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Gender and Remittances: Lived Experiences of Women in Oaxaca, Mexico

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GENDER AND REMITTANCES: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN OAXACA, MEXICO

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

GENDER AND REMITTANCES: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN OAXACA, MEXICO

This dissertation project analyzes the ways that migration and remittances, the money that migrants send to people in their place of origin, intersect with the political and social dynamics in an Indigenous community in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region of Oaxaca, Mexico. Drawing on 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork, which included semi-structured interviews and participant observation alongside historical archival investigation, this dissertation examines the following questions: What international organizations, national government, and private sector policies govern remittances? How does Indigenous collective work and communal governance shape remittance management? How do the responsibilities of family members shift with migration and how do remittances factor into the responsibilities that women have in migrant sending communities? In answering these questions, I approach remittances as a lens for analyzing global migration and related flows of capital in everyday life and examine how labor migration and remittances intertwine with the collective work and communal governance that shape Indigenous life in Oaxaca. Through the examination of these practices, I found that the territory of the community expands and gendered norms shift. The three empirical chapters examine essentializing claims in remittance policy literature alongside the reality of how women manage remittances, how labor done elsewhere is extracted in remittance form and used to support social reproduction in the community, and the colonial foundations of my fieldwork. My feminist theoretical contribution argues against labeling women as disempowered and passive receivers of remittances while questioning the neat distinctions between productive and reproductive labor, thereby calling for a more thorough understanding of the diversity of economic lives. In this dissertation, I incorporate and make contributions to feminist economic geography, feminist theories of social reproduction, critical development and finance studies, interdisciplinary Latin American feminist work on the economy and gender, and post/de-colonial theories.

KEYWORDS: Feminist Economic Geography, Critical Finance Studies, Remittances, Social Reproduction, Ethnography, Mexico

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10/08/2021

Date

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DEDICATION

To Alejandro, Gonzalo, Isaias, José, Torres, and Trinidad.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

It is estimated that in 2020 international migrants sent US $540 billion to people in their communities of origin (World Bank & KNOMAD, 2021). This number is only the beginning. Called remittances, this money is important to local, regional and national economies, household incomes, and social relations. Remittance are the lens through which I study social processes. Money matters for everything. Simultaneously material coins and paper for exchange and abstract in its value, money is obviously economic and it also has implications for social, political, ecological, cultural, and technological processes, and more. Through remittances, I investigate several phenomena: the changing ways that international institutions, national governments, and financial actors assess people as potential sources of greater capital accumulation; the gendered processes of how women's political and economic subjectivities are formed; and diverse economies. Through my research I theorize and make contributions to feminist economic geography, particularly feminist political economy and social reproduction theory, critical development and finance studies, and interdisciplinary feminist work from Latin America on the economy and gender. In addition, my work on this project and elsewhere is rooted in a deep commitment to feminist praxis, which is reflected in my contributions to scholarship on feminist research methods.

For this dissertation I spent over two years in Mexico, conducting ethnographic fieldwork for 16 months, examining how the people living in one Indigenous community in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, manage remittances. The United States and Mexico

comprise one of the most significant remittance corridors in the world. Mexico received approximately US $40,607 billion or MX $875 billion in remittances from the United States in 2020 (BBVA & CONAPO, 2021)[1]. Remittances are 3.8% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Mexico and dependency on remittances is even greater in some states, like Oaxaca, where they are 12.9% of the GDP (ibid.). Again, these numbers do not tell the whole story. This money is sent and managed by people who are mobile and whose actions from disparate locations, both real and virtual, inflect many different types of economic activity. For example, my research project was focused on just one community, but it is a community which occupies a vast spatiality that goes beyond territory in Oaxaca to include other parts of Mexico, several places in the United States, and the digital spaces of social media and messaging applications. I will discuss the unique geography of the community and my fieldwork more in this introduction (1.3), but first I will briefly reflect on how I came to study remittances (1.2). This is followed by a summary of the structure and sequence of this dissertation's following four chapters and two appendices (1.4). I conclude this introduction with a brief note about what motivates me to be a scholar (1.5).

1.2 Why I study remittances in Mexico

The path of my research and writing about remittances for my Master's thesis and this dissertation was shaped in part by my experiences over the last 15 years. I first learned about the money that people send to their families and communities back home when I was

[1] While the statistics here are about remittances sent between countries, this dissertation also considers remittances exchanged within Mexico. It is hard to calculate domestic remittance totals because most of this money circulates as cash, and in-kind, whereas the majority of international remittances are sent by money wiring agencies and banks.

working as a waitress in New York City (2006-2013). On the job I heard firsthand about the push and pull factors that shape labor migration, saw the conditions in which people work, and could sense just how vital the money they earn is, not just for them, but also for their friends and loved ones back home. No matter the job, in the New York City restaurant industry over half of my coworkers came from other countries such as Chile, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Russia, South Africa, Venezuela and more, but most came from the state of Puebla, Mexico[2]. At one restaurant, I was fortunate to work with the same group of six men from Puebla for five years (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: The staff at Restaurant Palo Santo in Brooklyn, New York, 2010. The author is seated in the front.

[2] Mexican immigration to New York City, dominated by Poblanos, increased during the 1980s-through the early 2000s, a process which remade several neighborhoods. See Hum, 2014; R. C. Smith, 2006 for more.

Over the years our relationship grew from work acquaintances to friends, and I gradually became familiar with details about my co-workers' lives such as the reasons they left Puebla, what the journey to the United States was like, what jobs they had held in the United States, why they chose to live and work in New York City, how they lived in the city, what their families and friends in Mexico and the United States were like, and their dreams for the future. In addition, I observed how the money that they earned was deployed in various ways that I was previously unfamiliar with. For instance, workplace savings groups were common (called *tandas/roscas/cundinas/pollas* depending on where people are from) and all of my co-workers sent remittances to people in Puebla regularly.

I sensed that the money that they shared and sent could not be comprehended as merely a cash amount. For example, when someone made the last cash transfer that secured the purchase of a plot of land in Puebla, we made a special staff dinner to celebrate. On another occasion, everyone chipped in to buy gifts for the baptism of a co-worker's baby. When one person tragically lost his family member in New York City and had to pay for their body to be repatriated to Puebla, we raised money among the restaurant workers we knew. And there was everyday socializing like the small bets at the end of a long shift to determine the loser who had to buy everyone *caguamas* (32-ounce bottles of beer, preferably Victoria). These are economic transactions, but they are also recognitions of achievement, expressions of dedication, condolences, and expressions of fun and entertainment. Understanding the intricacies of the social relations through and how remittances are constituted is what I wanted to explore as a graduate student.

1.3 The research

As I developed the research plan for this dissertation, I knew I wanted to study themes of gender and labor on the receiving end of remittance transactions. I was interested in doing ethnographic fieldwork in Mexico, ideally in Puebla or Oaxaca, two states that have rich histories of internal migration and emigration to the United States and two states where I had connections. As I considered possible research sites and refined my research questions, I was encouraged to work in Oaxaca by my colleagues in the University of Kentucky Department of Geography. They had years of collective experience doing collaborative research with people living in the state of Oaxaca, with the Oaxacan diaspora, and with a range of academic and non-governmental organizations in the state. In 2017 two of my committee members (Tad Mutersbaugh from the University of Kentucky and Holly Worthen from the Autonomous University Benito Juárez of Oaxaca) invited me to join their research associate Candelaria Gómez as she did interviews in a couple of communities in Oaxaca. That was the first time I visited Ni ap Ayuuk kajp (or Kajp)[3].

1.3.1 The research site

Kajp is located along a ridge high in the Sierra Madre mountain range 1,000 meters above sea level (Figure 1.2). It is in the municipality of Santo Domingo Tehuantepec (total population 67,739) in the Isthmus region of the state of Oaxaca[4], located about 125 kilometers from the lowland city of Juchitán de Zaragoza. It is one of several predominantly Mixe communities that fall outside of the neatly mapped boundaries of the

[3] With the exception of Chapter 3, a pseudonym is used. Ni ap Ayuuk kajp was suggested as a pseudonym by a research participant and means historic Mixe community.
[4] Mexico is first divided geographically and administratively into states and then each state is divided into municipalities.

Mixe region (Figure 1.3). The Ayuuk people, commonly known as Mixes, are one of 16 original peoples who live in the state of Oaxaca and altogether compose 48% of the current population. The Mixe-Zoque languages are linked linguistically to the Olmec people who inhabited the region 4,000 years ago and I was told more than once during fieldwork that Kajp has existed for 10,000 years.

Currently Kajp is home to anywhere from 600 to 1,000 people, the majority of whom are Mixe, although there are a few Zapotecs residing there as well. The estimated range of 600-1,000 for the population is because this is what I heard from people there and reflects how people travel to and from Kajp. Every research participant I interviewed had family living in nearby rural settlements and the nearby Isthmus cities of Juchitán, Ixtepec, Matías Romero, Tehuantepec, and Salina Cruz. The local authorities estimate that an additional 400 people are a part of the community, but have migrated to the aforementioned cities, as well as Guadalajara, Mérida, Mexico City, Monterrey, Oaxaca City, Puebla, and parts of the United States. Kajp is like much of rural Oaxaca in that it has seen patterns of predominantly male out-migration to urban areas for the past 100 years (Cohen & Ramirez Rios, 2016; Rees, Murphy, Morris, & Winter, 1991; Sandoval-Cervantes, 2017) and to the United States since the 1980s (Fox & Bada, 2008; Stephen, 2007). During fieldwork, I quickly learned that female out-migration to destinations in Oaxaca and other parts of Mexico among Millennials and Generation Z is common as well.

Figure 1.2: Photo of Kajp from the community Facebook page

Figure 1.3: The Ayuujk Nation (or Mixe region) located in Oaxaca, Mexico. The background map is by the author and the inset map is from Vázquez García, 2018 and @TajewwDR.

1.3.2 Reflections on the research

In this dissertation I draw on 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork, which included semi-structured interviews and participant observation alongside historical archival investigation, to consider the following questions: What international organizations, national government, and private sector policies govern remittances? How does Indigenous collective work and communal governance shape remittance management? How do the responsibilities of family members shift with migration and how do remittances factor into the responsibilities that people (especially women) have in migrant sending communities? Rather than describe all of my research methods here (see Appendices A1 and A2 for that), I reflect on a couple aspects of my research that did not make it into the following three chapters.

Initially, I expected that all (or most) of the fieldwork for this project would be done with women in Kajp whom I anticipated were facing new challenges after an 8.2 magnitude earthquake struck Chiapas and Oaxaca in September 2017. Around 100 people died, and in some municipalities 80% of essential infrastructure was damaged, including homes, clinics, schools, electrical systems and sources of drinking water. Just months before I started fieldwork, many were criticizing the response to this earthquake, arguing that the extent of the destruction was not reported and residents waited for official help that never arrived. In reaction to the problems with delivering government assistance, numerous local autonomous initiatives for coordinating aid distribution sprung up. I knew that many impacted communities like Kajp were turning to family and community resources to rebuild, a significant source of which I assumed would be remittances. My assumption was incorrect, primarily because an organization, Mundo Maya, had selected Kajp as a community to assist after the earthquake. During my 16 months in Kajp, Mundo Maya

engineers and project leaders coordinated the construction of over 90 adobe houses. While the earthquake was still a recent traumatic event and rebuilding was a priority for many families, my conversations about remittances did not focus on the earthquake or rebuilding efforts.

In addition, I quickly figured out that working only with women in Kajp would be insufficient. In the first weeks of fieldwork I noticed that there was a great deal of translocal and transnational activity beyond the boundaries of the actual communal lands where Kajp is located in Oaxaca. I noticed this activity in two places: on social media and in the physical movement of people in and out of Kajp. Therefore, I immediately began studying the community's social media pages, of which there are several, but two receive the most user interaction. While one of my research assistants and I collected data about Kajp's social media accounts and discussed them on numerous occasions we have not written about them yet. I share some of what we observed here because it is illustrative of the importance of studying migrant sending communities as an network of interconnected people, places, and economies.

Kajp has a Facebook profile (with 2,388 friends and 628 followers) and an Instagram profile (with 906 followers). Both are moderated collectively and while Instagram only allows for someone with the account username and password to post content, the Facebook page is more open. The Instagram account is exclusively posts of scenic pictures of landscapes, plants, and animals in and around Kajp. Few people are in the photos. The accompanying hashtags #kajpismydestination #oaxacahaseverything #magicalmexico #tehuantepecoaxaca #naturalscenery[5] link Kajp's content to users

[5] The hashtags are translated to English and anonymized by the author.

interested in Oaxaca, Mexico, and scenic locations. The Facebook group is less curated, but we noticed that it is a mix of official announcements shared by the authorities in Kajp, announcements shared by people living in Kajp, pictures of everyday life within and outside of Kajp (some of which get shared on the Instagram account), and re-posts of other content (news, funny videos, memes). Of course, followers comment on the posts. Followers include but are not limited to people who live in Kajp, are from Kajp but live elsewhere, have visited Kajp, and work in organizations that have completed projects in Kajp.

Social media was important to fieldwork because it was an additional forum for people living in Kajp and the diaspora to know about my research and to be in touch with me. When not in Kajp, social media was an important method of communication. A cell phone and the phone number attached to it is not always reliable as phones change hands, break, or become lost or stolen. Facebook profiles stay the same, are accessible on cellular service networks or Wifi, and Mexico's ubiquitous cellular service network Telcel offers unlimited data on Facebook's messaging application, making it a popular and convenient way to stay in touch. During fieldwork I acquired hundreds of new Facebook friends and some of my photographs were shared on Kajp's main social media profiles. I received messages from people in other parts of Mexico and in the United States who saw these posts and had heard about *la guëra* (person with a fair complexion) doing research in Kajp. Through these encounters, as well as through our observations of social media, I expanded the number of research participants and the geography of my research project and learned more about the everyday lives of people from Kajp in multiple places.

In addition to collecting data on social media throughout fieldwork, I adjusted my methods to be able to conduct participant observation and interviews with the people who travel to and from Kajp on a weekly, monthly, and annual basis. For example, some of my first contacts from Kajp were young people living in Oaxaca City who coordinated a large shipment of supplies after the earthquake damaged dozens of houses and other forms of infrastructure. In order to better investigate the economic geographies of the community, I shifted the boundaries of my research project to include some of the other places where people from Kajp are making their lives. I spent time with people from Kajp in other parts of the state of Oaxaca including: Ixtepec, Juchitán, Oaxaca City, Soledad Etla, Tehuantepec, and Tlacolula. In addition, I met people from Kajp living in Iowa and Kentucky in the United States. In almost every instance, I initially met the research participant when they were staying with family in Kajp and they invited me to visit their home. That I accepted invitations, was willing to travel to visit people, and brought gifts (and always carried gifts from other people for other people) helped to establish trust with research participants. These meetings gave me perspectives on how and why people maintain a connection with that goes beyond the familial and includes the communal governance and collective labor of maintaining life in Kajp. I share these reflections here because these aspects of my fieldwork did not make it explicitly into the three subsequent chapters, but offer rich material for further analysis and theorizing on how the territory of Kajp expands beyond its borders in Oaxaca, including digital spaces. I return to this in section 5.2 on future research in the concluding chapter.

1.3.3 Research limitations

My study, like any other research project, has limitations. Among the main ones, I identify the following: my inability to speak Mixe and the coronavirus pandemic. A less significant limitation concerned my navigation of the relations between the town itself and the municipality in which it is located.

I undertook Mixe language study which included learning and reviewing Mixe words and phrases with my hosts during mealtime, reading books dedicated to Mixe linguistics (Hoogshagen & Bartholomew, 1993; Hoogshagen & Hoogshagen, 1997), listening to Radio Jënpoj XHJP 107.9 FM (Mixe radio station in Santa María Tlahuitoltepec with streaming online http://jenpojradio.info/inicio/), and assisting members of the committee for the preservation of Mixe language and culture in the planning of a week-long Mixe language workshop for local children. Despite my efforts at learning Mixe, I never became proficient beyond greetings and answering simple questions with a word or two. Therefore, there were moments in participant observation that I did not fully understand, such as one meeting of the general assembly where the mayor at the time spoke entirely in Mixe. This occurrence was rare, as almost everyone spoke Spanish and not everyone, particularly younger generations, spoke fluent Mixe. It was more common that I missed the content of conversations in Mixe that were happening around me, among groups of women with whom I was spending time. Twice, my host and research assistant Alejandra translated between Mixe and Spanish when a research participant preferred to speak Mixe.

The second major fieldwork impact was the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which was in March 2020 in Mexico. At the end of February, I was in the town. We heard news of COVID-19, particularly in China and the United States, each day on

Radio Jënpoj and as we eventually heard of isolated cases in Mexico, I knew we would hear of them in Oaxaca, but I didn't know when. I travelled to Oaxaca City on February 26 and within days there was news of a case in Oaxaca. I write more about this moment in Chapter 4, section 4.5, but to summarize, the pandemic cut short the last 4-5 months of fieldwork. During that time, I had planned on spending about 2 weeks out of each month in Kajp, analyzing data and writing. I wanted to share what I was thinking about with research participants as I was writing and continue conversations that were started during participant observation and interviews. I also wanted to formally end what would have been a two-year research stint by offering a bound book or printed pamphlet summarizing my findings to the local authorities and participants, many of whom do not have regular access to email addresses, social media accounts, or personal computing devices for receiving digital documents. Unable to travel to the town in those first months of the pandemic, I was in touch with people who did have cell phones and social media accounts, asking them to please send my best wishes to others. In June, when it was apparent the pandemic was not going to end any time soon and I would be returning to the United States, I arranged to travel to Ixtepec, a major commuter destination for people from the town. Through one of the drivers, I sent a package to my hosts and research assistant Alejandra which included a formal letter to the local authorities about the status of my research project and my intent to return when it was safer for everyone, handwritten letters to about a dozen key research participants, and several gifts for Alejandra including a cell phone pre-programmed with my content info and a few thousand pesos so she and others could buy credit to access local Wifi. Alejandra called me a few days later and continues to call me 2-4 times a month, usually on Sunday nights.

An additional, but less significant, fieldwork restriction I faced had to do with the political relationship between the town where I did fieldwork and the larger municipal government. I originally planned on interviewing authorities at the municipal level about remittances in the region. However, when I proposed this to the authorities in the town, they expressed a desire that I not meet with municipal authorities. As my time in the field progressed, I surmised that this desire may have to do with several regional disputes: one over territory and resources between the town and a neighboring community and another over the distribution of state and federal funds between the town and municipality. Not wanting to anger the local authorities and people at my main field site, I opted to forgo interviews with municipal authorities.

1.4 Structure and sequence of chapters

This dissertation is organized into three chapters, each of which is a stand-alone article for publication in a geography journal. The first article, "Challenging the financialization of remittances agenda through Indigenous women's practices in Oaxaca," was published in *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* (Smyth, 2021). In it, I investigate claims made in remittance policy literature that finance is empowering to women through a detailed case study based in the research site. I examine women's experiences managing remittances and their work in the absence of men who have migrated using ethnographic methods to collect data from the women themselves, and policy documents generated by international organizations and the Mexican government. I join other scholars in their critical analysis of the "global governance of remittances flows" (Lindley, Forthcoming), specifically in its most recent form, the financialization of

remittances. I find that the essentializing claims that women who have access to financial services will use money more productively and feel empowered found in policy literature are limited and do not reflect the diversity of women's experiences managing remittances. Instead, I argue that categories like productive and non-productive are limited and therefore conceal some of the ways that women manage remittances, supported through examples of how the categories productive and non-productive use of remittances exist together, particularly in how women take up various forms collective work, which is often seen as non-productive but in fact generates productivity. I also show that it is through this collective work that women often exhibit feelings of empowerment, and I argue that narrowly defining empowerment in financial terms like the policy literature does, relegates other sources of validation as secondary or even as obstacles to financialization, something that feminist Marxists and scholars of critical remittance and finance studies have expressed concern about (S. Federici, 2014; Gago, 2020; Guermond, 2020; Haiven, 2014, 2017).

