact of the Mexico's Oportunidades Program on boys' and girls' school attendance.

[13] Rodríguez and Santander (2011) detected greater difficulties in the educational attainment of children with migrant parents, while Meza and Pederzini (2009) corroborate a negative statistical effect of migration on school attendance, at both the individual and collective level, in the 80 rural communities included in the "Encuesta nacional de hogares rurales de México" (Precesam, 2003).

The heterogeneity of migration situations in which migrant children are involved is evident from the various efforts to construct empirical typologies. Authors speak of "nomadic," "transient" and "transborder" children (De la Rosa, 1992; Centro Scalabrini de Tijuana, 1990, cited by Méndez, 2000:25-26), or those who emigrate for reasons of work, family reunification, poverty, "adventure," family conflicts, abuse or having committed crimes in the U.S. The spectrum of situations ranging from those who travel alone or as part of a concerted effort of family reunification to meet up with their relatives in the United States, to those who have broken away from the family nucleus (whether by choice or due to expulsion), through those repatriated by the U.S. government. The latter tend to stay temporarily at some of the twenty-seven border shelters designated for this purpose (Ortega, 2009:5). There is no doubt that the situation of Guatemalan indigenous children who travel alone to pick coffee in the farms in the state of Chiapas adjacent to Guatemala (Girón, 2012), is very different from those who roam the northern border and have turned to crime after several failed attempts to cross the border (Cordero, 2009), to cite two cases. Each of the two border areas and the long, dangerous path between them constitutes a particularly vulnerable social scenario for these children.

Clapps, Chaudry, and Pedroza (2012) deal with a different angle by evaluating the indirect impact of increased control measures by the U.S. government on the welfare of a group of children whose parents were imprisoned in one of the many raids on the immigrant population undertaken in recent years in the United States. Research findings report significant impacts on the behavior of children, and their parents, in the medium and long term, which were invariably accompanied by dramatic economic effects following the arrest.

Analytical Perspectives and Empirical Approaches:
Different Views on the World of Families

Shifting the focus somewhat, this section embarks on a non-exhaustive analysis of the major analytical frameworks on which the aforementioned studies are based with the aim of highlighting implications for the research process.

A quick inspection yields five analytical perspectives, which are sometimes combined as often happens in the research process. These are listed below in roughly chronological order as they have appeared in national research on the subject. These perspectives are: *1)* reproduction (of households or family systems); *2)* gender, empowerment and autonomy; *3)* transnationalism, 4) sociology and anthropology of emotions, and 5) vulnerability and human rights[14]. Although these theoretical approaches are largely parallel to the analytical dimensions and subdimensions listed in the previous section, they do not correspond exactly. Some converge and overlap, while others, such as gender and transnationalism, enjoy a degree of tranversality.

It is a well-known fact that the analysis of the process of household reproduction is theoretically linked (whether directly or indirectly) to Marxism. From this perspective, the reproduction of families is merely a further example of the process of general social reproduction, a macro level of analysis largely concerned with the study of the mechanisms for the perpetuation of social systems, their stability (more often) and change (Giddens, 1987). The study of social reproduction tends to adopt a *socio-structural* approach, emphasizing the aspects involved in the maintenance and change of the system, whether socio-economic, socio-cultural or political. In the Latin American socio-demographic research tradition, these analyses have been closely linked to the review of the mechanisms for the reproduction of the labor force and the shaping of the labor supply. The units of analysis are usually

[14] Another two analytical frameworks more tangentially present in the research as a whole are: *1)* human capital (Meza and Pederzini, 2009), and *2)* complex systems (Estrada, 2008).

the household, the family or domestic groups, with researchers showing how they resist, cope with or adapt to the onslaught of more inclusive social processes. The analytical view tends to assess the relative capacity for *agency* of domestic units when faced with the corrosive effects of certain social processes on their stability. Changes in the composition and structure of households and changes in consumption and labor patterns (employment), are understood as an expression of the strategies undertaken by households to ensure their reproduction (Torrado, 1986; Tuirán, 1993). From this analytical platform, the role of migration is to provide a reorganizational (adaptive) response on the part of households.

