

From Ultimogenitur to Senior Club.

Negotiating certainties and uncertainties of growing older between rural Mexico and urban Chicago

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Short Abstract

Mexico - U.S. migration greatly affects the living conditions of elderly Mexicans on both sides of the border. Examining communities in rural Mexico and urban Chicago we seek to investigate what kinds of new (un)certainties the migratory context causes for elderly Mexicans in both settings.

Long Abstract

Many Mexicans on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border agree that fulfilled ageing is tightly connected to the everyday presence and care of family members and the family in general. Such perceptions are part and parcel of wider Mexican kinship and family ideologies. However, lived realities in transnational communities between rural Mexico and the USA diverge from these idealized discourses. Based on two long-term field projects and ethnographic locations (rural Mexico and urban Chicago) we want to ask how the elderly and their families within migrant transnational communities deal with new uncertainties (and certainties) emerging out of broader changes in economic, social and ideological conditions that are linked with migration. While elder women and men in rural Mexico are confronted with the crumbling of indigenous inheritance and security systems such as the practice of ultimogenitur, their elder counterparts in Chicago face new models of living arrangements and daily routine that result in appreciated leisure time on the one hand and loneliness and abandonment on the other hand. Participation in past time activities at Senior Clubs serves as a means to deal with this ambiguous situation and to create new social ties. Both in Mexico and Chicago migration thus crucially influences the frameworks and structures elderly Mexicans interact with, thereby necessitating new strategies for a satisfied ageing. In the new emerging realities the ideal of a family centred old age might be replaced by more diverse models of ageing.