The second article, "Accountability, Refusal and Autonomy for Unsettling Research Methods," has been through one round of peer review at *Antipode* and at the recommendation of the handling editor is being revised for resubmission by December 2021. It is located in recent scholarship that discusses how research methods can be important inroads to decolonizing geography (Asselin & Basile, 2018; Vasquez-Fernandez et al., 2017; Weir, Woelfle-Erskine, & Fuller, 2019; Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020). Here, I examine my own research methods, asking *how am I unsettling and re-shaping accepted practices of fieldwork?* To answer this question, I drew on my own field notes to make a sort of autoethnography and used archival materials from the University of Chicago

Library's Special Collections Research Center to discuss researcher accountability, ethnographic refusal and Indigenous autonomy in southern Mexico.

The third article, "Making Futures: Remittances and Labor in the Governance Structures of Communal Territories for Reproducing Life," is ready to be submitted for peer review at the *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. Responding to recent calls from economic geographers to study the work of managing remittances in migrant sending communities (Guermond, 2021; Winders & Smith, 2019) and ongoing calls from social reproduction theorists to study life-making practices beyond the household (T. Bhattacharya, 2017a; Silvia Federici, 2004; Fraser, 2013; Hester, 2018), I examine how the waged labor done by people who migrate and the remittances that they send supports communal social reproduction in Kajp. Many studies on the ways that human migration transforms social reproduction focus on family life. Instead, I analyze social reproduction at the community scale, which I argue is what makes it possible to secure livable futures in the midst of ongoing crises and precarity.

Following these three chapters, I briefly conclude. The conclusion is followed by an appendix of research methods and a list of references.

1.5 Conclusion: My motivation

I research and write in the hopes that what I produce ignites the imagination. I try to create knowledge that expands how we understand social economic lives so that people might see what exists and what could be possible beyond the power structures of global patriarchies, capitalisms and colonialisms. Economies full of difference, nuance, place specific practices, and more help people survive and maybe even undermine and undo

oppressive systems. I study and write in the hope that what I produce will inspire existing modes of economic difference and solidarities across them.

CHAPTER 2. CHALLENGING THE FINANCIALIZATION OF REMITTANCES AGENDA THROUGH INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S PRACTICES IN OAXACA

2.1 Introduction

"I did it all. I was mother and father." - Paulina[6]

Paulina and I sat at her kitchen table with warm mugs of *café de olla*, a sweet black coffee, between our hands and a plate of homemade bread between us. Over the course of an hour, she told me what her life was like when her husband emigrated from Mexico to the United States. Paulina cared for their three children, cleaned and organized the home, supervised the cultivation of land, monitored finances, and participated in collective local politics. She maintained her primary responsibility for the day-to-day social reproduction that keeps her family going as she assumed the political responsibilities and agricultural work of her husband. As she says above, she did it all.

Paulina's life is an entry point to the minor geographies of remittances that are often missed in the large-scale policy literature, texts which are frequently dominated by summary statements such as: 1.6 million households in Mexico are estimated to receive up to US $33.7 billion in remittances annually. Statistics at this scale tend to be accompanied by a common claim: the money is important for economic development and it could be more beneficial if it was funneled away from consumptive use and channeled towards productive uses such as saving, investment or development finance that generates economic growth (Adams Jr. & Page, 2005; Orozco, 2002; Ratha, 2007). Usually focusing on the responsibility of the individual to have the wherewithal to invest the money wisely,

[6] All quotations from interviewees are translated from Spanish to English by the author.

this agenda often includes a gendered component: if women link their remittances to financial services, they will become empowered and lift themselves out of poverty (Anzoategui, Demirgüç-Kunt, & Martínez Pería, 2011; Villasenor, West, & Lewis, 2016; World Bank, 2019a).

This paper challenges two flawed dichotomies underpinning representations common across the literature linking remittances to finance: first, that remittances are either squandered on consumer goods or rendered productive, and second, that women are disempowered or empowered when remittances are linked to financial institutions. I challenge these dichotomies through an ethnographic study of the financial geographies of remittances and migration that are rooted in Ni ap Ayuuk kajp (Kajp),[7] an Indigenous Mixe community in Oaxaca, Mexico. The experiences of Paulina and her neighbors are rich in details that muddy these dichotomies. I analyze their stories through the lens of postcolonial and feminist scholarship that centers the experiences of women and *comunalidad*, a central knowledge-system of Kajp, an approach that I argue is necessary to construct a more thorough understanding of the diversity of economic lives. Scholars in critical development and finance studies have critiqued the universalism of the global economic development agenda, particularly those that preclude gender (Roberts, 2004), and those that emanate from global institutions and banking interests in the Global North (Escobar, 2008; Santos, 2008). Feminist scholars have similarly challenged overarching narratives about the movement of global capital (development, finance) for reducing the complexity of social lives and for being too abstract (Ho, 2009; Massey, 1994; McDowell,

[7] The name of the community and the names of all interview participants have been anonymized. Ni ap Ayuuk kajp is a pseudonym suggested by a research participant and means historic Mixe community.

1999). And others have shown how abstract narratives can be underpinned by simple dichotomies (Bondi, 1992; Kobayashi & Peake, 1994; Rose, 1993). I join these critical voices and their calls for detailed empirical work on how people negotiate capital flows in everyday lives (Nagar, Lawson, McDowell, & Hanson, 2002; Werner et al., 2017; Winders, 2016). My analysis moves the discourse on remittances from the decontextualized agenda to detailed empirical terrain based on the knowledge systems and economic networks of one Indigenous community.

2.2 Locating remittances in the global financial inclusion agenda

According to many economic policy analysts, remittances are an under-leveraged asset for migrants' communities and the national economies of their home countries (Orozco, 2002; Ratha, 2007). Indeed, in recent years policy recommendations and reports issued from international institutions working in this area, including the World Bank and United Nations (UN), have strongly advocated for the need to bring remittances into the formal financial system. The International Fund for Agricultural Development, (a UN agency) has facilitated the Financing Facility for Remittances since 2006. Its mission is to increase "the impact of remittances on development by promoting innovative investments … supporting financially inclusive mechanisms; enhancing competition; empowering migrants and their families through financial education and inclusion; and encouraging migrant investment and entrepreneurship" (IFAD, n.d.). The World Bank (2019b) listed "leveraging remittances for financial inclusion" as one of the areas where it will be "deepening its engagement" on international migration. The same year, it called for "promoting financial inclusion, skills training, and access to finance" and more specifically

"financial education" for migrant workers and "financial literacy" for families "left behind" (World Bank, 2019a, pp. 38, 44) citing the importance of deploying "remittance channels to increase financial access to poor households" (World Bank, 2019a, p. 49). These initiatives contend that remittance senders and receivers will turn to banks for the money transfer services and then they will access additional services such as credit, loans, and savings (as Nurse, (2018) argues in a paper written for the UN's Committee for Development Policy). In some cases, scholarly work has provided support for such policies, illustrating with empirical modeling how remittances put people in a position to access more financial services (Chowdhury, 2016; Giuliano & Ruiz-Arranz, 2009; Gupta, Pattillo, & Wagh, 2009; Toxopeus & Lensink, 2008).

Policy documents from and connected to the National Board of Financial Inclusion (CONAIF is the Spanish acronym) illustrate where remittances fit in the financial inclusion policies in Mexico.[8] In these reports, analysts tend to measure financial inclusion through "access points." An access point is the location where people access financial services. An access point could be a bank, automated teller machine, business accepting debit or credit as payment, digital payment system, cash transfer social program (Prospera[9]), or a retail store with banking (Coppel, Elektra[10]). Policy documents argue that many people lack

[8] For more on how remittances are being financialized in Mexico, specifically in the state of Puebla and how this process is gendered, see Kunz & Ramírez, 2021.
[9] An anti-poverty program that gives regular stipends to women, Prospera benefits 6.8 million households in Mexico. See Morvant-Roux, Angulo, Carmona, Crucifix, & González, 2018; Parrillat & Gamboa, 2016 for more on the program's history, including its role in Mexico's financial inclusion agenda.
[10] Coppel and Elektra are combination finance centers and retail stores that sell appliances, computers, electronics, furniture, telephones and more, as well as offer credit cards and different types of loans and savings options. See Correa & Girón, 2019 for more on how retail stores with banking are important conduits to financial services in Latin America.

access points, particularly in the "southern region" (composed of seven states of which Oaxaca is one) where it is estimated that 60% of the population lacks a bank account (INEGI, 2018). Moreover, while people may frequently use one of the aforementioned access points, it may not offer them a whole "portfolio of financial products and services" (CONAIF, 2016, p. 27). A Center for Latin American Monetary Studies report, also cited by CONAIF, estimates that financial inclusion for remittance receivers in Mexico is low. The majority of remittances (95%) sent from the United States to Mexico are sent through electronic transfers paid out in cash at an access point but only 34% of remittance receivers have a checking or savings account, only 8% have a credit card, and 26% have credit with a store, (Cervantes González, 2018; CONAIF, 2018). Much like the agenda put forth by the World Bank and UN, policy in Mexico stresses the potential of the remittance transfer: when the 10 million remittance receivers in Mexico go to an access site to pick up their remittances in cash, they will be drawn to other financial services such as lines of credit or loans.

At the center of these global policies is a desire to transform remittances from a monthly gift - for instance, of US $200[11] between family members - into finance that generates profit by virtue of its capture by the formal financial system. Scholarly work has reviewed how international institutions target remittances as an under-managed asset and work with governments and financial actors to craft policies that channel remittances as economic development (Bakker, 2015; Faist, 2008; Gamlen, 2014). Lindley (Forthcoming) characterizes these long-term trends as a "global governance of remittances flows" that has

[11] Mexican migrants living in the United States send an average of US $200 once a month (Consejo Nacional de Población, 2019).

emerged in the last two decades. The most recent financialization of remittances is a part of ongoing moves by international institutions, governments, and financial actors to formalize and securitize remittances, and funnel remittances into development initiatives. This agenda, as it is being framed by scholars, is yet another attempt to scale-up remittances from "non-productive" money that privately changes hands and to capitalize on it by putting it into savings, investment, or development initiatives (Datta, 2017; D. Hudson, 2008; Kunz, 2012; Silvey, 2009).

The polices that advocate for remittances to be a component in financial inclusion carry promises that often have gendered consequences. They promise that when women have direct access to money and financial services, they will make their own decisions, use money more productively, and feel empowered (Anzoategui et al., 2011; de Vasconcelos, Casano, & Jarzombek, 2019; World Bank, 2019a). These literatures depict a typical migrant as male and productive: he moves to a new place, is a waged laborer, and sends remittances. On the receiving end of the money is a woman who must be made productive for development to occur (Marchand, 2015). However, the woman who does not migrate is portrayed as non-productive, a wife waiting for remittances (Kunz, 2011, 2015). As research has shown, cultural and gendered processes that inform remittance practices are more nuanced than this binary suggests (Hoang & Yeoh, 2015; King & Vullnetari, 2009; Wong, 2006) and deserve close attention.

2.3 Feminist and postcolonial geographies for challenging the financialization of remittances agenda

The work of feminist and postcolonial scholars is useful for challenging and moving beyond the gendered dichotomies of the financialization of remittances agenda. Feminist economic geographers have long pushed for detailed studies that call for attention to social differences in how people experience spaces of capital (Massey, 1993, 1994). Geographical studies of financial subjectivities at the household and community scale give insight into the unevenness of claims such as those found in the financialization of remittances agenda (Hall, 2012). Nagar et al. call for studies that illustrate "multilayered politics of difference [which] constitute the everyday politics and realities of globalization," (2002, p. 275). Werner et al. argue that a part of the social change that feminist economic geographers ought to struggle for is in "challenging and redefining the conditions under which knowledge about material processes is produced" (2017, p. 3). I mobilize their work to counter the financialization of remittances agenda discussed in the previous section in order to construct a more thorough understanding of the diversity of economic lives.

As I illustrate the lived experiences of women who are receiving and managing remittances in this paper, I place *comunalidad* in a central analytical role. The realities of women living in Kajp are the starting point for my analysis and theorization. Kajp is located high in the Sierra Madre mountain range and the territory has been cared for by the Ayuuk people for generations (Mixe-Zoque descendents, commonly referred to as Mixes). Therefore, I consider their practices through the framework of *comunalidad*, a Mixe and

Zapotec epistemology[12]. *Comunalidad* is composed of four elements: territory, collective work, communal governance, and celebration (Díaz Gómez, 2004; Martínez Luna, 2002, 2003, 2010; Robles, 2017; Robson, Klooster, Worthen, & Hernández-Díaz, 2018). The four elements are how people work together to maintain the community, performing (usually unpaid) collective work duties called *cargos* and *tequios*. *Cargos* are administrative jobs that range from president, secretary or treasurer serving the entire town or positions on specific committees responsible for maintaining services like water, the health clinic, and schools. *Tequios* are collective labor, often on public works projects like clearing land, repairing a road, electrical line, or water pipeline. Communal governance takes its highest form when all town citizens come together in meetings of the assembly to debate important issues and serve as local political representatives. And finally, there are the annual celebrations to honor the patron saint of the community. While this paper primarily focuses on collective work and communal governance, these four elements play a part in how the people of Kajp defend their territory in a continuous evolving relationship that is a crucial part of self-determination and autonomy (Cruz, 2010; Gil, 2018).

Analyzing the experiences of women in Kajp through the lens of *comunalidad* allows me to question the analysis and findings in the finance and remittance literatures, which have become hegemonic in global and national economic policy debates (Escobar, 2008; Santos, 2008). My work avoids applying essentializing ideas from these agendas that reinforce normative claims about development and gender (Lunden, 2006; Mohanty, 2003;

[12] While I focus on *comunalidad* in the context of Oaxaca, the characteristics of *comunalidad* exist across Mexico and Latin America, and the debate on community is long and complex. See Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2009; Patzi Paco, 2004; Quintero Weir, 2013; Wolf, 1957 for more.

Predmore, 2020). Refusing to leave local knowledges at the margins, I center and valorize the lived experiences of Indigenous women (Marchand, 2015). I contend that the notion that women will be empowered if their received remittances are linked to financial services perpetuates the pervasive stereotypes that women are one, not currently empowered, and that two, they are passive, dependent receivers of remittances. Such stereotypes are linked to what Mora calls the "economic niches and naturalized tropes of racialized inferiorization" (2017, p. 10). In the Mexican context, these discourses of dis-empowerment are rooted in the colonial era, when Indigenous peoples in Mexico were forced into positions of servitude to the Spanish and others. This colonial violence crystallized gendered and racialized tropes that depicted Indigenous peoples in Mexico as infantilized, innocent, and in need of instruction. These tropes persist in the present day and inform current national and global dis- course that replicates paternalistic arguments (in this case, remittance discourse) with consequences on lived conditions (Mora, 2017; Novo, 2005; Saldívar, 2014). In contrast, I present women's decision-making processes and feelings about remittances in the gendered and place-based context of *comunalidad* in order to situate an analysis of what is productive and empowering in women's experiences, individual and collective (Hill Collins, 2000).

2.4 Methodology

My overall methodology is informed by feminist scholarship on the co-production of knowledge (Benson & Nagar, 2006; Caretta, 2015; Haraway, 1991; Kobayashi, 1994; Rose, 1997); cross-disciplinary scholarship on de-colonial research with Indigenous communities (Asselin & Basile, 2018; L. T. Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012); and

research that engages with Indigenous worldviews (Mora, 2017; A. Simpson, 2014; Todd, 2016). I have begun to elaborate on the theoretical ideas that informed the methods for this research project elsewhere (Smyth, 2019, Under Review).

Since 2015, I have spent at least part of every year in Oaxaca, and one year in Kajp. Recognizing that engaging the collective of citizens is fundamental in Oaxacan life, I presented my project three times to the elected local officials. I also met with them every 4-8 weeks to discuss the project. In addition, during my initial 6 months in Kajp I worked to gain the consent of smaller collectives and individuals in the community rather than immediately starting the data collection process. I consistently discussed the research questions and motivation behind the project, as well as my positionality with research participants. I listened to their thoughts on the topics of migration, remittances, and women's work, weighed concerns about me and the proposed research, and adjusted accordingly. I worked with four research assistants, two of whom are from Kajp. Together we interviewed over 50 people and completed approximately 600 hours of participant observation in Kajp and with members of the community who emigrated to Oaxaca City, Tehuantepec, cities in the Central Valleys region of Oaxaca, and parts of the United States. The stories presented in this article are about married women between the ages of 30 and 80. As such, they are not representative of the whole community, but offer a snapshot that is crucial for under- standing the "microlevel decisions [that] add up to shape the much-heralded global flows of remittances in hundreds of billions of dollars" (Carling, 2014, p. 251), and to situate our knowledge of capital in everyday processes (Ho, 2009). Both participant observation and interviews provided information that helped me to map how

women's activities and labor under *comunalidad* change with migration and the presence of remittances.

2.5 Women's practices in Ni ap Ayuuk kajp

Kajp is home to one thousand people, the majority of whom work in subsistence agriculture, cultivating corn and beans, and growing coffee to sell to regional buyers. The economic, political, and social geography of Kajp extends beyond the boundaries of the town itself. Residents' lives and work are linked to the political economy of the Isthmus region of Oaxaca, a bustling commercial zone since the pre-Hispanic era. Truck drivers transport people and goods daily between Kajp and the cities of Ixtepec, Juchitán, and Tehuantepec, 100 kilometers away. Approximately 500 people originally from Kajp currently live in neighboring mountain communities, in Isthmus cities, as well as further afield, in Cabo San Lucas, Guadalajara, Matías Romero, Mérida, Mexico City, Monterrey, Oaxaca City, Salina Cruz, and the states of California, Kentucky, Virginia, Washington, and North Carolina in the United States.[13] All of these places are significant to understanding remittances and women's economic lives. While this research focuses on women living in Kajp, they and their families frequently travel through a multi-centered network that inflects economic activity.

While a detailed analysis of gendered labor and political participation in Oaxaca is beyond the scope of this paper, some explanations are helpful for understanding women's experiences. In Oaxaca, gender relations influence women's natural resource access, land

[13] This study considers remittances sent from people who migrate internationally and within Mexico. For more on the significance of both see Cohen & Ramirez Rios, 2016; Sandoval-Cervantes, 2017; Shelton & Skeldon, 2010.

ownership, property, labor, and political participation (Nader, 1990; Stephen, 1991). Since the 1990s, Mexico has gradually ushered in legislation at the federal and state level that recognizes Indigenous communal systems of government, and in the process, has contended with the fact that women were not always included in many of its processes. Women's formal political participation remains low despite legislation to raise involvement. Of 570 municipalities in Oaxaca, there are only 25 women presidents for the term 2016–2019.[14]

In Kajp women have been active in collective political bodies for several generations. Women own and inherit land, and they are *comuneras*, members of the collective governing body that manages the territory. They vote in local elections, attend and speak at meetings and smaller governing bodies. Although men serve most *cargos* (communal governance positions) from year to year, women are also named and elected by the assembly to do this important service. This is significant for women's empowerment in Kajp, because while it is legally mandatory for women to participate in the local election process and to be nominated for *cargos* in the state of Oaxaca, there have been many documented cases of towns denying women *cargo* and *comunera* status (Velázquez, 2003; Worthen, 2015). These broader debates in Oaxaca about gendered labor and political participation inform my interpretations of what constitutes productive and non-productive remittance use as well as women's feelings of dis/empowerment.

2.5.1 Challenging the notion of what is productive use

[14] For more on how women's roles in the gendered processes shape Oaxacan life see Cohen, Everett, Polsky, & Montiel-Ishino, 2009; Fox & Bada, 2008; Velázquez, 2003; Worthen, 2015.