But reproduction involves not only an economic but also a socio-cultural dimension, through which it is possible to maintain the fabric of values and behavior patterns that lend cohesion and legitimacy to the social order. In its sociocultural aspect, analysis of the family reproduction process deals with the change or permanence of the values and normative behaviors governing the exchange and reciprocal relations between domestic groups in response to the disruptive effect of migration. The research focusing on the Mesoamerican family system mentioned earlier is part of this reproduction-based approach. In most cases, it highlights its resilience and continuity, despite the tensions caused by the experience of migration. In this analytical approach, the prevailing impression of the family is its *strength* and *porosity*, strength for preserving the pivots of the family system, and porosity to accommodate the restrictions imposed by the migration process without losing its identity. Empirically, the research examines the patterns of union formation, residence patterns, changes in the transmission of inheritance and the exercise of civil and religious *cargos* (Translator's note: traditional social obligations contracted in a migrant's home town), among other aspects (D'Aubeterre, 2007; Córdoba, 2007; Mancillas y Rodríguez, 2009; Del Ángel and Rebolledo, 2009).

Another image of family life is provided by the gender perspective and its related theoretical developments (empowerment, masculinity), the second of the prevailing theoretical analytical frameworks in the set of research registered. On the basis of these studies, the household is not seen as a more or less cohesive, functional structure, but rather as a space of asymmetries, ambivalences and contradictions (Ariza and Oliveira, 2001). More than a structural approach, the gender perspective provides a *relational* view of the family environment and continuously seeks to determine the true balance of power relations within families. This research seeks to construct empirical indicators to determine how family life changes in connection with migration, when measured by the yardstick of gender equity. Some of the analytical categories included in empirical research are: control and management of remittances (Del Ángel and Rebolledo, 2009; López, 2012), women's social status (Arias, 2009; Marroni, 2009), decision-making (López, 2012), factors associated with return that promote empowerment (Córdova, 2012; D'Aubeterre, 2012), social practices and representations in the performance of family roles (Mummert, 2010b) and the social mandates of masculinity (Rosas, 2008; Hernández 2012).

In the set of theoretical approaches prevailing in the research between 2007 and 2012, the gender perspective enjoys a degree of transversality and combines in different ways with transnationalism and the analytical proposals concerning the sociology and anthropology of emotions. Transnationalism is often the theoretical framework guiding reflection when family roles and long-distance relationships, in which affect plays an undeniable role, are examined.

The same laxity reflected in social and family networks for creating and sustaining the ties linking societies of origin and destination within an intangible space of social relations, is evident when one examines long-distance family interaction. An image of the family emerges in which its *plasticity and creativity* prevail in response to the challenges posed by migration (Mummert, 2009, 2010b).

Also evident, however, are the structural constraints that limit long-distance family interaction in contexts of acute social asymmetry (Mummert, 2009; Ariza, 2012, 2014). Practices (maternity, paternity, parenting, conjugal, transnational), experiences, the social representations of family roles as normative aspects, the gap between them, and long-distance exchanges (calls, monetary remittances, gifts, objects) are the empirical observational variables of choice in analyses of transnational family dynamics (Asakura, 2012; Mummert, 2010b; Clairgue, 2012; Ariza, 2012; Hernández, 2013).

Most empirical research on migration and family analyzing emotions and affect reflects the confluence of three theoretical perspectives: gender, transnationalism, and the sociology and anthropology of emotions. Arguably, the first is a tacit starting point, while transnationalism, and above all, the sociology and anthropology of emotions, are regarded as purposeful and relatively new disciplinary approaches. This perhaps explains why their analytical assumptions are unevenly incorporated, with very different levels of systematicity.

Although this is an emerging area of research in Latin America, the sociology and anthropology of emotions have been explored in the social sciences for over twenty years (Hochschild, 1979, 2003; Kemper, 1978, 1981; McCarthy, 1989; Lutz, 1986; Thoits, 1989; Scheff, 1997). With a necessarily interdisciplinary approach, drawing on neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, sociology and anthropology, both promote the recovery of emotions as an intrinsic feature of social interaction, stripping them of the element of irrationality attributed to them by the Enlightenment tradition from which classical sociology emerged. The assumption they share is that social interaction includes not only doing and thinking, but also feeling.

The main empirical objects of authors who analyze emotions and affect in Mexican research on migration and family are perceptions, feelings, moods, representations, and in general, subjectivity in situations of separation or family reunion as a result of migration (Martínez, 2008; Asakura, 2011; Clairgue, 2012;

López, 2012; Ariza, 2012). This provides a sort of emotional x-ray showing the mixed feelings elicited by migration among different family members (sadness, anger, pain, nostalgia, resentment), with emphasis on the role of certain moral emotions (guilt, shame, pride) as regulators of interaction patterns (Turner and Sets, 2005, 2006)[15]. Within this area of research, the family is seen as an area of collective belonging, rights and morally legitimate obligations, *shelter* and *emotional support*, regarding which there may be mismatches, ambivalences and tensions, with varying outcomes for the psychological stability of each of its members.

