

BOOK REVIEW

Oaxaca in motion: An ethnography of internal, transnational, and return migration

Iván Sandoval-Cervantes. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2022. 117 pp.

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In this readable and insightful book, Sandoval-Cervantes adeptly weaves together three strains of mobility research: internal rural-to-urban migration, commuting for work, and transnational migration. Even though the book is a mere 117 pages, the author brings these mobilities into discussion with each other, illustrating just how interdependent they are and how they mutually frame and reshape conventional cultural gender practices.

Sandoval-Cervantes describes why men and women from the agricultural Zapotec community of Zegache, Oaxaca, are linked to places near and far, particularly Mexico City and Willamette Valley, Oregon, and how in their interconnections with these three places they navigate rich, complex lives. In contrast to much of the abundant and varied Latin Americanist ethnographic literature, which tends to focus on either internal or transnational migration, he presents a case study of how internal and transnational migration are interrelated. In clear and concise ethnographic detail, he illustrates how internal rural-to-urban Oaxacans migrate to improve their livelihoods, construct meaningful urban communities in Mexico City, and yet do not lose their social and economic links to their homes in Zegache. He also outlines the paths they take to and from Oregon for work and family. Within these movements, gender and cultural conventions are challenged, sometimes strained and preserved, and sometimes changed.

The book's chapters are logically organized around six themes, tied together with an introduction and conclusion. These cover how the author came to do the research and how he approaches femininity and masculinity using Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams's concept "structure of feeling," anthropologist M. Bianet Castellanos's concept "communities of sentiment," and anthropologist Federico Besserer's concept "sentimental regimes." He employs these concepts throughout the book to understand how women decide to migrate and then negotiate with men in the places they go and work, especially noting the complex layers of constraints that both women and men face as they migrate between Zegache, Mexico City, and Oregon. We learn from Sandoval-Cervantes that migration—internal and transnational—is reshaping "deeply rooted" and

"interconnected factors: the idea of womanly suffering, and the surveillance of femininity" (p. 81), while masculinity is being redefined according to the roles that men play as workers and even caregivers.

One of the more significant insights that Sandoval-Cervantes brings to bear is the role that military service plays in internal and transnational migration. The scholarly literature on the military in Latin America is most often about how it acts on indigenous communities in devastating ways. Yet even in my own ethnographic experiences in Guatemala, where the military was particularly brutal, indigenous soldiers could learn to read and write during their service, as well as develop skills useful in the job market. Similarly, Sandoval-Cervantes shows how men gain these pragmatic skills and how military service can reconfigure Zegache men's conceptualizations of place, movement, work, and gender relations.

Many of the stories that Sandoval-Cervantes tells here will sound familiar to those well versed in the migration literature, especially that related to rural Oaxacans. That Oaxacans, and other Latin American rural peoples, make their way to the United States for temporary and long-term work is a commonly told tale, as are the reasons: unstable political conditions, violence, and chronic poverty. Also well known is the story of how such migrants are indeed transnational and how they keep connected through various means—these days via platforms like WhatsApp and FaceTime, among others. What distinguishes Sandoval-Cervantes's book from the rest of the literature is the attention he pays to the particularly gendered forms of migration from the perspectives of both men and women. For instance, migrant women rely on networks of women in Mexico City (p. 36), which the author describes as a transborder experience. They then take these experiences to become more socially and economically autonomous, even when they return to Zegache. For men, such transnational border crossing can occur via military service, which allows them to demonstrate core cultural values, such as making sacrifices for family (p. 56). Military service, however, recalibrates their gendered sense of being in the world and valorizes cooking as meaningful work (p. 75). But the author pays especially close attention

to the roles that Zegache women play in these different kinds of migration.

Through his research, Sandoval-Cervantes examines the complexity of the concept of migration itself, given its multiple meanings and uses by the people he studied. The experiences of women and men in this study are distinct yet entwined. Each is judged by their peers according to community standards that are continually reevaluated and modified as they move and work in all three places.

The book's straightforward and relatively jargon-free prose, combined with its conciseness, make it ideal for undergraduate

university courses related to migration studies. Ethnographers interested in migration and Mexican communities will want more fleshed-out descriptions and details about the lives of Zegache women and men who stay and who migrate, and how and why they travel between their home, Mexico City, and Oregon. Still, the book is an excellent introduction to the gender analysis of migration studies.

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