The first of the two flawed dichotomies that I address is the notion that a 'productive' use of remittances is constrained to "investment in financial instruments and business ventures," (IFAD, 2015, p. 29). As critics have stated, this definition of productivity is arbitrary and fuels a narrow view of what constitutes development (De Haas, 2005, 2010; Zarate-Hoyos, 2004). According to my interviews, the ways that women in Kajp spend remittances pushes against and expands this definition of productive use. Though they do not use all the financial instruments offered by formal financial institutions, the women of Kajp invest remittances in business ventures, household expenses, and education, which policy literature labels as productive. And they spend remittances on maintaining the collective work (*cargo* and *tequio*) and communal governance that shapes the community, a practice that is not considered in the financialization of remittances agenda. These ways of managing remittances, when analyzed together, challenge the dichotomy.

Productive use: investing in a small business and education.

Paulina's husband emigrated to the United States for five years. She says of the money he sent back:

> He earned a lot there. When he went for the first time, that's when we bought the pickup truck ... When he sent me money, I didn't waste any of it, and we didn't use all of it, I saved some in the bank, I opened a bank account. It was important to buy groceries, soap, corn, everything ... We paid all the pending *tequio* expenses. When he returned, none were outstanding. This is what I learned. I went to pay his part, each meeting, each *tequio*, I went in the afternoons to pay, so that when he returned the fees hadn't accumulated. I always did this.

At first glance, Paulina might be construed as an example of best practices straight out of the remittance handbook(s). She appears to be a diligent saver who made a secure investment. She opened a bank account and saved money. The money was then invested in the purchase of a pickup truck when her husband returned to Kajp, which he used to start a small business. Using the pickup, he drove daily between the Kajp and a city 100 kilometers away, transporting passengers and hauling cargo - mostly grocery items like cooking oil, milk, and beer to re-stock local stores, as well as the occasional heavy load of construction supplies like sacks of cement. Now their adult son does the same work. Thus, while it may have looked like a purchase, the pick-up truck was a long-term investment that has provided weekly income to Paulina's family for more than a decade. Through its cargo services, it enables others to do business, including women, which I will return to in the next section on empowerment.

In addition, Paulina spent the money on necessities like groceries and paying for her children's education. While the financialization of remittances literature sometimes classifies this type of money management as non-productive or less productive, I observed that Paulina and other women spoke about education as an investment and as something very important to them. Until recently, there was no secondary or high school in Kajp (both opened in the last 20 years). Paulina and another woman, Diana, used remittances to cover their children's school fees, frequent travel between school and Kajp, and the cost of room and board. Paulina's children traveled to a nearby town five kilometers away for secondary school, and then they attended high school in two different cities over 100 kilometers away. Diana's daughters went to high school in another town 40 kilometers away. This education at a distance was significant in the lives of women because they invested a substantial

amount of time and money in sending their children far away. After Diana's son finished high school, he migrated to the state of Baja to work in tourism and sent money to pay for his two younger sisters' education. Paulina's daughters finished high school and one completed her bachelor's degree. They now send money from Oaxaca City and the northern state of Tamaulipas where they each live. Paulina and Diana described these remittances as vital as they and their husbands (who both live in Kajp as well) transition into old age.

Scholarly work has explored the problematic divide between non-productive and productive remittances which often falls along gendered responsibilities in transnational families (Herrera, 2012; Hoang & Yeoh, 2015). I follow their framework and consider how we might envision remittances as economic activity weighted in social meaning that is shaped and reshaped by intimate relationships (Zelizer, 1994). Parents investing remittances in the education of their children and those children sending remittances to care for their parents is illustrative of how families manage money and negotiate responsibilities together. The framing suggests that remittances are never not productive and that women are always involved in managing them in some way, contradicting the stereotype that they are passively dependent.

Women's practices that do not fit within the confines of the productive use dichotomy.

In addition to spending remittances on small businesses and education, women in Kajp pay for their husband's absences in the form of fees to the local government. When men miss a *tequio* (collective work day), or cannot complete a *cargo* (year-long nominated administrative service to the community), they must either pay a fee or appoint someone

to do the labor in their absence. Women have various strategies for fulfilling their absent husband's responsibilities. They either do the collective labor in their husband's place, have a family member (usually male) do the work, pay someone (usually male) to do it, or pay a fee to the local government. Women reported that the money to pay someone to work or pay the fee frequently comes from remittances. Paulina paid laborers to work her husband's agricultural lands and to do his *tequio* work. Rather than pay fees for his absence at local meetings (communal governance), Paulina opted to attend in his place.

My research assistants and I spoke to several women who acted as representatives for their absent husbands. Mariela completed two *cargos* on behalf of her husband while he was in the US. Diana's husband went to the United States for two years. Their son was in high school at the time and he commuted the distance of 10 kilometers round-trip (sometimes by foot) on most weekends to complete his father's *tequio* obligations. She fulfilled the *cargo* responsibility by working in the local health clinic on Sundays. The women explained that working in this way ensured the fees did not accumulate and that the family did not have to spend remittances on fees.

The spending of remittances on collective labor responsibilities of absent men does not fit the categories of productive or non-productive use. I argue that while paying fees does not invest remittances, it is productive in that it compensates the community for missed labor. Furthermore, the work that women and their families do for absent men is productive. It is economic and political work that contributes to communal governance and household reproduction – again blurring distinctions between notions of what is reproductive and productive labor in the household and the community (Mitchell, Marston,

& Katz, 2003). Thus, the dichotomy of productive/non-productive conceals other practices, such as these, that women in Kajp have for managing remittances.

2.5.2 Challenging the notion that women are not empowered

The second dichotomy is the claim that financialization brings empowerment to women. This assumes that women exist in one kind of world, one defined by international institutions, national governments, and financial actors shaping policies like the ones analyzed for this paper. The universalisms they propagate are part of the "broad political and economic structures, cultural assumptions and discourses, notions of human rights, laws and practices in which women and men seek to survive and even flourish in marginalized communities around the world," (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002, p. 4). The financialization of remittances agenda assumes that empowerment is an outcome when it is also a process (ibid.). Women live in many worlds and their knowledge systems and everyday experiences offer them multiple forms of empowerment within the financialization of remittances agenda and not considered by it. In this section, I provide examples of how women's feelings of empowerment come from many of their life experiences: sometimes managing money and other times through the praxis of *comunalidad*.

Managing money is empowering.

"He gives me all of the money he earns. When he goes to work, they pay him for the week, and he gives it to me." -Nancy

To understand how women feel about economic processes, my research assistants and I asked how their families generate income, whether they have bank accounts, and whether they have borrowed money. Most of the women that we interviewed were engaged in more than one of the following income-generating activities on a semi-regular basis: waged agricultural and construction work, selling food they grew or prepared, mending clothing, caring for children, renting rooms or working in one of the eight retail stores in Kajp that sell food, clothing, medicine, tools, printing, copying, and Wifi access. A few women embroidered blouses and regularly sent bundles of them on Paulina's family's pick-up truck to be sold by market vendors in Juchitán. One woman carried catalogues from direct sales companies like Avon. She took orders from people in Kajp, phoned them in, had them shipped to a woman in Ixtepec, where Paulina's son would pick them up and bring them to her.

Almost every conversation my research assistants and I had with men and women about managing household income and expenses illuminated how women are involved in making decisions about money. Many people reported that men and women work together, some told us that their family (adult children, son and daughter-in-laws, parents) make decisions together, and it was common to hear men of all ages say that their wife manages their money. And like Nancy, whose quote introduces this section, women frequently exclaimed without hesitation that they manage the money in their households, sometimes laughing at the thought that anyone else would do it.

There is no bank in Kajp, there is no automated teller machine nor a money wiring service. Residents travel four hours to the closest cities to receive a remittance transfer deposit money, or send money to a relative in another place. Just under half of the women

we spoke with do not keep a bank account, and those that do have accounts at banks or the combination retail/banking centers in cities in the Isthmus. Even fewer women told us that they have taken a loan with a bank. About half of the people who we spoke to that borrowed money said that they did so through a coffee cooperative (the upcoming coffee harvest is collateral and can be exchanged in place of repaying the loan with cash) or borrowing from a friend (particularly their Godfather, a relationship that comes with financial obligations). The hesitation people expressed over borrowing money from a bank is best expressed in the words of Rocío, who said "with what would I pay it back? I couldn't sleep if I took a loan from the bank!"

Rocío's answer implies stress about owing an outside institution money and her feelings of uncertainty in being able to pay it back. In contrast to Rocío, Paulina described her family as hard workers who quickly paid off any money they owed. She was proud that they had borrowed money and paid it back. However, I do not categorize Paulina as empowered because she was proud of borrowing money and paying it back or Rocío as disempowered because she felt stressed about the prospect of borrowing money. Their responses suggest that they are knowledgeable of their family's economic situation and active in making decisions about what is best for them.

The description in this section offers a fairly rosy glance at women who are empowered in their households and entrepreneurially empowered in their community. However, empowerment is a ubiquitous term in discourse on economic development and financialization that has been criticized for being co-opted (Walker, Jones III, Roberts, & Fröhling, 2007) and exacerbating inequalities (Haiven, 2014). It should be noted that we also spoke with women who did not control their household's money, though those

examples were few and far between. A richer understanding of the multiple ways that class, Indigenous identities, and gender intersect in Mixe and Zapotec daily life is beyond the scope of this paper, and has been done well elsewhere (Stephen, 1991; Vázquez García, 2018). I present these details as a window into the breadth of women's income-generating work and their place in financial decision-making.

The work of comunalidad is empowering.

More than talking to women about their household incomes and banking, we talked to women about the work they do each day and their obligations to the local collective. We also asked women to describe how these duties make them feel. Mariela served two *cargos* for her husband in his absence. She was one of the spokespeople on the committee that manages the kindergarten and the treasurer on the committee for the primary school. Her responsibilities included attending meetings about the schools, liaising with teachers, cleaning the classrooms and school grounds, managing the school's finances, and reporting to the larger community. We asked Mariela what she thought about the work:

> The truth is that I liked it because I left the house. I was no longer always in the house and only with my children. When I had cargo in the primary school, I didn't know how to do the work, I didn't finish elementary school, but I learned because they taught me: you make the calculations like this, deposits, withdrawals. I didn't know how to do that or what it was. I felt [*cargo*] was worth it because I learned something.

This example illustrates how gendered labor roles are changing in Kajp. *Cargo* took Mariela out of the house and into public space where she learned new things. It showed her that women are capable of doing the work that was previously the responsibility of men. Her experiences doing *cargos* and those of women like her are changing ideas about whose

work is recognized and valued by the community. This renders the previous rationales for limiting women's participation in communal governance (such as claiming that because women did not do communal labor they might have a less valid or informed voice) harder to substantiate. People consistently told us that there used to be strong opinions that women could not do the work of men but that this has changed (although a few still hold onto the old ideas). It is clear that Mariela feels personally empowered, and at the same time, the way her story illustrates the changing gendered labor of *comunalidad* is descriptive of how women are collectively empowered. She told us:

> At that time [before] there was still more *machismo*. The municipal authority never supported us, on the contrary, they took our money. Now it is different, now women participate, they have a voice and a vote.

When Mariela says "they took our money" she is referring to the local government's requirement that women pay fees when their absent husbands missed *tequio*. Prior to women being permitted to do the communal labor of men, their only option was to pay another person to do the work or to pay fees in their husband's absence. Numerous people reported that the fees were set by the municipal authority, that the fees varied, and women didn't feel like they could contest the amount. Now women say they have more options in how to manage obligatory work that serves the community and remittances, and that they can participate in the political spaces which make decisions about how to manage the two. Martina expands on this point: she described that it is important to have knowledge of how community money is acquired and spent. For her, going to assemblies is an "obligation" not just to herself but to the entire community, because it is a central space where decisions are made that impact women and their families. She sees the assembly as a space where women can speak and influence such decisions.

While the new responsibilities that women take may be shifting the expectations for gendered labor and political participation in Kajp and contributing to women's individual and collective empowerment, it has not been without obstacles. Mariela speaks of *machismo*, an exaggerated sense of masculine pride, which women commonly ascribed to the persistence of patriarchal ideas that women cannot do the work of men and should stick to previously defined gender roles (Jiménez, 2017). Moreover, women also face the challenge of managing their domestic responsibilities alongside the work of communal labor and political participation (Lyon, Mutersbaugh, & Worthen, 2017; Mutersbaugh, 1998; Worthen, 2015). Women are doing a lot. As Paulina said, she did it all.

2.6 What is learned by challenging dichotomies of the financialization of remittances agenda

Paulina and her neighbors are extremely productive with the remittance money they receive from relatives abroad. They participate in *comunalidad*, and from the stories I have shared, they describe a vibrant, empowered life in Kajp. Yet, their life is not without difficulty; many struggle to make money and save, and they endure gendered discrimination in public political life. However, their validation comes not only from their financial stability but also from participation in *comunalidad*. Likewise, their financial stability comes not only from the productive use of their remittances. The comingling of productive and non-productive uses of remittances is crucial for keeping their lives afloat.

The financialization of remittances agenda evaluates the behaviors of the people receiving remittances but it does not often recognize the practices and feelings they have about managing their money. As I have shown, the categories of productive and non-

productive uses of remittances as they exist in the financialization of remittances agenda are limited, and conceal some of the ways that women view and manage money. The most significant way that I see women's experiences in Kajp troubling the productive/non-productive dichotomy, is in the work that women do in the place of their absent husbands. When people are absent and unable to do the collective work of serving the community, their money goes towards maintaining *comunalidad* in their place. However, when women themselves take on the role of maintaining *comunalidad* by doing their husband's *cargos*, they can spend the money elsewhere. Thus, through their labor, women render money productive. This practice of doing *cargo* on first appearance seems non-productive because it doesn't generate capital, but it creates space for remittances to be spent in other ways and more importantly, individuals coming together to do cargos creates significant results for the larger community. Women's work, often seen as non-productive - is valuable in that it generates productivity, challenging the premise in financialization literature that holds these categories separate (Katz, 2001). Women's practices muddy this separation and call us to question its validity.

The financialization of remittances agenda claims that when women have more access to financial services that they will be empowered. This logic first assumes that women are not empowered as they are now and it pivots empowerment on the practices of the individual. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) theorizes Black women's empowerment as going beyond the individual, to engage the collective, a framework that is helpful for contextualizing women's feelings of empowerment in Kajp. I have shown how women feel empowered through the collective work of *comunalidad*, although not without obstacles. Prevailing patriarchal power relations, especially *machismo* significantly hinder how

women feel empowered. That women cope with *machismo* on a daily basis, and still participate in processes that serve their communities and give them personal and collective strength, is significant. There are always power relations that prevent people from participating in the same processes that might also empower them (McEwan, 2005; Staeheli & Cope, 1994). The structures people live within and the social situations that shape them are "simultaneously confining and empowering" (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 46). Coping with this paradox - this internal and community struggle - is additional work that women do in the management of remittances.

Tracing empowerment through *comunalidad* is not to dismiss the feelings of empowerment women described to us that are linked to having money to make ends meet and having choices in managing that money. It is valuable to have skills for managing money in our increasingly financialized global world. However, narrowly defining productivity and empowerment in financial terms leaves out and treats significant sources of validation and capacity-producing activities that come from economic activity like supporting children's education and participating in *comunalidad* as "obstacles that need be overcome" (Guermond, 2020).

2.7 Conclusion

The financialization of remittances agenda, and the wider development and financial inclusion literatures that it is a part of, contain promises of wealth generation and women's empowerment wrapped in dichotomous discourse with gendered consequences. This agenda frequently depicts women remittance receivers as disempowered and unknowledgeable of how to spend their own money. In order to get underneath the agenda

and its promises, I have deconstructed these two claims frequently touted by the financialization of remittances agenda using ethnographic empirical evidence from Oaxaca about the everyday practices of managing remittances that shape ideas about productive use of money and the empowerment of women. My analysis revolves around *comunalidad*, centering experiences of the women of Kajp that they, together, create themselves. Feminist economic geographers have recently argued for making people's lives in the Global South the starting point for our theorizing (Winders, 2016). I present remittances through the lens of *comunalidad*, not only to document place-specific experiences that exist outside of dichotomous thinking, but also to challenge the way knowledge about economies gets made and destabilize hegemonic intellectual thought.

Gendered dichotomies, myths, and norms construct desired subjectivities that mark some women as entrepreneurial at managing remittances (productive, empowered) and others as unsuccessful (unproductive, disempowered). When women are assessed in this way, they can be rewarded for successful practices and disciplined for subverting the ways in which they are expected to conform. Feminist theorists have been critical of how women's activities, the home and social reproduction, are increasingly becoming sites of capital accumulation (S. Federici, 2014; Gago, 2020). The gendered dichotomies within the financialization of remittances agenda suggest yet another site for assessing and potentially exploiting women's practices, which I link to Verónica Gago's (2020) concept "expanded extractivism" because of the ways in which migrants and their families manage remittances are constantly being assessed by international institutions, governments, and financial actors. There is a colonial element to financial extraction, in this case visible in how the binary of productive/unproductive echoes gendered and racialized tropes of

Indigenous women in Mexico from the colonial era and the binary of empowered/disempowered invisibilizes and devalues collective ways of living such as *comunalidad*. Gago cautions that financial extraction confines women and feminized bodies in an "economy of obedience," which is a form of coercion to accept dangerous living situations and working conditions marked by continuous precariousness, enforced by debt. Despite promises of poverty reduction and women's empowerment, I contend that policy agendas that rely on essentialized notions serve the interest of financialized global capital rather than the interests and wellbeing of the people whose lives they affect.

CHAPTER 3. ACCOUNTABILITY, REFUSAL AND AUTONOMY FOR UNSETTLING RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction

I first heard the name Frederick Starr from Silviano Ruiz[15], the Indigenous Representative of the community of Santa María Nativitas Coatlán (Coatlán), in September 2018. I was in Coatlán, a rural community in the state of Oaxaca, southern Mexico, to do fieldwork towards my doctoral dissertation in geography. In addition to holding the role of Indigenous Representative, Silviano is a historian and has also served as the mayor and as president of the assembly of communal property in Coatlán. He writes about Coatlán, Ayuuk (Mixe) culture, and he advocates at the municipal, state and national level for Indigenous rights. It was the first of many meetings where we discussed Mixe culture and history, contemporary politics, and our research. When I arrived for our meeting that day, Silviano was tending to the garden of flowers outside the house he shared with his wife and three of their children. I greeted him and told him that I brought him a USB containing an electronic copy of a book that he might find useful for his research. He invited me into his office, a one-room adobe house a few meters away. Inside, Silviano opened the windows and turned on the light, revealing rows of books neatly organized on shelves along the walls. We sat side-by-side at his desk to look at a PDF of a book on Mixe identity and national development projects on his laptop.

[15] This article uses the real names of researchers, organizations, research participants, and the research site. The author sought the consent of with everyone named in this article at various stages of the research and writing process, and will seek approval from all parties for the final draft before it goes to publication.

Silviano opened a draft of his writing about Mixe philosophy and linguistics. He explained some Mixe vocabulary to me, for example, *tsënaayën*, signifies development but not as it is defined in the social sciences, rather it is the free and spontaneous thought of a person (Ruiz Vasconcelos, 2020). As we scrolled to the end of the document, I thanked Silviano for generously showing me his writing and teaching me some words of Mixe. He thanked me for the PDF of the book. Then the conversation pivoted, as it so often did, to be about my presence in Coatlán. On the laptop, Silviano opened a document that contained a few names, some of which I recognized: Tad Mutersbaugh, and Holly Worthen. Tad (Professor of Geography, University of Kentucky – hereafter referred to as UKY) is co-advisor to my dissertation and Holly (Professor of Geography, Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca) is a member of my committee. Together with others, they had led research on coffee farming in several Oaxacan communities, including Coatlán. Silviano explained that he kept a list of researchers who had come to Coatlán and as I spelled my name, he added it to the document. Together we updated biographical details and contact information for me and the others that I knew on the list. For my entry in his records, Silviano added that I am a feminist economic geographer, that I study economic matters such as migration and remittances, and that I want to learn about the deeper social meanings that inform economic processes.