The last of the main frameworks of analysis is social vulnerability, which is usually combined with a human rights approach. It is a well-known fact that this analytical perspective stems from the dissatisfaction with the descriptive, simplistic nature of poverty studies. It is offered as a proposal that reintroduces structures and institutions into the analysis of the recurrent risk situations facing certain sectors of the population (Moser, 1998; Pizarro, 2001). Either way, this is the prism of reflection that focuses on unaccompanied minors (MNA) (Girón, 2012; Ramírez *et al.*, 2009)[16].

These studies seek to describe the hazards involved in the various circuits of mobility in which children participate (Ramírez *et al.*, 2009; Girón, 2012). In this research, the family tends to be characterized by its absence or omission and the prevailing image is one of *dysfunctionality* and inefficiency in ensuring children's welfare. However, it not only highlights the inability of the family but also of the state and institutions, which should protect children and youth. Part of the empirical evidence on which this research is based suggests a panorama of frequent ruptures between children and their families, before or after migration, due either

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[15] Moral emotions connect people with the social structure through self-awareness. These arise in relation to the moral codes governing a society, whether to abide by or violate them, but always in connection with them (Turner and Sets, 2006:548; Mercadillo, 2012).

[16] Although not explicitly located within the vulnerability approach, the research by Capps, Chaudry, and Pedroza (2012), referred to above, has intellectual affinity with it since it analyzes the indirect consequences of U.S. immigration policy on the welfare of children whose parents were imprisoned as a result of the toughening of this policy.

to abandonment, death, poverty or the migration of one or both parents (Ramírez *et al*., 2009:61).

Final Reflections

This attempt to review recent research in the field of migration studies and family yielded uneven results. From a thematic point of view, it reflects the emergence of new research, together with the survival of other consolidated fields. Some of the pathbreaking lines are consistent with the course of migration as a social process, in particular the interest in returnees and the impact on migrants and their households of the economic crisis which began in 2008. Others, such as the study of emotions and affect, respond more to general trends in the social sciences related to the rise of the sociology and anthropology of emotions in the late 20th century. One last area of analysis, migrant children and youth, is primarily the result of the increased visibility of a growing, albeit pre-existing, phenomenon, generally overlooked by migration research.

From an analytical point of view, a variety of approaches frame research efforts within which gender has the greatest transversality, followed some way behind by transnationalism. The gender perspective, which fought to establish its legitimacy in the academic establishment not so long ago, combines in varying doses with all the others (reproduction, the sociology and anthropology of emotions, and vulnerability and human rights), with the exception, perhaps, of research focused on the study of *migrants' children*. The sociology and anthropology of emotions are the disciplinary proposals with the greatest porosity since they draw on both the gender perspective and transnationalism. With few exceptions, the greater mainstreaming of the gender approach has not translated into an expansion of the analytical focus to include more studies on masculinity, the performance of family roles assigned to males in migration contexts or sexuality. The small number of multi-sited research projects within the universe of the research compiled for this article undoubtedly limits the use of the analytical potential of transnationalism as an interpretive framework.

In general, it is necessary to strengthen the quality of scientific inquiry to promote growing methodological awareness reflected in a more systematic, transparent approach to the construction and analysis of empirical data. Anthropology is the leading discipline in all the research reviewed[17], which entails a predominantly qualitative orientation and a preference for rural localities in conducting fieldwork. Without discrediting the undeniable value of this disciplinary orientation, it would be useful to promote the undertaking of quantitative studies, the combination of methodologies and the spatial diversification of study sites, given the predominantly urban nature of Mexico today.

Although qualitative methods are characterized by their analytical flexibility and the highly iterative nature of the research process, the various methodological designs (ethnographic, narrative, grounded theory, phenomenology, action-research), have basic procedures for ensuring the quality of the research process (Hernández, Fernández, and Bautista, 2008). In the set of qualitative research reviewed, although there is a predominance of narrative designs, often in combination with ethnographic and occasionally phenomenological ones, their procedures and methods of systematizing information are not always made sufficiently explicit.

Lastly, from their many angles and approaches, the research reviewed in this brief inventory continue to draw attention to the complexity of migration as a social process, its constant transformation due to events of various kinds (economic, political, social), and the pressing need for social intervention initiatives to mitigate some of its many effects on family life.

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[17] Sociology and to a lesser extent demography are the other two disciplines in which the majority of the authors reviewed were trained.

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