Then Silviano turned to another name on the list that I was not familiar with: Frederick Starr, and asked if I had heard of him. I answered no. Silviano explained that he was an Anthropologist who came to Coatlán at the end of the 19th century. Silviano explained that Starr had written books that he thought may include photos of Coatlán or other Mixe towns, and he asked me if I could access the book and any of Starr's materials.

That day, I left Silviano's office assuring him that I would look into Frederick Starr's publications and return with more information and obtain copies of what I could, using my university library access.

This is how my colleague Lindsey Funke (Master's student in Geography, UKY) and I ended up traveling to University of Chicago Library's Special Collections Research Center in February 2019. At the time, our journey felt important because we were fulfilling a request from people in Coatlán to find a few books about research done on their territory and about their ancestors, but our research quickly felt weighted by much more.

3.2 Proceeding through a colonial confrontation

Frederick Starr was a US-born Anthropologist at the University of Chicago from 1891 to 1922. Lindsey and I had quickly secured copies of three books by Starr via the UKY library, Google, and scribd.com. We learned that the University of Chicago Library's Special Collections Research Center held Starr's professional materials and personal correspondence but few of his materials are available online. So, during my next trip to the US, I borrowed my father's car in Cincinnati, Ohio, picked up Lindsey in Lexington, Kentucky and we drove the 370 miles to Chicago, Illinois during the polar vortex of February 2019 in order to follow through on Silviano's request.

Sitting in a glass-walled room under the watchful eyes of the University of Chicago librarians, Lindsey and I were granted one box at a time of the dozens comprising Starr's papers. As we carefully removed document-after-document with gloved-hands, we learned more about him and his travels to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala,

Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Philippines, and parts of the USA. He defined the purpose of his research in southern Mexico as being "to ascertain and define the physical types of the different tribes" (Starr, 1900, p. 2). To do this, he and his colleagues measured the bodies of 2,278 men and 569 women, made plaster busts of over 100 people, and took photographs of thousands of people.

Starr travelled to the Mixe territories of the Sierra Norte and Isthmus regions of Oaxaca in 1886 and 1899, and to Coatlán in 1899. In one particularly revealing newspaper article in the archive, Starr described his methods:

> "Fourteen distinct measurements were made on each of 100 males and 25 females of every tribe ... Fourteen measures on each of 125 persons of 17 tribes makes a grand total of 29,750 measures, and it must be remembered that they were made for the most part under great difficulties ... Many, moreover, through superstition or stubbornness, would at first refuse absolutely to be measured, but the sight of our government papers [signed by Porfirio Diaz, President of Mexico 1876-1911] usually had a wonderful effect and submission was easy. Occasionally, however, nature triumphed over fear, and in such cases of continued obstinacy we were forced to take full advantage of the rights granted us by the government and have them arrested and kept in the town jail until they were ready to submit ... When we have completed our arrangements, sometimes by threats, oftener by bribes, the lucky (or unlucky one) is stretched out at full length upon the ground, back upward, and thoroughly greased to prevent the plaster from sticking when the time comes for removal ..." (Frederick Starr Papers, Box 50, Folder 2, Special Collection Research Center, University of Chicago Library).

Starr's horrific methods were driven by and informed by racist ideas and eugenics. As a scientific movement, eugenics seeks to influence human reproduction in order to manage the hereditary makeup and achieve desired characteristics. Eugenics as a social movement encourages those who are "fit" to reproduce and prevents those deemed "unfit" from reproducing. Measurements of the nose, ears, skull, forearms, etc., like those collected by anthropologists like Starr, were used to calculate "racial worth off the geometry of the

human body," as scientists categorized each measurement in order to rank whole groups of people (McClintock, 1995, p. 50). Eugenics has manifested in invasive and violent policies such as forced birth control and abortion; compulsory pregnancy and sterilization; marriage restrictions and racial segregation; medical examinations and genetic screenings; and genocide.

As Lindsey and I looked at photograph after photograph of the hundreds of people who Starr and his colleagues threatened into the frame, the years between our work and his blurred, "forcing a confrontation" of the past, present, and future of our disciplines and how we conduct research (Gordon, 2008). I was uncomfortable with my proximity to Starr. He and I are white settler scholars at universities in the USA, which are sites of settler colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. To illustrate: I attend a land grant university which sits on Shawnee, Eastern Band Cherokee, and Osage land in what is now commonly known as the southeastern USA. "Land grab universities," such as the one I attend, were not only built on Indigenous land but were funded with 11 million acres of expropriated Indigenous land (Lee & Ahtone, 2020). Land seizures funded endowments, and in the case of the state of Kentucky where I study, 87% of that endowment went to historically white institutions like UKY and only 13% was allotted to the historically Black Kentucky State University (ibid.). It was not until 1949 that UKY allowed Lyman T. Johnson, a Black 43-year old Navy veteran and high-school teacher to enroll as a graduate student after he successfully filed a federal lawsuit against the university. Black students were not permitted to attend UKY until after Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954, and were subsequently denied the same opportunities as white students. For example, the UKY basketball team did not admit a Black player until 1971. These historical details illustrate the ways that capitalism and

racism intertwined to produce unequal universities meant to exclude (Daigle, 2019; Meyerhoff, 2019; Wilder, 2013).

Colonial-capitalist universities and state, federal, and non-governmental institutions have educated and funded Starr and I (and many others) to do research on Indigenous territories in Mexico, a nation which is part of a larger region shaped by ongoing processes of colonization, *colonialidad*, and settler colonialism (Lugones, 2008; Quijano, 2000; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010; Speed, 2019). The inhabitants of Coatlán and their ancestors have cared for and managed their territories for generations, surviving attempts at conquest by other Indigenous people and Spanish colonization. They (and others) currently struggle against the expropriation of their lands for various megaprojects that are ongoing in Oaxaca (Navarro F & Bessi, 2016; Ruiz García, 2019). I had assured myself that I was different from Starr given my university training in feminist methodologies, participation in reading groups on decolonial and unsettling praxis, and years of solidarity activism stretching back to high school, yet I continued to dwell in discomfort for months after our trip to the archive in Chicago. After all, Starr and I are both on Silviano's list.

Rather than discard my discomfort, I held on to it. In this, Coddington's praxis of *proceeding* provided crucial guidance through this moment. She calls on researchers doing work in a colonial framework to linger "in those methodologically complex places" (Coddington, 2017, p. 318). Sitting in discomfort allows for uncertainty, and while it disrupts the research process, the time a researcher takes to recognize discomfort, evaluate and work through ethical dilemmas around discomfort can be generative. Proceeding through my discomfort slowed down fieldwork, as I spent more time in Coatlán getting to

know people, discussing my research project, and reading the authors cited in this paper. Proceeding provoked me to ask myself *how do I unsettle the settler colonial, white supremacist, patriarchal foundations of my discipline that are still shaping accepted practices of fieldwork?*

My experiences of fieldwork were caught in questions of accountability, refusal and autonomy, questions considered in scholarly work that discusses how research methods can be important inroads to decolonizing geography (Asselin & Basile, 2018; Vasquez-Fernandez et al., 2017; Weir et al., 2019; Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020). I attempted to unsettle my research methods, first by re-thinking the consent process for working with individual research participants, an approach informed through reading about those webs of relations that scholar activists work to be accountable to. Then I recount how there were moments when research participants refused to participate in data collection, sometimes subtly and occasionally outright – moments which I analyze alongside scholarly work on ethnographic refusal. Finally, I reflect on how *autonomía* (autonomy) underscored the official procedure for obtaining permission to do research in Coatlán as well as how I sought the consent of individual research participants. In southern Mexico, Indigenous autonomy is a struggle for recognition of difference, respect, and dignity in the making of everyday life. Throughout my experiences in the field, the ghost of Starr remained close, and while I remain excited about the possibilities of unsettling power relations of colonial knowledge production during fieldwork, I feel the weight of its limitations.

3.3 Re-confirming consent for greater accountability in researcher and community relations

I surmise from Starr's fieldnotes and the news articles about him in the University of Chicago archives that he did not have the consent of the people that he measured and photographed. He described the process:

> "Much time would be necessary, in each village, if one depended upon establishing friendly and personal relations with the people. But with government assistance, all might be done promptly and easily. Such assistance was readily secured. Before starting on any given journey, I secured letters from the Department of Fomento, one of the Executive Departments of the Federal Government. These letters were directed to the governors of the states … From the governors, I received letters of a more vigorous character to the jefes of the districts to be visited. From the jefes, I received stringent orders upon the local governments; these orders entered into no detail, but stated that I had come, recommended by the superior authorities, for scientific investigations …" (Starr, 1908).

The permission that Starr had was sourced from the top down, specifically the scaled layers of the state, and, as such, could be backed by military and policing forces. Since then, the ethical principles that form the basis of human-subjects research have changed. In the USA, Institutional Review Boards (IRB) review and monitor research involving human subjects, and require that researchers summarize important aspects of the project to prospective research participants and allow ample opportunity for participants to consider the project and ask questions. This process is called informed consent.

Appearing in every IRB training, the idea of consent can be mistaken for legal language, a script, checking boxes on a form, or a signature. However, it is much more. Consent is deeply relational – it is a negotiation (or not) on uneven ground of shifting power relations (Benson & Nagar, 2006). Bhattacharya writes that consent is "contingent on varied negotiations of multiple subject positions, life events, and a shifting understanding of research" (2007:1105). She argues that consent is a fluid process based in part on

relations. Like many scholars, I am "embedded in a web of relationships" which "demand a high level of accountability to a community" (Pulido, 2008, p. 351). I came to the themes of my research over two decades of activism, work, and study in the United States and Mexico. One of the hubs in the web of relationships in which I work is an organization of scholars, educators, and activists who have collaborated in Oaxaca for 10 years: University Services and Knowledge Networks (SURCO). Some of their names appear in this paper. Mine is just one of many diverse projects that radiates outwards from SURCO and I am connected to other people and projects by threads of appreciation, support, exchange, and collaboration. Our accountability to each other is place-based (Daigle & Ramírez, 2019; Walia, 2012), grounded in the histories, memories, and politics of southern Mexico (Cruz & Fröhling, 2019). My relations and our accountabilities are what brought me to Coatlán and what have allowed me to stay.

I began the consent process in meetings with Coatlán's authorities. Most of Oaxaca's municipalities are governed by Indigenous customary laws that are rooted in traditional collective practice. The authorities are nominated and elected by many citizens living in the community and they serve for 1-3 years. I was accompanied in the meetings by Tad Mutersbaugh, co-advisor to my dissertation and by our colleague Gildardo Juárez. In addition to being from Coatlán, Gildardo is a community media activist, host of the radio show Pez en el SURCO, and master's student in Communication and Social Change at the Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla. I sat between them as Gildardo first spoke about my character, and how he believed I would conduct a respectful research project. Then, Tad spoke about my qualifications and training. I closed the presentation part of the meetings by reading a description of my research questions and objectives, and listing the institutions

funding the project. I then answered a few questions from the authorities about how I would compensate my hosts for food and lodging. After these meetings and the authorities' deliberations, I was granted permission to stay in Coatlán to conduct my research.

The series of meetings with authorities was just one part in the consent process. First, while the authorities are nominated by an assembly that contains many adults living in the community, engaging the broader collective is fundamental (Robles, 2017). Second, I was the only woman present in the meetings with the authorities (see Barrera Bassols 2006 and Curiel et al. 2015 for more on women holding political office in Oaxaca). I reflected on the words of scholars who had worked with women, and recalled those instances when women said "no one ever asked us what we thought" (Basile, Asselin, & Martin, 2017; Lefèvre, 2018). On one hand I thought about asking the authorities if I could call a meeting of women to explain myself, but Alejandra Juárez, my research assistant whose house I was also living in, told me that this had never been done. I was reluctant to do something that would be thought of as weird. I also worried that such a formal approach with an invitation such as "come sign up with me if you want to be part of a study" would likely fail. The majority of women in Coatlán did not know me and I imagined if they were skeptical about signing up to be interviewed by a stranger, putting out an open call would be ineffective. In the end I elected to do 6+ months of participant observation, talking to people in small groups and individually in order to gain and re-confirm their wish to participate in my project. I call this process *re-confirming consent*, seeing consent not as a one-off task, but as on-going, fluid and situated. In my process of re-confirming consent I made spaces for participants to speak, ask questions, and refuse, and for me to listen, pause, re-assess, and proceed.

I began by volunteering to work with women as they prepared food for community functions (groups of women do this almost daily for groups that range from 20 school students to the majority of the community). As we plucked chickens, made tortillas and tamales, and washed dishes, I made conversation with women, gradually explaining who I was, where I was from, what my research was about, and how I came to be in Coatlán. When women engaged me in conversations, asking me about my research, education, funding, family, religious beliefs, and political ideas, and volunteering information about themselves, I took that as an indication that they might be willing to talk with me further. I would ask them in those conversations whether it would be alright for me to visit them at their home. Most women said yes and that I should visit them whenever I liked. A few women invited me to their homes before I ever asked.

Alejandra came with me for almost all of my initial visits to people's homes. In addition to helping me, she had worked with Holly, Tad, and Sarah in the past. Alejandra had also served the community in numerous ways, such as by being the treasurer of a coffee cooperative and as a representative for Coatlán on an inter-community conflict resolution team. In those first meetings I would thank my host or hosts for having me to their home and go over details about myself and my research, even if we had touched on those topics in our initial meeting. I paused frequently, so that they could ask me a question or speak to Alejandra. A typical conversation with my hosts was shaped by their curiosities, such as:

> How did you come to Coatlán?
>
> I was invited by some other researchers from my university who were here a couple of years ago to study the coffee plots. At the same time I met and became friends with Gildardo Juárez who is from here.
>
> Did you vote for Trump?
>
> No and I never vote for his party.
>
> Do you have scholarships?

> Yes, two. Both from organizations in the USA. One is a private organization that gives scholarships to women who are geographers. They raise money from women who are geography professors, like I will be, and give scholarships to students. The other is from the National Science Foundation in the USA, which is a public organization that receives the funding for scholarships from the federal government.

Most women wanted to know from Alejandra if I was accustomed to the living in Coatlán, the climate and food. Sometimes they spoke in Mixe to Alejandra, and unless Alejandra was translating for me from Spanish to Mixe, I didn't ask them to share what they were discussing in my presence. The visits often ended with me requesting to spend more time with the women and their families. I said:

> I would like to interview you and others here in Coatlán, but first, I would like to spend time with you. I want to learn more about your responsibilities and obligations. Is there a day this week when I could come work with you? I'm not very good at making tortillas, carrying firewood, or clearing coffee plots, but I can do it. I can come with you and we can chat while we work, establish trust. Working with you and other women will help me know what to ask when I do interviews because it will teach me about daily life here. And you can ask me questions too about my work as a student, teacher, and researcher.

This request was usually met with one of two responses. Some women immediately told me when to return, "Tomorrow? I have to make food for the construction workers building that house over there, come tomorrow," or "The day after tomorrow I am going to gather firewood and you can come." In most cases like this, I saw the women again within a few days. Other women were hesitant to tell me a day of the week to return or they had plans to leave their homes to work on their corn and coffee plots or tend to their cows a few kilometers away, and did not volunteer a date when I could visit again. In those instances, which I interpreted as "silent refusals," it was not clear if they wished to participate further or not (Kamuya et al., 2015).

As I advanced through fieldwork from initial meetings, to participant observation, and on to more formal interviews, I frequently visited the women who assured me that they would like to participate in my research, allotting time to re-discuss the goals of the project and how the outcomes would be disseminated. Key factors in this work were my relationships with Alejandra, Gildardo, and Tad – all of us different radiuses emanating from the hub of activists and scholars in Oaxaca. I am recognizable by my relationships, and I worked to stay accountable to them as I built new relationships in the field. By re-confirming both the community and individuals' consent to participate each month that I returned to Coatlán, and at each new phase of research, I worked to render my intentions more transparent and become a better listener, more adept at recognizing nuances of discomfort and refusal (Koch, 2019). When consent is limited to the guidelines set by IRB, researcher accountability is discouraged. One part of the uneven ground of power that consent is negotiated on is the power of the institutions behind IRB consent forms and the protection they afford researchers in the field (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Permission becomes something to be obtained, when in fact, it is more fluid and is not easy to hold on to and can be revoked.

3.4 Moments of ethnographic refusal for unsettling colonial imaginations

As I was learning about Starr, Holly Worthen, professor at UABJO and one of my committee members, asked me for a favor. She was preparing a report due at the end of the funding period for a National Geographic grant that she, Sarah and Tad had been awarded. They were required to send 20 photographs with the report, and wanted to include pictures

of three women from Coatlán on their coffee farms. Holly wanted to get permission from the women and ask for their signature on release forms for the photos. In short, National Geographic wanted the rights to edit the photos, use them in any form, in any part of the world, forever. The favor: would I go to each of the women in the photos, show them the photos and release form, talk to them about it, and ask for their signature and consent to send the photos? I agreed.

I knew the three women, Alejandra, who I was living with, Giselda Martínez, and Eva Faustino. Before I approached them about the photos and release form, I translated the letter from English to Spanish, prepared paper copies of the form in both languages, and downloaded the photos to my phone. First, I sat down with Alejandra on the patio outside of the bedroom I was renting from her and her husband, and showed her all of the materials. I explained that Holly, Sarah, and Tad were funded in part by National Geographic and I explained what National Geographic did in the world. I said that as part of the funding agreement, they were required send a report about their research in Coatlán, including 20 photos. I explained that National Geographic would then own the photos. I gave a copy of my Spanish translation to Alejandra to read, as I read it out loud, pausing a few times to discuss what she thought of the terms. She asked where National Geographic was based. I told her that it is in Washington, DC, the capital of the USA, but that it is not a part of the government. I detailed how National Geographic has a global reach that includes a magazine and website, and that many anthropologists, geographers, journalists, photographers, and more publish with the organization and read its work online and in print - and that it reaches a lot of people with its content. Alejandra asked what National Geographic would do with the photos and I responded that because of the terms of the

release form, we cannot be sure what will be done with the photos now or in the future, but that they may be stored digitally and never seen by the public, or that they may go in a magazine, be on a website, or be used in classrooms for educational purposes, but that the language in the letter is clear, National Geographic will own the photos. While she was not outright refusing to sign the photo release, I sensed Alejandra was hesitant. She was also curious to know what her friends Eva and Giselda thought. I agreed that it was a good idea to talk it over with others, creating a community discussion over the possibility of circulating images, and I gave her English and Spanish copies of the letter. I stressed that she had the option to NOT sign the release, and that any decision would not hurt Holly, Sarah, and Tad's research project, or my project, that it would not alter their status as participants in any of our projects, and that their decision would not affect their relationships with any of us.

After I spoke to Alejandra, I initiated the conversation with Eva in much the same way. While I interpreted Alejandra's hesitancy as what might be a move towards a silent refusal, Eva was more openly skeptical about the use of the photos. She illustrated her doubt by sharing the story of a woman that she had heard of, who was photographed carrying firewood on her head. The photo was used on some coffee packaging and seen by people around the world, and the woman was not informed that this depiction of her would be used to market a product and seen by so many. She also said that photographs of people end up online, on sites like Facebook, where they are shared beyond the scope of the context in which they were taken, sometimes without the knowledge of the people in the photos. I listened to Eva and affirmed what she was telling me. She was most concerned that we did not know where the pictures would end up, who might see them, and then what

those people might do with the pictures. I told her that her assessment of the situation was correct and that Holly, Sarah, Tad, and I understood the doubts she was raising about signing over the rights to these photos to National Geographic.

A couple of days later, when I sat down with Giselda in her house to talk about the photo release form, she quickly said that she understood that the organization would have the right to use and could also change the photo for any purpose. Then she read the first paragraph of the letter aloud to me, stressing the part about how National Geographic could use the photo for commercial and publicity purposes. Giselda said that this did not sound good to her. There was no ambiguity in her refusal to sign the release. She had spoken to Eva and she said that they had two issues with what I was asking: 1) there was no way of knowing how National Geographic would use the photos and 2) they did not like the photos. I told her that I understood how this photo is a representation of each of them, and that they were telling me that the photos are not the representation that they wanted of themselves being seen by others and floating around in the world. Giselda agreed, saying "exactly, that is it, this is not how I want to be seen." Before I left her house that afternoon, I left the release forms with Giselda and she said that it was good that I was there in person to discuss this matter and make the translation of the letter, saying she would send both copies to one of her sons. I encouraged her to do so and the outcome was that Alejandra, Eva, and Giselda did not want their photos sent to National Geographic. They did not sign the release forms, and Holly did not include their photos in the research report.

Refusal manifests in so many ways during fieldwork: it was Alejandra, Eva, and Giselda's refusal in this case; in another, the researcher's refusal to adhere to accepted data collection practices or write about certain topics shared by research participants. Simpson

theorizes refusal in ethnography, as moments when the ethnographic limit is reached (2014). I have not had conversations with Alejandra, Eva, and Giselda about theories of refusal. I do not know if there was more to their not liking the photos and not wanting them to be released than they gave me. However, they made a decision that was clear. They marked pieces of the data collected about their lives as off limits, challenging researcher expectations of data availability in economies of knowledge accumulation (Craven, 2016). At the same time that refusal limits, it "generates, expands, champions representational territory that colonial knowledge endeavors to settle, enclose, domesticate," (Tuck & Yang, 2014, pp. 241–242).

Simpson says that when people speak (or don't) that their sovereignty interrupts anthropological portraits of their past and present. We do not know if the people photographed by Starr gave their full consent first to be photographed, and for those photographs to be published in a myriad of ways, exhibited at museums, and eventually stored in an archive. But we know that photos like these were the chosen method when making racial classification studies in Indigenous communities (Poole, 1997; Zamorano Villarreal, 2012). In addition to being tools in the creation of racial hierarchies, the photos Starr took are exemplary of a masculinist, disembodied vision that feminists have long critiqued (Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1986). I see Alejandra, Eva, and Giselda's decision-making process – how they spoke to each other about the photos – as part of a wider endeavor of managing researchers. The authorities in Coatlán oversee researchers coming to the community, individuals make decisions about whether or not to participate in a research project, while at the same time, people carry on conversations with each other about whether to participate, speak, sign, about what information to give, and what to ask

the researcher. This scaled collective conversation was ongoing in Coatlán while I was doing research there, and I believe continues as my relationships with people there continue. The decision of Coatlán's authorities to let me stay, the individual consent of research participants, and Alejandra, Eva, and Giselda's refusal to sign the photo release, are deeply linked to the practices of making autonomy in Southern Mexico.

3.5 Making autonomy for unsettling research methods

One afternoon in March 2019 I walked to the building that housed the recently-elected mayor's office in the center of Coatlán to meet with him and other authorities. I had done this on multiple occasions, but this meeting was a little different since I was going to re-present myself. I say re-present because while it was similar to the first presentation I gave in August 2018, the authorities were different. On the first Sunday of each December, hundreds of citizens in Coatlán gather for a large day-long meeting where they nominate and elect the people from the community who will carry out the responsibilities of managing the town for the upcoming year. While the presentation was a repeat for me, it was new for the new authorities and therefore, very important.

I sat on a bench in the hallway outside the mayor's office and waited my turn to be called. I was always nervous to meet with the authorities. When I entered the room, I carried a copy of my original research proposal letter from the previous year, printed on University of Kentucky letterhead and signed by my two advisors, as well as a two page update on the progress of my research since that time. The mayor was seated at a large wooden desk, with a staff indicating leadership to his right. I shook his hand and gave him

my papers. Then I shook the hands of the other men seated on the three wooden benches that lined the other three sides of the room and took a seat among them.

I introduced myself and spoke briefly about my dissertation research, covering the basic facts such as where I was from, which university I attended, my research questions and objectives, and which organizations had funded my research. The authorities asked why I had selected Coatlán as the site for my research project and I recounted how my advisor, Tad and committee member Holly had done research there. I explained how I was connected to the organization SURCO, and how Gildardo who was from Coaltán, worked there, was a friend and collaborator, and had encouraged me to work in Coatlán.

Then, the mayor asked why the organizations that had funded my research, particularly the National Science Foundation (NSF), had supported my project and what interests they had, as organizations of the government, in Indigenous towns of Oaxaca, such as Coatlán. He said that researchers have extracted knowledge from Indigenous communities in Oaxaca in the past for the United States and Mexican governments. Though he did not mention the México Indígena project by name, I immediately thought of it.

México Indígena was part of the Bowman Expeditions, a series of international investigations with a mission to improve GIS databases of different countries with focuses on "human" and "cultural terrains" (Wainwright, 2013, p. 9). It was funded by the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth with participation from the American Geographical Society (AGS), Kansas University, Kansas State University, Carleton University, the Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí (UASLP), Mexico's Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT), and Radiance Technologies. México Indígena was a series of investigations focused on Indigenous communal lands in

the communities of Guelatao, San Miguel Tiltepec, San Juan Yagila, and Santa Cruz Yagavilla, all located in the Sierra Norte region of Oaxaca. The project was led by Peter Herlihy (Professor of Geography, University of Kansas) and Jerome Dobson (Professor of Geography, University of Kansas and President of the AGS), working in collaboration with Geoffrey Demarest (FMSO) and Miguel Aguilar Robledo (Professor of Geography, UASLP). People in the four communities listed above were not informed of the military's extensive role in the project, nor were they informed that as such, the maps of their lands would be used in military counterinsurgency strategies. When these facts were discovered, the people of many communities organized to denounce the project and affiliated researchers (Perez et al., 2011; UNOSJO, S.C., 2009).

I remember wanting to shrink through the floor as I heard his questions, and I stumbled through my first response. But a couple of weeks later I went back to the mayor with a more solid response. First, I acknowledged that I was aware of various histories of researchers who had come to Oaxaca in the past. Without naming anyone specifically, I said that I knew that some researchers had not declared their affiliations and funding sources, had not stated what would happen with their research data, and that some had taken things from communities without permission or had done things in communities like ask insensitive questions, touch people, or take pictures without permission. I then detailed to the best of my knowledge, how each of the funders had made the decision to support my research. For instance, I explained how geography faculty, and not politicians, review applications to the NSF in geography. I explained that while I would be giving the NSF and other funders a summary of my research methods and findings, that I would not be sharing personal information about participants or raw data with funders. My answer

seemed satisfactory to Arón. He followed it up by telling me that in the time that had passed since our last meeting, he had spoken to several people (I assume people who are in, from, and affiliated closely with Coatlán) about me and my research and that they had affirmed my presence. Then his secretary offered me some mezcal, which I politely declined, and he joked "Araby, it's not a question," we laughed, I took the tiny cup from his extended hand, and we had a drink.

Violent military and state intervention is nothing new in the lives of the Indigenous peoples of North America. Nor is geography's engagement with the military. Starr arrived with letters of permission from the highest governmental offices in Mexico and planned on asking the military to enforce the carrying out of his project if he was refused.

> "Prof. Starr says he expects to meet resistance at the hands of at least two of the ten tribes, but that he believes he will be able to accomplish his tasks by diplomacy. If this fails he will ask the Mexican government to provide him with a company of soldiers." (Frederick Starr Papers, Box 50, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)

Similar to Starr, the creators of the Bowman Expedition arrived with the explicit intent to undermine Indigenous communities in Oaxaca (Bryan, 2010; Sedillo, 2010). Each of these research projects were part of ongoing attempts at dispossession of peoples and natural resources in Oaxaca that aim to breach Indigenous communal defenses and disrupt the communities' care for their territories, practices which are foundational to "our collective rights and our self-determination" (Cruz, 2010, p. 1). Placing researchers such as myself, in the context of this wider intervention and its long history of violence and threats of violence, is critical. This context demands researcher accountability, and the necessity of recognizing refusal as a practice of communal defense and autonomy.

According to Comandantas Esther and Yolanda of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), the struggle for autonomy is about full recognition of difference, a difference that is not apart, but rather must be included, afforded respect and dignity (2001). Comandanta Susana (EZLN) says that Indigenous struggles for autonomy are not localized to Chiapas or Mexico, and calls on everyone to be in dialogue to create solutions because solutions are not granted from on high but rather, are created (ibid). Feminist scholars who work with Indigenous communities in southern Mexico have amplified practices and theories of autonomy and in their work. Stephen defines it as "participation in a nation without assimilation" (1997:7) and Naylor expands, defining the struggle for autonomy as "not simply a rejection of state governance and neoliberal market structures, it is a process of creating self-reliant and secure livelihoods" (2017:24). Echoing Comandanta Susana, others write that autonomy is not a right granted by the state but a practice of decolonization that is part of everyday life and community sociality which transforms the conditions under which people live (Blackwell, 2012; Esteva, 2010; Mora, 2017).

I situate my fieldwork in the ways that people engage with and multiply spaces of autonomy in daily life. The silent refusals of individuals described earlier, Alejandra, Eva, and Giselda's outright refusal, and how the local authorities manage researchers, considering refusal or consent, are examples of how refusal and autonomy operate in multiple governance registers (Mora, 2017). I link this to the ways that autonomy is not homogenous or universal in southern Mexico. For example, there often are differences among community members over government intervention in communities (Blackwell, 2012; Naylor, 2017). Differences represent ways that people are within multiple zones of

making autonomy and practicing decolonization – people do not leap into an idyllic autonomous decolonial space, but they make it, in struggle, over time, gaining and losing ground (see Mixe scholar Aguilar Gil 2018 for more detailed discussion on Indigenous strategies of autonomy in Mexico). As Comandanta Susana says, processes of struggling for autonomy are not for Indigenous communities to do alone, but require scores more people, I would say researchers too, participating in struggles that aim to remake the world rather than recreate the power dynamics of the present. One way we might do that is by amplifying praxis which unsettles fieldwork practices.

3.6 Conclusion: Methodological thinking about unsettling power relations in geographic research

Geography is in an extended moment of reckoning with its white, (in many cases settler) colonial, and patriarchal roots. Critical geographers have written about the ways in which whiteness and white supremacy, colonialism, racism, and masculinism have limited and shaped the discipline (Blunt, 1994; Domosh, 1991; Driver, 1992; Gilmore, 2002; Hamilton, 2020; Joshi, McCutcheon, & Sweet, 2015; Mansfield et al., 2019; Pulido, 2002). Hearing the urgency of their calls, and spurred by the archival confrontation with Frederick Starr, this paper is a contribution to geographical scholarship that strategizes how methods might contribute to movements to decolonize geography. Placing the work of Starr alongside my own (and my contemporary colleagues in Oaxaca) illustrates how close we are to the racist and eugenicist research methods and theories of the last century and military campaigns of the present. Though very different, Starr's abuses, and the geopiracy of Herlihy, Dobson, and Aguilar Robledo live alongside my research methods.

Motivated by a feminist commitment to feminist geographic praxis grounded in "colonial past-presents" (Faria, Caretta, Dever, & Nimoh, 2021), I asked myself, *while the settler colonial, white supremacist, patriarchal foundations of my discipline are being called into question, how am I unsettling and re-shaping accepted practices of fieldwork?* I hope to have done this in three ways. First, recognizing that how I came to do research in Coatlán was based on a web of relations, I sought ways to be accountable to the people who have helped me and allowed me to study in Oaxaca. In addition to following the protocols for presenting myself to the authorities and asking for permission to stay in and do research in Coatlán, I re-confirmed consent with individual research participants, because consent is a process and not something that is ever fully attained. Second, I drew on theories about refusal to strengthen my ability to listen to the nuanced responses of research participants. In some cases, their refusals were silent, in others they were outright, and refusals signaled to me that there are ways that we as researchers can refuse the standard practices of fieldwork. Third, being accountable to research participants by re-confirming their consent and respecting their refusals was a recognition of autonomy, an ongoing process which I am still engaged in. In these ways, I hope to contribute to feminist geographic praxis against imposed frameworks and learn through accountable relations and responsibility, across landscapes of struggles and meanings (Nagar, 2019; Noxolo, Raghuram, & Madge, 2012).

I am not convinced that altering research methods is enough to constitute decolonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012), but they may be a form of anticolonial practice and unsettling (Leeuw & Hunt, 2018). Autonomous struggles extend outwards from southern Mexico to other parts of the country, other countries like the USA, and they persist through

time from my presence as a researcher in Coatlán to the past when Starr was there, to the future when undoubtedly someone will refer to Silviano's list and ask a researcher, *who are you and why are you here?* Though in the past, Starr, is not detached from my research in the present. One hope I have is that by proceeding through the horrors of past research, I might force confrontations in the present that challenge and eliminate the conditions that made his research possible.

CHAPTER 4: MAKING FUTURES: REMITTANCES AND LABOR IN THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES OF COMMUNAL TERRITORIES FOR REPRODUCING LIFE

4.1 Introduction

In 2020 Mexico received upwards of US$42.8 billion in global remittances (World Bank, 2021). This money supports the basic necessities and financial security of 1.7 million Mexican households, most of which are located in rural and semi-rural settlements with fewer than 15,000 inhabitants (BBVA & CONAPO, 2021). In May 2020 the Mexican president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, thanked "our migrant countrymen" for sending record remittances in this difficult period, referring to the early months of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which saw market volatility, unemployment, recessions, stay-at-home orders, state and country-wide curfews, travel restrictions and relatively closed or slowed sectors like hospitality (2020). During subsequent months, he routinely expressed his gratitude to Mexican migrants living abroad for continuing to break records by sending over US $40 billion in 2020 – an 11% increase "from a normal year to a pandemic year," calling them "heroes, heroines, the equivalent of doctors and nurses who are saving lives; them, in the economic sphere" (2021). Indeed, recent statistics suggest that, in Mexico, household dependency[16] on remittances drastically increased in 2020 and to "a level unseen since 2003" (BBVA & CONAPO, 2021, p. 92).

Remittances have taken on new significance under the recent (and ongoing at the time of this writing) COVID-19 pandemic and its associated disruptions of economic and

[16] In Oaxaca remittance dependency, measured as % of gross value added to the GDP, averaged around 8.2% 2003-2019 and then jumped to 12.9% in 2020 (BBVA & CONAPO, 2021).

social life (see Cohen, 2021; Datta & Guermond, 2020). However, the money sent by migrants, and the very fact of transnational and domestic labor migration, have deep roots and long histories. That remittances are necessary to make ends meet for many households in Mexico is not new (Cruz Islas, 2014; Suárez & Zapata Martelo, 2004). Remittances are one of several strategies employed by people facing diminished prospects for income from agriculture and simultaneous cuts in social spending. But remittances alone do not guarantee life. The waged work of migrants living in the United States and working within Mexico and the remittances they generate exist alongside other forms of labor (waged, unwaged, subsistence, collective, reproductive, emotional and care) and the value they produce and co-produce.

Recent scholarship calls for exploration of labor migration geographies beyond sites of production and for a deeper analysis of informal work relations and economies of care that are part of overall diverse and inter-connected labor geographies (Mullings, 2021; Shah & Lerche, 2020; Strauss, 2017). The albeit important work of the people who migrate, do waged labor and send remittances back home is, thus, seen in relation to other diverse forms of labor and economic activities (Guermond, 2021; Katz, 2001; Winders & Smith, 2019). This paper takes these observations as a starting point and presents an analysis of the reproductive economy of one migrant sending community in rural Mexico and its ties to national and international migrant networks.

The community is Ni ap Ayuuk kajp (Kajp),[17] one of the original Mixe (Ayuuk) settlements in the Isthmus region of the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. Kajp's geography of

[17]Ni ap Ayuuk kajp is a pseudonym suggested by a research participant and member of the community. It means historic Mixe community.

remittances is linked to locations in a regional, national, and international network of labor migration. While 1,000 people live in Kajp, approximately 400 live and work elsewhere. Many commute weekly or monthly from regional cities in the Isthmus such as Juchitán, Ixtepec, and Tehuantepec, while others are a little further away near Oaxaca's state capital. Members of the community live in other parts of Mexico such as Baja California Norte y Sur, Jalisco, Mexico City, Nueva León, Puebla, and Tamaulipas, and a few reside in the United States. This article draws on 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation research in geography. During that time I conducted participant observation and interviews with members of 50 families. My research was rooted in Kajp and I visited members of the community in Juchitán, Ixtepec, Tehuantepec, various parts of the Valles Centrales surrounding Oaxaca City, and the United States. I met with people living in other parts of Mexico when they were visiting Kajp, which most tried to do once a year.

This case study of migration and remittances is distinct because Kajp, like most Indigenous communities in Oaxaca, is organized around communal territories and governance structures for managing them. In these communities a great deal of social reproduction is done collectively, in what Tzul (Maya K'iche') calls "the structures of communal territories for reproducing life" (2019) – translated by the author. I investigate the ways in which people living across Kajp's expansive geography participate in the community's political system of Indigenous self-governance through remittances, which are embedded in the structures of communal territories and collective labor for reproducing life. In doing so, this paper makes complimentary theoretical contributions to

recent studies of remittances and social reproduction theories within and beyond economic geography.

While feminist economic geographers have made tremendous contributions to scholarship on the ways that social reproduction undergoes changes among Latinx and Mexican migrants, they have tended to focus on individuals and the family as the primary scales for social reproduction (Cravey, 2005; B. E. Smith & Winders, 2008). Beyond the family or household, others have focused on the withdraw of state-provisioned social welfare and shifting the responsibility to individuals and communities (Kunz, 2010; Mullings, 2009). At an in-between or community scale, a great deal of work exists about the collective practices of remittance senders to Mexico (e.g., hometown associations) (Malone & Durden, 2018; Smyth, 2017) but with few exceptions (Kearney, 2018 [1996]; VanWey, Tucker, & McConnell, 2005) less is known about how receiving communities fold remittances into their already existing communal structures. Following the work of theorists who analyze struggles over social reproduction in and beyond the household (T. Bhattacharya, 2017a; Silvia Federici, 2004; Fraser, 2013; Gago, 2020), I bring remittances and social reproduction together, beyond the scale of individuals and their families, and with a focus on the recipients, not just the senders, in order to illustrate how important the structures of communal territories for reproducing life are for securing the future of communities in Oaxaca, especially in times of crisis.

4.2 Geographies of social reproduction

Social reproduction theory is "the social processes that produce labor power as a commodity" (T. Bhattacharya, 2017b). This reproduction of the labor force happens

"through the acquisition and distribution of the means of existence, including food, shelter, clothing, and health care," (Katz, 2001, p. 711). That said, theories of social reproduction cover a diverse assemblage of social forms, including households, social and solidarity economies (Hossein, 2018; L. Hudson, 2018; Pettas & Daskalaki, 2021), cooperative institutions (Castellini, 2021; Nembhard, 2014), and, as in the current example, Indigenous communities with collective ownership, governance, and labor (see Araujo, 2018; Martínez Luna, 2002; Patzi Paco, 2004; Quintero Weir, 2013 for other examples from Latin America). This work seeks to contribute to our understanding of social-reproductive economics within the context of the structures of communal territories in Oaxaca, Mexico.

4.2.1 The structures of communal territories for reproducing life

The southern Mexican state of Oaxaca has the largest proportion of land held as communal territories of any state. Roughly 80% of the land is collectively held. Of the state's 570 municipalities, 417 operate under Indigenous normative systems, an officially recognized political system of Indigenous self-governance. In Kajp, which operates under this system, people earn the right to live on and from collective properties. Individuals are obligated to serve their communities through hierarchically organized administrative jobs that range from serving on committees that maintain local services like water, schools and the health clinic or in elected roles such as secretary, treasurer and mayor (*cargos*), and to perform collective labor for communal benefit such as construction, maintenance and agricultural work (*tequios*). Other responsibilities include participating in local assemblies and meetings, organizing for celebrations (*fiestas*) and saint days, and

protecting the territory. In Oaxaca, collective labor, assembly, *fiesta* and territory compose the four pillars of Indigenous life, or *comunalidad,* a complex epistemology explained by Mixe and Zapotec scholars (Díaz Gómez, 2004; Martínez Luna, 2003, 2010; Robles Hernández & Cardoso Jiménez, 2007).

The sociologist Gladys Tzul (Maya K'iche') has written about the centrality of social reproduction in places organized around communal governance and territory. She is drawing on her deep familiarity with life in the departments of Totonicapán and El Quiché in Guatemala but her observations resonate with the way social life is organized in many of the municipalities of Oaxaca, including Kajp. She writes:

> Communal territories that produce structures of government for sharing, defending and recovering the material means for the reproduction of human life and domestic and non-domestic animals … these forms of Indigenous communal government produce and control the concrete means of the reproduction for everyday life … When I speak of the concrete means for reproducing life, I refer to the territory and everything that it contains: water, roads, forests, cemeteries, schools, sacred places, rituals, festivals; in sum the material and symbolic wealth that communities produce and govern through a series of guided strategies, issued from a concrete space and specific time, and that are structured from every site of reproduction (Tzul, 2019, p. 72) – translated by author and Tad Mutersbaugh

Indigenous communal systems of government center land or territory. They also center the non-human, and frame social reproduction holistically in ways that go beyond frameworks that may focus on individuals and/or the nuclear family. What is so important to learn from people living on and governing communal territories is that they manage remittances by folding them into the existing communal structures for reproducing life in order to secure a future.

While migration is a significant undertaking that separates people from their hometown, it does not sever them from the work of reproducing life in that place. Tzul

recently reflected on how communal governance and collective labor shifts with and through population changes caused by human migration:

> What would become of us without remittances? If the communities didn't fall, it was because of the cultivation of corn, beans, vegetables … And because of remittances. Migrant workers are giving life with 2 or 3 jobs in order to not lose their families. The migrant caravan is our mirror (2021) – translated by author

She situates the waged labor of migrants alongside subsistence agricultural work as equally important for the reproduction of life in rural Indigenous communities like Kajp. She describes multiple work sites (elsewhere and here) and types of labor (waged and subsistence) and, unsaid in her text but operating behind the scenes, the work of people, migrants and those back home, who manage migration and remittances in the context of communal governance and collective labor. In many Oaxacan towns, when people migrate and are unable to complete *cargo* and *tequio* obligations, they may be assessed fines or lose usufruct of communal lands. In these ways and others, towns exercise agency and attempt to manage the pulls and pushes of migration (Cohen & Rodriguez, 2005; Mutersbaugh, 2002; Worthen, 2012). While communities such as Kajp adapt their collective responses, this adaptation requires effort. As the communal structures for reproducing life face new and constantly evolving environmental, economic, political and social challenges like migration, mining concessions, extreme environmental events, narco-trafficking, and the COVID-19 pandemic, people put in a great effort to maintain communal structures. This is evidence of the value of these practices to the people and their lands that they are protecting (Conway & Cohen, 1998; Robson et al., 2018).

4.2.2 The temporo-spatial distributions of social reproduction for investigating remittances

While *comunalidad*, the structures of communal territories for reproducing life, are central to my analysis, I also draw on themes related to migration in social reproduction theory. As people move around their country of origin or the world, their movements disassemble and reassemble processes of social reproduction across geographies (Gago, 2017). Katz's theory that "the social reproduction of a migrant workforce is carried out in its members' countries of origin … this represents a direct transfer of wealth from generally poorer to richer countries," (2001, p. 710) illustrates the significance of the social reproductive economies in places like Kajp to the global capitalist economy. Beyond the hometown in the country of origin, the social reproduction of the migrant workforce is also carried out by migrants themselves. While leaving home "requires abandoning certain channels of support … one's physical and emotional survival necessitates the construction of new social networks of care and care giving" (Cravey, 2005, pp. 359–360). Smith and Winders note that these "place-making rituals" of people who migrate that take place in "grocery stores, playgrounds, health clinics, and other public … spaces" of social reproduction require a "rootedness" (B. E. Smith & Winders, 2008, pp. 61 and 66). The necessity of rootedness to sustain social reproduction and the populations that it supports implies that Kajp's continuous governance of communal lands is vital.

And while the spatial relations of social reproduction change for migrants, they also shift for the people living in their place of origin. Guermond argues that

> A social reproduction lens could help us understand how members of remittance-receiving households secure their own past and future means of

> life as well as that of migrants through unwaged, income-generating activities, subsistence and reproductive work as well as emotional labour *here*, with the support of the outcomes of often precarious, hyper-exploitative waged work *there* (2021, p. 15).

I agree with Guermond and others who have called for less of a fixation on waged labor and for the social reproduction and often gendered, frequently womens' work of people left behind to be studied for the significant value that it contributes (Datta & Guermond, 2020; Guermond, 2021; Shah & Lerche, 2020; Smyth, 2021; Winders & Smith, 2019). To this focus on social reproduction in remittance-receiving households, I add a call for scholars to pull back from the scale of household and individuals and also think about the additional relations that people are engaging in their daily lives like the collective. Though capitalism requires a stable set of social relations to reproduce itself, not all social relations are forged by and in service to capitalism, such as the structures of communal territories for reproducing life in Kajp. Collective ontologies such as these are steeped in generations of struggle, give rise to new forms of resistance, and make Indigenous futures.

4.2.3 The structures of communal territories for reproducing life are resistance

Structures of Indigenous communal governance in Mexico and other parts of Latin America are directly linked to Indigenous existence. In Oaxaca, completing *tequios*, serving *cargos*, attending assemblies and contributing to *fiestas* are part of what it takes to become a fully formed member of the community. Ruiz (Mixe) writes about this as learning to serve, saying that it is "through the social acts that take place in the community, here the individual loses his [or her] own image but takes shape in the figure

of society" (Ruiz Vasconcelos, 2020, p. 6) – translated by author. Robles (Zapotec, first woman president of the predominantly Mixe municipality Santa María Tlahuitoltepec, Oaxaca) describes it as "a whole series of things that come together at the moment of acquiring Indigenous consciousness" (2017) – translated by author.

In addition to being about living, these structures for reproducing life are about struggling in common. Tzul argues that a focus on Indigenous communal governance and the labor that it constitutes increases our ability to see Indigenous histories, struggles and strategies for organizing against the constant aggressions on the parts of capital and the state (Tzul, 2018). Indeed, Indigenous resistance in Oaxaca has a long and diverse history (Boyer, 2019; Cruz & Fröhling, 2019; *Curándonos de Espanto: Oaxaca 2006-2016*, 2016; Dillingham, 2021; Gil, 2020), and as Melquiades Cruz (Zapotec) says in the documentary film *The Demarest Factor* (Sedillo, 2010):

> I think that it is very important that we speak of resistance, and think about methods of resistance, and what that means. Often times we ask ourselves, *What are we resisting?* And we come to the conclusion that we have been resisting the same thing for 200, 300 years. What is this thing that sometimes has a pattern, and other times it seems chaotic? But it is the same thing right?

Cruz goes on to discuss the defense of territory, collective work, communal governance and *fiesta* as "a method of resistance … a method of struggle" including *fiestas* because "people celebrate for these reasons: to defend the earth, to work collectively, or to come to an agreement," (ibid.). The ways that Indigenous communal governance manifests autonomy and self-determination has been perceived as a threat to neoliberalism and attacks on it have come in many forms, such as moves for individualization and private property which attempt to destroy communal praxis of belonging.

The structures of communal territories for reproducing life, like other sites of social reproduction are indeed "fields of battle" (Curcio & Weeks, 2015). But there are important differences across sites of social reproduction: communal territory is not present in the same way at all sites of social reproduction. Spaces such as Oaxacan communal lands provide governance and facilitate social relations that differ in character from those in, for instance, ephemeral spaces of solidarity economies or in familial households. The following sections analyze the ways that the waged labor of migrants and remittances support the social reproduction of Kajp through one ethnographic example about collective labor and another about the *fiesta*. Then I will turn to an analysis of the ways that the structures of communal territories for reproducing life have been vital during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social reproduction is necessary because the survivability of humans is not secure, making the communal lands of Kajp all the more central for securing the future of the community.

4.3 Learning to serve

I was sitting on a stone wall in the center of Kajp at dusk. Behind me, a convenience store bustled as people bought vegetables, milk, oil, soap and other daily necessities. In front of me the Catholic church constructed in the 16th century loomed uneasily, the cracks left by the 8.2 magnitude earthquake of 2017 visible in the roof. Directly to my right, teenagers played basketball on one of the town's two cement courts. And a few more meters away on the left, the doors and windows of the two-story municipal building were open, and light streamed out into the evening as the authorities met with locals to discuss the pressing issues of the day. I noticed a young man of about

thirty years-old quickly approaching me with purpose, as if he knew me, and I was puzzled as to how that could be since it was only my first week living in Kajp. He extended his hand and asked if I was the researcher from Kentucky. As we shook hands, and more formally introduced ourselves, I learned that his name is Eduardo[18] and he is the brother of another young man from Kajp that I had met a few weeks earlier in Oaxaca City. "My brother told me about your project and encouraged me to help you," he said, explaining that he was in the middle of serving his first cargo as a *topil*.

A *topil* may be understood as a kind of community servant. They are empowered by the local citizens and authorities to tend to the safety of local inhabitants, deliver official messages from the local authorities to individuals at their homes and assist in the administration of communal governance by doing things like setting up 300 seats before an assembly meeting. *Topil* is the least prestigious in the hierarchy of obligatory municipal cargos in Kajp (a system which operates similarly in other Oaxacan communities). For young men like Eduardo, serving as a *topil* for one year is a common experience, and this service is usually followed by other cargos of increasing prestige in subsequent years.

But Eduardo wasn't always living in Kajp. He spent a lot of his younger years living outside of the town. He described the timeline of his moves in and out of Kajp to me as we sat on the roof-top of the house where I rented a room near the center of the town. He first left Kajp to attend primary school in the city of Ixtepec, about 100 kilometers away when he was around 7 years-old. Then he went to Oaxaca City when he was 16 years-old and worked in a restaurant. Throughout his late teens and early 20s

[18] The names of all interview participants have been anonymized.

Eduardo gradually moved north through Mexico, living for a time near the border with the United States, eventually migrating to the United States and living in a couple of states. Moving frequently in his youth shaped Eduardo's outlook on life. "I think that as humans, we are predisposed to move," he told me and went on to describe the first time he saw the wind farms of the Isthmus Region of Oaxaca, the southwestern deserts and the Midwestern river city skylines of the United States as all being uniquely breathtaking. "I always say that the more one knows, the bigger, the richer you feel."

Eduardo felt a certain level of fulfillment as he moved for education and work opportunities. He was earning money, much of which he spent on himself, paying for the clothes he wanted, vocational classes on restaurant food and beverage service, English lessons and high school equivalency tutoring and, at the same time, he sent some money back to people in Oaxaca. He sent anywhere from $10-20,000 pesos (US $500-1,000) approximately every three months to his parents, rarely dictating to them how the money should be spent because he felt they should buy whatever it was they needed, such as donations to the church, pay others to help them till agricultural lands or spend the money on his siblings' school fees as they saw fit. Eduardo told me that he didn't feel much pressure to send money to his family and that he felt no obligation to send money to the municipal government of Kajp. He ascribed this to the lack of frequent contact he had during that period of his life with people in Kajp, contrasting it to the present moment when he felt more connected, in part through constant message notifications via Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram and more.

Of the roughly ten years that Eduardo spent away from Kajp, moving and working in Oaxaca state, Mexico and the United States, he said that he liked living and

working in different places but that over time he felt a gradual change in his feelings about his daily life and his sense of obligation to the Kajp collective grew.

> I start working … and well, I'm not happy, I don't feel good [speaking in present tense about the past] … When I was in the United States I remembered when I was a child I lived on the ranch, I ate cheese, cared for the cows, and then I said *I want to be in my town*.

It was during a visit to his parents in Kajp that Eduardo felt that pull to be in his town become even stronger.

> The authorities called me [to be a *topil*] and I tried to escape it, telling them *I don't live here I'm just here for Christmas* and they said *that's fine* but I still have this feeling *why didn't I say yes?* It's a service I give to my people, *why have I never given it?* … In the city where I had moved I think *I am paying taxes*, there the government manages itself, there is administration there, and here *you have to do it yourself*.

After this reflection, Eduardo accepted the nomination to be a *topil* and that was how I met him. In the almost three years that have passed since I met Eduardo, I came to know him and his family well, sharing meals with them, learning to make the pancakey sweet and savory fresh corn *tortilla de elote* from his mother, gossiping with his sister-in-law, and visiting his siblings who lived in other places. Eduardo was always busy and he seemed to enjoy the process of envisioning something, outlining the steps necessary to see it through and working with others. The year after he served as a *topil*, he served on the local committee to preserve Mixe culture and language in Kajp and in this capacity he led myself and others in organizing a Mixe language workshop for primary school-age children during their Easter holidays from school. On the days when he wasn't doing an obligatory community service, he did agricultural work with his brother, father and uncles, ran errands for his mother, and studied (he's in college). During our interview I

told Eduardo how I observed him serving Kajp in various ways and asked him to tell me why he does it.

> I dedicate all my time to it each day because here in the community, there is no one else who is going to do it for you … if they [the municipal authority] put us on a committee, then that committee has to work and see what's next: *what we can do? What we can give?* … Right now I think it is important to serve your community, because as I said, there is no one else, who else is going to do it? Only us. I would like to perfect [the community], improve it, if you can improve something that is not good and in the future it is, then we have served.

4.3.1 Laboring for the structures of communal territories for reproducing life

Eduardo describes his history of migration, how he worked various jobs in several different places and how, though not frequent, he consistently sent remittances. Experiencing new places enriched his life, he was content with his work, and he felt good about the money he was able to earn for himself and share with others. But he also felt something was missing, illustrated by the nostalgia he felt for his childhood in Kajp and his growing desire to return. Upon his return, he was called to serve a *cargo* as a *topil* and while he was resistant it at first, that nagging feeling was still there as he asked himself why he had never given this service to his community. Eduardo was well into his second year of service when I recorded the interview with him and he was describing new meanings he ascribed to his labor in Kajp that differed from his labor elsewhere – a meaning that stems from learning to serve and acquiring Indigenous consciousness as part of the collective (Robles, 2017; Ruiz Vasconcelos, 2020). Prior to moving back to Kajp, the remittances that Eduardo sent were a sort of transactional way of sustaining social reproduction. Once back in Kajp he saw a future being made through his own embodied labor: a future based in communal territories and governance and the structures

for reproducing them. These are processes which Eduardo and the generations before him have struggled to maintain, precisely because it ensures their future (Cruz, 2010; Tzul, 2018). The assurance of a future gives the work meaning.

4.4 The communal spark

"Araby, come dance with me!" the directness overpowered the excitement in Carmela's voice and it sounded more like a command than a request. It was the annual patron-saint festival in Kajp and I was sitting on a plastic chair at a table filled with other women, most of whom were old enough to be my mother, a seat I had strategically chosen because my lack of confidence in my dancing abilities had me hoping to avoid such invitations. But when I looked at Carmela's beaming made-up face reflecting the lights strung around the basketball court for the occasion, I couldn't say no. The older women at the table laughed at my hesitation and nodded in approval as Carmela took my hand and pulled me out into the crowd of dozens of people dancing in neat pairs. After Carmela coaxed me out of my seat, I continued to dance with her, the older women at the table, Eduardo, and others. I occasionally took a break resting my feet and sipping from a small bottle of Corona, but whether it was cumbia, tropical or istmeño, Carmela rarely missed a song. When I first met Carmela a few months before in December, she was listening to music through headphones on her mobile phone. In the weeks after, I frequently saw her at holiday parties. Her makeup was always sparkling, her nails painted and she chose her outfits carefully, whether she was in bedazzled jeans and sneakers, an a-line dress or a Tehuana *traje*, the style of many women in the isthmus which consists of

a brightly colored *huipil* (blouse) and long flowing skirt. Carmela came to parties to be seen, and her love of music, delight in dancing and boisterous laugh were infectious.

Though Carmela is a frequent presence at events in Kajp, she does not live there full-time. Carmela lives in Tehuantepec (about 100 kilometers from Kajp), and for work she cleans the homes of refinery workers in nearby Salina Cruz. We met one afternoon in Tehuantepec after she finished work for the day and over pizza she told me more about her role in the planning of Kajp's annual patron-saint festival that was held two months prior. The patron-saint festival is an important event in rural Oaxacan communities, and beyond Oaxaca in other parts of Mexico and throughout much of Latin America. Under Spanish colonial rule, Catholic patron saints were bestowed on communities. While such festivals were and are a product of Catholic rituals, they are also a place for communities to maintain practices and celebrations that pre-date the Spanish conquest (Batalla, 1996). Whether it is the patron-saint festival, a birthday, graduation, wedding or baptism, celebrations are planned by a collective of individuals who volunteer and are appointed to donate themselves, raise funds and organize party activities such as food preparation, prizes, entertainment, and more.

Carmela committed to being a *madrina* (godmother) responsible for organizing aspects of the annual patron-saint festival in 2015, which she has done a couple more times since then. In 2019 her primary responsibility was to help with the planning of a party at the *mayordomo's* house (a person administrating the overall organization of the many aspects of the festival). For this occasion, Carmela coordinated with others to purchase gifts, food and alcohol for party guests, hired a band for entertainment, and played the role of hostess for the day. Invited by Carmela, I attended this party and an

organizing meeting of the festival committee at the end of the week of celebration. Gil (Mixe) describes the impressive scale of social reproduction that goes into planning *fiestas*: "There are expert women who can properly calculate the proportion of ingredients in large quantities [for hundereds or even thousands of people] and who dictate the dynamics and pace of work of the other people … involved in the preparation" (Gil, 2019) – translation by author. When I shared my observations of how a large group of over 20 people shared the responsibility of planning and sponsoring the patron-saint festival with Carmela, she smiled and said, "it's beautiful!" I asked her to elaborate on her comment and she said that it is the cooperation of many that is beautiful because some years, individuals might struggle to give as much for "whatever reasons: maybe you do not have much work, someone died, but what matters is you pay it the next year and you talk to your committee," she said describing how the committee works together to coordinate who is able to take up responsibilities from year to year.

Participating in the annual patron-saint festival is important for people who have migrated away from rural life in Mexico because it demonstrates their continued commitment to their family and community (Arias, 2011; Robson et al., 2018). Festivals in rural Mexico rely on the earnings of migrants and are frequently used by communities to tap into migrant nostalgia and promote return and connection. Carmela learned about the importance of maintaining ties to Kajp even as one moves around from an early age. Her family (father, mother and two sisters) moved to the neighboring state of Veracruz to work on coffee farms when she was two years old. Her parents' work seeking took them and their children to various parts of the Isthmus region of Oaxaca such as Juchitán, Lagunas, Matías Romero, Salina Cruz and Tehuantepec. When Carmela and her sisters

were a little older they moved further away, sometimes laboring alongside their parents, harvesting tomatoes in Sinaloa and grapes in Sonora. Carmela and her family were among the 125,000 mostly Indigenous Oaxacans who migrate within the state and the 150,000 who migrate to northwestern states like Sinaloa, Sonora, Baja California, and Baja California Sur for seasonal agricultural work (DIGEPO, 2014). The family returned to Kajp at least every couple of years and, while her parents did not serve *cargos* or regularly complete *tequios*, Carmela remembered her father loving the festivals. He would contribute what little he might have to the communal sponsorship of a band or food for the party, and when he was older and not able to work and give as much, Carmela stepped in and made donations of 500-5,000 pesos (US $20-200), assuring him, "don't worry Dad, I paid for your entrance."

I asked Carmela if she missed living in Kajp when she is not there and she said without hesitation, "Of course, I miss my town a lot because it is a very beautiful, a cool [speaking of the temperature, at a higher elevation, Kajp is significantly cooler than Tehuantepec] and quiet place, but for money reasons I can't be there," and when I asked why she continues to give she evoked memories of her late father again, saying,

> I feel this love by supporting someone, if they are in my hands I give everything for them and this is something that stems from my childhood because my dad instilled in us to do that … you give with love.

Even though she is not there, Carmela is one of many people drawn to the regular celebrations in Kajp such as the annual patron-saint festival because it is a "space that summons those who belong and want to continue to belong to their communities" (Arias, 2011). And the contributions of migrants like Carmela are not one-sided. Through her regular donations for local celebrations, Carmela receives support from the town saying

that the local authorities and the broader community "cannot deny you" if she were to approach them in need.

4.4.1 Remitting for the structures of communal territories for reproducing life

Carmela describes her history of migration, how her parents labored in agriculture around the state of Oaxaca and other parts of Mexico, and now she is a domestic laborer in Salina Cruz. Despite her many moves growing up and working primarily outside of Kajp as an adult, Carmela always feels connected to the community. That she chooses to give a portion of her wages earned in Salina Cruz to support the patron-saint festival is a significant way she maintains the legacy of her family's connection to Kajp. She sponsored festivals, in part she said, so that her late father could attend – according to her, the celebrations brought him comfort and happiness. Carmela feels that by donating her wages to sponsor fiestas she is making a genuine difference, not just in the life of her father, but for the hundreds of other attendees as well. Her labor cleaning houses in Salina Cruz is abstracted as money, which she chooses to give to the social reproduction of Kajp, again like Eduardo's labor, guaranteeing a future. The *fiestas* that she and others sponsor are a celebration of the continuous defense of communal territories and collective labor that reproduce life in Kajp (Cruz in Sedillo, 2010). At the same time, Carmela's remittances are securing her place in Kajp, despite her frequent physical absence. She does not participate in *cargos* and *tequios* like Eduardo, but she has learned to serve in a different way, and the return on that service is that the collective will be there for her should she ever be in need, something that her waged labor in Salina Cruz cannot guarantee her. The survivability of humans is not secure and people often find themselves

in need when crises emerge. One place the people of Kajp turn in difficult times is to their communal territories.

4.5 Structures of communal territories for reproducing life in challenging times

In March 2020 it was first reported that people in the state of Oaxaca were infected with the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). A couple of weeks prior I was in Kajp, where people were increasingly concerned with news of the spread of COVID-19 in China, parts of Europe, and the United States. One night in Oaxaca City as I watched the undersecretary of health deliver his nightly update, I knew I must postpone any further trips to Kajp. As public health officials rattled off the cancelation of events and flights in parts of the country with rising rates of infection, I fired off several texts via Whatsapp and Facebook Messenger to people in Kajp: "I know I said that I would return this month, but with COVID-19 cases rising in the city here, I don't think it would be safe for me or for you all if I were to travel across the state, through the Isthmus, and to Kajp right now." My decision not to travel was met with a little surprise as well as an understanding and assurance that I was welcome to return to Kajp when I wanted. Not even a month later, in April, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Mexico had increased to over 5,000 and there were 332 deaths. Around the same time, the Mexican consulates in the United States announced the deaths of 181 Mexican nationals due to COVID-19. As bars, nightclubs, movie theatres, museums, businesses, government offices, and parks closed around the country, on April 19, the municipal authority of Kajp issued guidelines on how to manage the spread of COVID-19 for those living in the town and the diaspora. Their first recommendation: suspending the celebration of the annual

patron-saint festival which would have been held that May. It was followed by a request that people from Kajp who had migrated elsewhere as well as traveling vendors and guests refrain from visiting Kajp for the duration of the pandemic, and other recommendations in line with public health measures from state and federal authorities.

As businesses laid off and furloughed workers across the United States, analysts at the Spanish multinational financial services company Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria, S.A. (BBVA) predicted that migrant remittances to Mexico could fall as much as 21% because of stay-at-home orders and record unemployment in the United States. Instead, the Bank of Mexico reported that remittances reached a record high: $4.02 billion in March 2020, a 35.8% increase over March 2019. Mexico has continued to receive remittances from Mexicans living and working in the United States, at rates that outpace those in other regions, despite major economic downturns. The urgency felt by some people from Mexico (and elsewhere) to send money to family and friends in their places of origin is clear from news coverage of immigrants working in the United States. “We are struggling here, but it’s worse in Mexico,” one individual told journalists at *The New York Times* and another said “We aren’t going to let down our families who depend on us” (Jordan, 2020).

In June 2020 COVID-19 case numbers spiked in Mexico and United States, and the death toll climbed. From my house in Oaxaca City I was in regular contact with people from Kajp living there, in other parts of Oaxaca, Mexico and the United States. For example, a young man from Kajp who had been living in Oaxaca City contacted me asking if I knew of any organizations that might offer housing support. I gave him the limited leads that I had and, as our conversation progressed, I learned that he had been

unable to work regularly since April causing him to fall behind on rent payments. I asked if he had an understanding landlord and he said yes for now, but that he was unsure how long he could sustain himself in the city. A contact in Kajp informed me that despite the request from municipal authorities that the diaspora not return, some people had indeed returned. She said that the quarantine protocol was sheltering return migrants for two weeks in the small houses that dot coffee plots, corn fields and cattle grazing lands that surround Kajp. I told her that I had heard from someone in Oaxaca City who was struggling to pay for their apartment and she sighed, saying that the higher cost of city living in comparison to the relatively low monetary cost of rural life was proving to be even more challenging with people out of work due to the pandemic. She said that is why some people were choosing to return from urban areas in Mexico, that and because Kajp "is where their mothers are and they can always eat here."

Over one year after I informed people in Kajp that I would be postponing fieldwork, I have still not returned. In April 2021 it seemed like the spread of the coronavirus was contained as case numbers decreased and vaccines became widely available to healthcare workers and the elderly. People began to move about more, with precautions, and I noticed more people from Kajp travling to and from, for example one person posted a selfie, wearing a mask on a bus to Oaxaca City. On May 9, 2021 the annual patron-saint festival was held in Kajp, though I heard it was a much smaller affair than in previous years.

The significance of the communal governance and collective labor that goes into reproducing life in Kajp becomes strikingly evident in moments of crisis like the global coronavirus pandemic that began in 2019. President López Obrador continuously thanks

migrants for their massive contributions to the national economy, acknowledging that remittances are sustaining life by likening it to the vital work of health-care professionals. But remittances alone done not sustain life. The communal governance structures and land management that people in and from Kajp have organized for generations laid the groundwork for things like issuing safety procedures to residents and those in the diaspora such as quarantining in houses on agricultural lands outside of the main settlement. That people who have migrated elsewhere can always return to their mother's house and eat begs the underlying question *what makes it possible for their mother's house to always be there?* It is the communal governance structure, collective labor and protection of communal territories that does more than produce value to be extracted and used elsewhere. It both subsidizes capitalism during a time of crisis and it ensures the existence of a future for people made vulnerable under capitalism.

4.6 Conclusion: making communal futures

Collective work, communal governance, the *fiesta*, and territory are the central structures in Kajp for reproducing life and securing the future that the people there want. Eduardo's service as a *topil* and on the committee to preserve Mixe culture and language meant that he set out 300 chairs before assembly meetings, delivered administrative notices to dozens of households, planned Mixe language lessons for 40 children ages 4-16, guided new people (like me) around, and worked with others to maintain agricultural lands and curtail wildfires, to name just a few things. Carmela's labor as a house cleaner in Tehuantepec was abstracted as remittances which she donated (alongside others) to sponsor things like the fees for several bands; renting stage, lighting and sound

equipment; and purchasing dozens of cases of beer, soda, mezcal, prizes, candies, and ingredients for making several multi-course meals of *tamales*, barbeque, salad and desert for hundreds of people over the course of a few days. The communal governance of Kajp's municipal authority is always strategizing on how to protect the territory and the people living within and those who have migrated outside its physical boundaries, as illustrated in the ways they organized around COVID-19. It is not just about someone's actual mother still having a house on a plot of land in Kajp, rather, it is the continued struggle of an autonomous collective for generations that ensures the existence of these four pillars for reproducing life.

How Eduardo, Carmela, and the community of Kajp work together to secure a communal future offer lessons for thinking about remittance management and social reproduction. The waged labor of people who migrate and the remittances that they send play an important role, but as scholars have argued, there is extensive labor "required to transform remittances" (Guermond, 2021, p. 15). I have shown elsewhere how women take on remittance management and some of the collective labor and communal governance responsibilities of absent men who have migrated (Smyth, 2021). Again, here I argue that it is not the money alone that is important, rather it is the manner of its insertion into the local communal economies that renders it valuable for reproducing life.

Making *comunalidad*, the structures of communal territories for reproducing life, the analytic starting point for a discussion about remittances and social reproduction is a kind of reorientation. As people send some portion of their wages off to Kajp, their waged labor is supplementing social reproduction. In a capitalist economy the social reproduction that is done by workers' loved ones in their places of origin is a direct value

transfer most often running from the Global South to the Global North (Katz, 2001), yet in addition, this research shows how the lines of value created by waged labor in capitalist economies also run in the reverse direction, helping non-capitalist processes.

The scale at which communal social reproduction takes place in Kajp and that it takes place on collectively held and managed land is what makes it so significant as a site of resistance and a lesson to others embroiled in contestation over social reproduction and in search of radical possibilities through it (Gago, 2018; Meehan & Strauss, 2015). Much scholarship on remittances focuses on the family and the household as the unit of analysis, but the family unit under capitalism does not have the ability to make structures like the ones that exist in Kajp for adapting to significant challenges that range from major earthquakes, out-migration, narco-trafficking, mining concessions and the COVID-19 pandemic. Though remittances are primarily sent from individuals to family members, the money is frequently earmarked for cooperative use such as funding communal events or paying people to do collective work. What people in Kajp are able to achieve under structures of communal territories for reproducing life is quantitatively greater than a household might achieve alone. They are able to assign plots of land for specific use, quickly adapt houses and other structures under changing circumstances, negotiate the use of resources, put on vast festivals that the local population, diaspora and neighboring towns are invited to. Remittances are being deployed to support the structures of communal territories for reproducing life of Kajp, which the people who originate from see as their primary source of support and security, past, present and future. Framing remittances in this way gives us a glimpse of social-economic relations where sustaining life is more fully valued than under the exploitative conditions of capitalism.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

This dissertation analyzes the ways that human migration and remittances intersect with the dynamics of gendered collective work and communal governance in one Mixe community in Oaxaca, Mexico. As a case study, it provides rich descriptions of how people manage remittances specific to the context of Indigenous communal governance in Oaxaca. Though it is only about one community, this dissertation gives empirical examples which speak to existing theoretical themes while it also provokes new practical and theoretical questions that may pertain to other remittance geographies.

5.1 Wider Contributions

First, this dissertation contributes to scholarly efforts to understand the global management of remittances (Bakker, 2015; Datta, 2017; Guermond, 2021; Kunz, 2011; Lindley, Forthcoming). In chapter 2 I trace some of the ways that international institutions, the Mexican government, and financial actors are targeting remittances for capture in the formal financial system. My approach scrutinizes the gendered dichotomies within the financialization of remittances agenda in Mexico (Kunz & Ramírez, 2021), and provides empirical evidence on the rich nuances within place-specific gendered social relations that inform remittance practices (Hoang & Yeoh, 2015; King & Vullnetari, 2009; Kunz, 2015; Marchand, 2015; Wong, 2006). Both chapter 2 and chapter 4 focus on the work of members of remittance households and the broader community that is necessary to manage remittances, answering recent calls from economic geographers to investigate the unwaged economic activity of non-migrants (many of whom are women) (Guermond, 2021; Winders & Smith, 2019). Additionally, I contribute to ongoing studies on how Indigenous

Oaxacan communities manage migration (Conway & Cohen, 1998; Martinez, 2020; Mutersbaugh, 2002; Worthen, 2012).

Second, this dissertation answers long-standing calls from feminist scholars that research must always begin from a situated perspective, one that recognizes knowledge as shaped by complex dynamics of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, (dis)ability, nationality, and more (Benson & Nagar, 2006; Caretta, 2015; Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1986; Kobayashi, 1994; Rose, 1997). Fortunately, feminist commitments to embodiment, positionality, and critical reflexivity in research have become the methodological norm across the social sciences. In chapter 3 I built on the foundation of this epistemological shift by discussing aspects of consent, refusal, and autonomy while conducting academic research as a US-born, cis-gender white woman in an Indigenous community in Mexico. In analyzing these themes through fieldwork, I contribute to recent geographic thinking about the possibilities of research methods for decolonizing the discipline (Asselin & Basile, 2018; Vasquez-Fernandez et al., 2017; Weir et al., 2019; Zaragocin & Caretta, 2020) as well as how we might build more accountable relations through research (Daigle & Ramírez, 2019; Nagar, 2019; Noxolo et al., 2012; Pulido, 2008).

Third, this dissertation contributes to social reproduction theory in and beyond feminist economic geography. Bhattacharya (2017), Federici (2004), and Fraser (2013) theorize social reproduction not just as the work of the family but also existing in public functions like welfare, parks, libraries, healthcare, water, and more. In chapter 4 I build on their work, mobilizing Tzul's theories of social reproduction in Indigenous communal governance (2015, 2018, 2019) to analyze how migrant labor and remittances merge with

collective labor to carry out the life-sustaining practices of *comunalidad* in Oaxaca. This chapter contributes to scholarship on the ways that human migration transforms social reproduction (Cravey, 2005; Gago, 2020; Katz, 2001; Shah & Lerche, 2020; B. E. Smith & Winders, 2008) and like chapter 2 it answers calls to study the work of managing money among remittance receivers (Guermond, 2021; Winders & Smith, 2019). The collective nature of social reproduction and the rootedness in place of Oaxaca's communal territories, which the people have defended for generations, provide important lessons about how people continuously struggle to secure the futures that they want in the midst of ongoing crises and precarity (Cruz, 2010; Mullings, 2021).

5.2 Future Research

I hope I will be able to expand my research in several ways. First, I would like to write and publish two additional manuscripts from my dissertation research in Oaxaca. The first will be on the unique role of digital spaces in expanding the social fabric and territory of communal life, co-authored with Gildardo Juárez (Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla). As I described in chapter 1, we collected data on Kajp's digital spaces. Based on our preliminary analysis, we believe we could make original contributions to ongoing scholarship about migrant transnationalism (Ehrkamp, 2020; Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006; Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Kearney, 2000; Pratt & Yeoh, 2003; R. C. Smith, 2006; Velasco Ortiz, 2005) as well as recent scholarship that considers the importance of "vertical space" in the defense of territory for Oaxacan communities (Bryan, 2018) while also considering how digital spaces like Facebook extract personal data for corporate profit, which Simpson (2017) has suggested might be further alienating

Indigenous peoples from the material (Indigenous) world. The second will be a further reflection on research methods, focused on embodied experiences during fieldwork, in the hopes of furthering feminist geographic scholarship on critical reflexivity in research. This will be co-authored with Manon Lefèvre (Yale University). We envision an article which analyzes aspects of our own identities and lived experiences while conducting academic research in order to interrogate lingering discomforts around embodied experiences and to call for a renewed commitment to placing the sexual and reproductive body in fieldwork and research (Cupples, 2002; Nast, 1994; Schneider, Lord, & Wilczak, 2020). We recently co-presented on this topic at the American Association of Geographers Conference in April 2021.

I would like to begin a new project on remittances in Mexico and between Mexico and the United States that will shift the focus of from migrants and their communities to the international development organizations, national governments, and financial institutions which shape global remittance governance. I propose to do interviews, archival research and discourse analysis of policy documents to provide insight into how economic policy analysts are assessing remittances as a source of capital accumulation and how migrants and their families are perceived in this process. This project will further my original contributions to critical development and finance studies as well as feminist economic geography and Latin American feminist theories of the economy with new theorizations on the racial and gendered character of what constitutions valuable economic practices.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. THE RESEARCH DESIGN

I was in Mexico from May – August 2015, May – August 2016 and again March 2018 – August 2020. During intensive fieldwork in Oaxaca (August 2018 – March 2020) I maintained a residence in the house of a prominent feminist activist in Oaxaca City and a residence in the house of a couple living in Kajp. In this section, I trace my research design involving ethnographic methods and share examples of how I did participant observation, semi-structured interviews, completed data analysis, and worked with research assistants.

A1.1 Permission to conduct research in Kajp

Obtaining the permission of local authorities is the first step to doing fieldwork in Indigenous communities in Oaxaca. In August 2018 I presented my research project to two groups of Kajp's local authorities. Tad Mutersbaugh, co-advisor to my dissertation and our colleague Gildardo Juárez (citizen of Kajp, community media activist, host of the radio show Pez en el SURCO, and master's student in Communication and Social Change at the Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla) attending the meetings with me. Gildardo and Tad affirmed my ability to do a cooperative and respectful research project in Kajp. And I read a description of my research questions and objectives, which included a list of the institutions funding the project. A copy of this research proposal, called a *carta de presentación,* was left with the authorities for their records. The local authorities asked a

few questions about my project, which I answered, and then I was given permission to stay in Kajp and complete the research project.

Following this initial meeting, I continued to meet with the local authorities almost every time I visited Kajp. The meetings were usually brief (less than 30 minutes). In them we discussed more details about me and my research project such as what kinds of questions was I asking research participants, what I was learning, and the organizations that funded my research. The authorities were always interested in how I was doing personally, inquiring about my comfort in Kajp and in travelling to and from – they were clearly looking after me – indeed, one of their primary responsibilities as nominated and elected authorities is the well-being of the community.

At the end of each year in December, new authorities are elected in Kajp and they assume their duties in January. Therefore, in February 2019 and 2020, I brought updated copies of my research proposal and a summary of my research to the newly elected authorities.

A1.2 Participant observation

With permission of the Kajp town authorities and individuals, I conducted participant observation, which included attending assembly meetings, observing casual gatherings in the central town square where people congregate regularly for a mix of recreation and politics, assisting people (primarily women) in daily activities such as cooking, cleaning, agricultural work and child-care, and monitoring content on the community's digital (Facebook and Instagram) and radio spaces (Mixe community radio jënpoj xhjp 107.9 FM http://jenpojradio.info/inicio/).

During participant observation, I paid close attention to the content of discussions in the different spaces as well as how those spaces were gendered, and how discussions about remittance management, labor, and politics differ in gendered spaces (such as spaces dominated by men such as large town meetings or mostly women-only spaces like food preparation for parties and festivals). I paid close attention to women's household labor and community responsibilities, and to the content of women's discussions in the absence of men. For example, during one meeting of the committee that organized the communal kitchen and food preparation for the elementary school students, I witnessed women opening encouraging each other to take on committee responsibilities and speak up in the meeting, in ways I did not see in larger community-wide meetings. Participant observation revealed important gendered themes such as machismo and care work. It helped me to gain insight into the different ways that people discuss their everyday work and how they see these processes as shaping gender roles.

In my observations of women's everyday work, I was able to sketch their time-geographies. Gathering data on the time-space paths of women in Kajp was important for understanding women's gendered strategies for completing responsibilities (Hägerstrand, 1985; Mutersbaugh, 1999; Rose, 1993). I was able to understand how women's productive input for their families and community change (or do not change) with the presence of remittances. For example, I spent a morning with one woman working in her home. We spent an hour making breakfast and feeding her children before they left for school and then she pointed to her washing machine, a gift from her son living in Mexico City, and joked that our work was over for the morning. While the two loads of laundry that we

washed with the machine did consume the rest of the morning, it took less time than it would have taken her to wash all of the clothes by hand.

Participant observation extended to Kajp's primary digital spaces and the regional Mixe community radio station. On two Facebook pages over 1500 individuals share news and plan for the town across space. Social media and messaging apps connect people who have migrated and those still living in their hometowns (Plaza & Plaza, 2019). Social media, radio, and text-messaging spaces expand rural Oaxacan towns beyond their physical boundaries (Bryan, 2018), making digital spaces an important site for gathering data on local politics and gendered behavior (Gatson, 2017; Leszczynski & Elwood, 2015; Sanjek & Tratner, 2015). Studying Kajp's digital spaces provided additional data on how Kajp reproduces itself online and via the airwaves. For example, town authorities regularly post photographs of events and official bulletins. These kinds of posts are broadcasts to members of the community living both near and far, sharing details about who is sponsoring the upcoming patron-saint festival, how the girls basketball team won a regional tournament, that the local band is selling sweatshirts, or more who was elected to serve administrative *cargos*.

Participant observation in group spaces like meetings or party preparation was crucial to building relationships, which often led to invitations from individual women and families to join them in their homes or on their lands, all experiences which informed my semi-structured interviews. My presence on Kajp's social media spaces like the Facebook page and Instagram account introduced me to members of the community living in other parts of Mexico and the United States. It has also been an important way for me to remain connected with people during and after completing fieldwork.

A1.3 Semi-structured interviews

I completed semi-structured interviews with members of around 50 families, often starting with a woman in the family (mother, grandmother, older daughter). I was sure to interview people of different ages, civil statuses, and from various family types and household incomes because all of this and more influences subjectivities (Ehrkamp, 2013). Many interviews were conversational and not recorded. We talked as we cooked, watched children, shared coffee or a meal, or walked through the town and the surrounding lands on our way to do some errand or agricultural work. In this context, I frequently talked to research participants more than one time, and often in the presence of other family members or friends. After our conversations I would rush off to write down everything I could remember, and because we had multiple conversations we were able to revisit the same topics and I could verify details from previous conversations. I recorded 27 interviews, most of which took place in the homes of interview participants. Interviews were approximately 45-60 minutes. They were conducted in Spanish, and digitally-recorded and transcribed with the consent of the interviewee. I compensated participants MX $100 (US $5) which I selected because it is the equivalent to half a day's wages and buys one kilo of beef or pork.

The aim of the interviews was to build on participant observation data by collecting further information on migration histories and the use of remittances, as well as more personal data on the meaning of remittances, how they impact women's daily responsibilities and social relationships, and how women feel about their political participation in Kajp. Interviews were particularly suitable for collecting data on how

people give meaning to processes, construct knowledges, and discuss their everyday life experiences (Crang, 2002; Valentine, 2005). For example, I often asked people about their feelings around a person who migrated or particular remittance transfers so that I might link the remittance management process to moments of social significance (Dreby, 2010; Guyer, 2004). The interviews provided insight into how Kajp manages remittances from people who have worked within the local government and how individuals participate in remittance management at the household and community level. Through the interviews, I was able to understand how Kajp collectively manages migration and remittances, to better understand the history of women's involvement in local politics, how remittances are being used by families, and how women view their own positionality within the decisions of migrants, town authorities, family members, and other actors in remittance management. Appendix 2 contains my interview guides.

A1.4 Data Analysis

To manage and analyze the field notes, interview transcripts, and social media screenshots that I collected during research, I used MAXQDA, software for importing, organizing, and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data that includes text, tables, photos, and social media content. MAXQDA was selected because it allows for variables to be coded and assigned values. It was necessary to assign quantitative value to some responses to closed-ended questions for example and code the text of the open-ended responses.

My research assistants transcribed all interviews. In order to preserve accuracy, transcription occurred within 2 months of each interview, and preliminary data analysis

was ongoing throughout data collection in Kajp. To manage and structure the textual data, I assigned meaning to text with in vivo coding. Coding is a component of grounded theory, a form of data analysis that facilitated uncovering patterns in how women experience remittance management in Kajp (Charmaz, 2008; Cope, 2010; Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Schensul & LeCompte, 2012; Schilling, 2006). Themes and codes were identified prior to fieldwork based on relevant literature and the research questions. As the months of fieldwork progressed, I evaluated and revised the themes, and writing the dissertation was yet another moment of exploring the connections between the literatures and the data that I collected.

A1.5 Research Assistants

I hired five research assistants to help me with various tasks.

Candelaria Gómez collected demographic data on migration from sources like the National Population Council (CONAPO) and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) and data on women's political participation from the Oaxaca State Electoral and Citizen Participation Institute (IEEPCO) for example. She assembled bibliographies of academic articles and recent Master's theses and Doctoral dissertations published in Mexico on various themes such as on migration in Oaxaca women's rights and political participation in Oaxaca, and the Mixe region of Oaxaca. Candelaria and her son Patricio joined me for two weeks of fieldwork in Kajp. During that time, she did several interviews with me, two interviews solo, and greatly improved the interview guides. Candelaria also transcribed every interview.

Coral Mendoza joined me for two weeks of fieldwork in Kajp. During that time, she did four interviews solo and accompanied me for several others.

Gildardo Juárez is from Kajp and was living in Oaxaca City while I did fieldwork. He provided me with feedback on the interview guides and monitored Kajp's official Facebook page (I was unable to check it as frequently because Wifi service in Kajp is not good). Gil took screenshots of relevant posts and conversations and we met on a monthly basis to discuss what he observed and chat about how the project was going overall.

Lindsey Funke was a Master's student at the University of Kentucky Department of Geography. She traveled with me to the University of Chicago Special Collections to look at archival material.

Alejandra Juárez lives in Kajp and I lived with her and her partner while I did fieldwork there. She introduced me to dozens of people who would become participants in this research project. When necessary, she translated from Mixe to Spanish. In addition, she made the food that I ate, showed me how to move around in Kajp, ensured that I had everything I needed to be comfortable and safe, and the knowledge that she shared with me enriched this project at every level.

APPENDIX 2. INTERVIEW GUIDES

The following are partially abbreviated interview guides[19] that my research assistants Candelaria Gómez, Coral Mendoza and I used May 2019-February 2020. I first outlined the interview guides in English and then re-wrote them as more detailed questions in Spanish. Then, another research assistant Gildardo Juárez provided feedback and edits on the questions in the guides. Finally, Candelaria and I ran test interviews with the couple who I rented housing from in Kajp and we used that experience to make final adjustments to the guides. I translated these questions from Spanish to English for this appendix.

A2.1 Consent to participate in research study

I am beginning to do interviews for my research project. Like I have said and you know, I am a student in a doctoral program in geography at the University of Kentucky in the United States writing a dissertation. My project is about the work that women do, migration, remittances and household economies. [PAUSE[20]]. And now I would like to talk with you about these topics. The interview is mostly about you and your family: who has left the Kajp, how they are, what they do, how you all maintain connections.

[PAUSE]

[19] Creating detailed interview guides was inspired by taking Dr. Lisa Cliggett's Ethnographic Research Methods seminar in Spring 2017. I modeled my interview guides and this methods appendix after the guides and appendices found in Hirsch, Wardlow, Smith, Phinney, & Nathanson, 2010, which Dr. Cliggett assigned.

[20] I paused frequently during the consent process and again during interviews. I trained research assistants to do the same, at moments that we felt our brief silence might encourage participants to share their enthusiasm for the project or voice their concerns.

With your permission, I would like to record the interview because I want to preserve your words and ideas correctly. I will use the interviews when I write my dissertation and articles. These writings will be available for the public in university libraries. But when I write about you and your family, I will protect your identities. I will not use your names in my writings nor will I use the name of the community. Furthermore, after the interviews I will transcribe and keep a written copy of the interview, then I will destroy the recordings. Other people will not hear the recordings or listen to your voice. Furthermore, I will never share my notes, the transcriptions or any other personal details about you or your families with the government of Mexico or the United States. Of course, they can choose to read my dissertation or articles because those materials will be made public in the future, but I will not give information directly to politicians.

[PAUSE]

Do you have questions for me? [PAUSE]. It is important to me that you all know a lot about my project. If you have a question or want to talk about anything, please come to me with confidence. [PAUSE]. Or if you do not wish to participate, or if you change your mind and prefer that I don't use your interview, let me know. I will not be mad, frustrated or sad. I will understand completely that you have your own reasons and I respect your opinions and wishes.

A2.2 Interview Theme: Basic Personal Information and Family Composition

Purpose: to focus on the interviewee and to gather information about the people who are close to them and will likely be subjects of future interviews

Questions:

How old are you?

What's your marital status?

Take mental notes about the house they live in, items in the house, people who come and go, and the surrounding areas around the house (What's the house made of? Is there a built floor? Is there significant damage to the house? Is there a Mundo Maya house under construction? Are there appliances (washer, television, microwave, gas oven, satellite? Cars or trucks?)

Who lives with you in this house?

Do you speak Mixe? Do others in the household speak Mixe? (parents, grandparents, children)

Are you from Kajp? Your partner?

Are your parents and in-laws from Kajp?

Do you have children and/or a partner who lives apart from you?

A2.3 Interview Theme: Migration

Purpose: to trace present and past movement of people in the family, the reasons and conditions for that movement, how people maintain connections, and how people feel about it.

Questions:

Who in your family has migrated?

Where did they go?

When did they leave?

How did they go?

Did you help them? Was it expensive?

What did you think when they left? How did you feel?

Why did they want to go?

What did they do when they left? (work, study)

What do they do now? Where are they now?

Do you have dreams or wishes for them? What do you want for them?

How frequently do you talk to your family who lives outside of Kajp?

How do you communicate with them? (telephone, Whatsapp, Face, Instagram, other)

How frequently do you see your family who lives outside of Kajp?

Do they visit? (How often? Do they like to visit? Why don't they visit?

When do they visit? (Christmas, Holy Week, the patron-saint festival, birthdays, other important dates)

Do they bring their children/your grandchildren? Do your grandchildren stay with you here? Who cares for them?

Do you leave to visit them? (How often? Why or why not?)

Do you miss them?

What is the most difficult thing about maintaining a family whose members live in different places?

In your opinion, is there more migration now, are more people leaving now than before? Or is it the same? Why?

A2.4 Interview Theme: Collective Life

Purpose: to collect information about how the approximately 800 people living in and 400 people living outside Kajp in other places participate in communal governance and collective labor and how people feel about this work.

Questions:

How do you participate in the community?

Are you a citizen, *comunerxs*?

Do you sometimes attend the meetings? (Which ones? When? Why?)

Do you vote in the community assembly?

Do you publicly express your opinion in the community assembly? How does that make you feel?

The *agencia*, municipal authority, has it called on you to serve?

Have you had a *cargo*(s)?

Has the community nominated you for a *cargo*?

Do you participate in collective work here? (*tequios* and gendered work such as cooking in the community kitchen that doesn't always get called *tequio*)

Are you in a community organization? Have you done service in that organization?

Do they pay people to do *cargos* or no? Are there penalties or consequences for not doing *cargos*?

Have you brought a complaints against the local authorities? Municipal government?

Are you part of a religion? Have you done a *cargo* or service for the church?

The people who leave, do they still have obligations/responsibilities to the family, the community? Are they part of collective life?

How do they maintain a connection and relationship with the community?

How do you (as their mother, grandmother, godmother, other relation) help them maintain connections with the community and the people here?

Do you help anyone else (such as a partner) do *cargos* or *tequios*?

Have you spoken (in a meeting) for someone who was absent?

Have you served a *cargo* for someone who was absent?

Do you feel responsible for the community, for the collective?

Do you have ideas for the community? Opinions for the community and decisions that are being made?

Do you wish that people did more for the community?

What do you think about the responsibilities for people that live in other places? What type of responsibilities should they have ?

Would you be in favor of a woman as *agente*? Why yes or no?

Would you be in favor of a woman as *comisariada* of *bienes comunales*? Why yes or no?

Do you believe the community would accept a woman in these positions? Why yes or no?

A2.5 Interview Theme: Remittances

Purpose: to elicit information about how people living outside of Kajp in other places help the people living in Kajp, and vice versa, and how people feel about sending money and gifts.

How do your [insert relation like child/ren, partner, etc.] help you and the community when they're absent?

Do they send gifts? (examples)

Do they send money? (How do you use the money? Expenses, school, buying tools or appliances, construction and home repair, etc.)

How often? How much? Who sends it?

Who makes decisions about remittances/money in the house, for the family? (and in the community)?

Have you asked them for their support?

Do they donate to the community? (agencia, patron-saint festival, school, clinic, church(es), other?)

Have they sent money after an emergency (like an illness, death, the earthquake)

How do you care for [enter relation like child/ren, partner, etc.] when they are away, in the city or the other side? (send gifts like coffee, fruit, bread; or make things for them like clothing, trinkets)

Are you proud of them?

A2.6 Interview Theme: Property and Resources

Purpose: to focus the conversation on the physical structures and lands that the interviewee is responsible for and gather information about how they maintain their home and lands

Do you have a house here?

Do you have terrain? (coffee plot, ranch land)

Who maintains the house and the land?

Do the people who have left help manage the house and land(s)?

Do you pay anyone for working on the house or land?

Do you ever wish the people who have left return? Do you think they want to return?

A2.7 Interview Theme: Credit, Expenses, Income, Benefits

Purpose: to gather information about other sources of income, the use of formal and informal financial services for savings and loans, and eligibility and enrollment in welfare services.

Questions:

Do you have money saved? (If yes, where/how?)

What is your plan for your savings?

Have you ever asked for a loan? (If yes, where/from whom? Did you receive it? Were you able to pay it back? How? What did you use the loan for? If no, why not?)

What do you do to earn money? (examples: sell things, cooperatives, washing clothes, waged work like for Mundo Maya)

Do you every work for another person?

Who makes decisions about daily spending in your household?

Do you receive Procampo, Adultos Mayores, Oportunidades/Prospera?

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Zelizer, V. A. (1994). *The Social Meaning of Money*. New York: Basic Books.

VITA

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EDUCATION

2015 Master of Arts in Geography, Hunter College of the City University of New York

2015 Certificate in Geographic Information Science, Hunter College of the City University of New York

2006 Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, Hunter College of the City University of New York

PROFESSIONAL PUBLICATIONS

2021 Smyth, A. "Challenging the Financialization of Remittances Agenda through Indigenous Women's Practices in Oaxaca." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*. 10.1177/0308518X20977186

2021 Linz, J and A. Smyth. "Interlude: Calling All Collectives, Interviews with Feminist Geography Collectives." In *Feminist Geography Unbound: Intimacy, Territory, and Embodied Power*, edited by Banu Gökarıksel, Michael Hawkins, Christopher Neubert and Sara Smith. Gender, Feminism, and Geography Book Series. Morgantown: West Virginia University Press.

2020 Smyth, A; J. Linz, and L. Hudson. "A Feminist Coven in the University." *Gender, Place & Culture* 27(6): 854–880. 10.1080/0966369X.2019.1681367

2020 Smyth, A. "Mexican Workers in US are Sending Record Money Home Despite Coronavirus-related Economic Shutdowns." *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/mexican-workers-in-us-are-sending-record-money-home-despite-coronavirus-related-economic-shutdowns-138704

2019 Smyth, A. "Centering Consent in Fieldwork." Pennsylvania State University Supporting Women in Geography. https://sites.psu.edu/swig/files/2019/04/Smyth_SWIG_essay_2019_v5-2k2nv6u.pdf

2017 Smyth, A. "Re-Reading Remittances through Solidarity: Mexican Hometown Associations in New York City." *Geoforum* 85 (October): 12–19. 10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.06.025.

2010 Beauchamps, J.H. and A. Smyth. "Lakou: Haitian Identity in Housing." In *New Haiti Villages,* edited by Steven Holl, 10–11. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

SCHOLASTIC AND PROFESSIONAL HONORS

2021 University of Kentucky, College of Arts & Sciences, Outstanding Teaching Award

2020, 2016 University of Kentucky, Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies Travel Grant for Research

2020 University of Kentucky, Graduate Student Congress, Conference Travel Award

2020 El Cambalache winter workshop: Decolonial Methods in Social and Solidarity Economies, San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico

2019 P.E.O. Scholar Award

2019 University of Lausanne workshop: The Financialisation of Remittances (invited participant), Weggis, Switzerland

2019 Penn State's Supporting Women in Geography, Jennifer Fluri and Amy Trauger Student Essay and Creative Works Competition (second place)

2019, 2018 University of Kentucky, Graduate Student Incentive Program Award

2018 National Science Foundation Geography and Spatial Sciences Program, Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Award (#1833226)

2018 Society of Woman Geographers, Evelyn L. Pruitt National Fellowship for Dissertation Research

2018 Economic Geography Specialty Group of the AAG, Graduate Research Award

2018 University of Kentucky, College of Arts & Sciences, Dean's Competitive Graduate Fellowship

2018 University of Kentucky, Presidential Graduate Fellowship (nominee)

2018 Visiting Scholar at the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociológicas at the Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca

2018 SIEG Summer Institute in Economic Geography, Ghent, Belgium

2018 Feminist Geographies Specialty Group of the AAG, Susan Hanson Dissertation Proposal Award

2018 Graduate Student Affinity Group of the AAG, Professional Development Award

2018, 2017 University of Kentucky, Department of Geography, Student Travel Funding Award

2017 Conference of Latin American Geographers, Field Study Award

2017 Middlebury Language School Kathryn Davis Fellowship for Peace (finalist)

2017 *Abolition: a Journal of Insurgent Politics,* Abolish Border Imperialism Convergence Travel Funding Award

2017 Warwick Law School and Social Theory Centre, Critical Legal Conference Bursary

2017, 2016 University of Kentucky, Department of Geography Barnhardt-Withington Research Award

2017, 2016 University of Kentucky, Graduate School, Student Travel Funding Award

2015 Society of Woman Geographers, New York City Chapter Fellowship

2015 Hunter College of the City University of New York, Department of Geography, Miriam and Saul B. Cohen Prize for Geographic Excellence

2015 Hunter College of the City University of New York, Shuster Award for Outstanding Master's Thesis (nominee)

2015 University of Kentucky, Teaching Assistantship (4 years)

2014 Hunter College of the City University of New York, Master's Thesis Support Grant

2014 Hunter College of the City University of New York, Graduate Student Association, Conference Travel Award

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS HELD

2021-present Research Assistant on An Everyday Queer New York: Companion Site http://jgieseking.org/AQNY/ for *A Queer New York* by Dr. Jack Gieseking

2017-present Reader, Advanced Placement geography exams, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, NJ

2020-2021 Graduate Student Instructor, Department of Geography, University of Kentucky

2017-2018 Scorer, Spanish-language exams, Council for Aid to Education, New York, NY

2016 Consultant on *What We Have Built*, documentary film directed by Adrián Gutiérrez and Grace Remington for UnionDocs Collaborative Studio Fellowship, Brooklyn, NY

2015-2018 Graduate Student Teaching Assistant, Department of Geography, University of Kentucky

2014-2015 Research Assistant, Francis Donnelly, Geospatial Data Librarian, Baruch College of the City University of New York, New York, NY

2014-2015 Research Assistant on Mapping the Solidarity Economy in the United States (NSF #1340030), Dr. Marianna Pavlovskaya, PI, Geography, Hunter College of the City University of New York (with Dr. Craig Borowiak, Dr. Stephen Healy, Dr. Emily Kawano, Dr. Maliha Safri), New York, NY

2014 Communications Intern, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, New York, NY

2014 Editorial Intern, *Journal on Migration and Human Security* at the Center for Migration Studies, New York, NY

2006-2013 Director of Operations, Palo Santo, Brooklyn, NY

2009-2011 Online Editor, PEN American Center, New York, NY

2008-2010 Administrative Director, BAU Institute, New York, NY

2002-2006 Senior Secretary in the Office of Admissions, Weill Medical College of Cornell University, New York, NY