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### [Review of: S.L. Lopez (2015) The remittance landscape: Spaces of migration in rural Mexico and urban USA]

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- *The Remittance Landscape: Spaces of Migration in Rural Mexico and Urban USA*, by Sarah Lynn Lopez. University of Chicago Press, 2015.

The body of literature on Latin American migration has been growing steadily over the last decades. Multi-sited research in anthropology and geography has illuminated the cultural, social, political and economic dimensions of migration and remittances. Mexico and the Andean countries are arguably the best covered regions in the debates on ‘globalization-from-below’ and on possible local development through the investment of remittances. Lopez’ study of Mexican

migration from the state of Jalisco to the U.S. (and back) might seem just another ethnographic addition to this list. Yet her excellent book sheds fresh light on several understudied themes and she innovatively connects a spatial and material analysis to a socio-political inquiry.

Lopez' sharp eye for the spatial and physical order reveals her disciplinary background in architectural history, which is blended with stories of the actors involved in the construction of buildings, spaces and symbols. Exploring such social spaces which are created through the act of remitting money, Lopez aims to comprehend migrants' shifting attachments to 'here' and 'there' over time. In six chapters, an introduction and a conclusion, she takes the reader from the individual migrant family's project of building a dream house to collective aspirations of hometown associations of migrants that attempt to bring development to their villages of origin. Lopez scales up to analyse state involvement and power play in the channelling of remittances through the well-known Mexican 3x1 programme, in which the state matches funds invested by hometown associations. The journey continues with analyses of migrants' gendered identity constructions in the famous bull riding events and the ways in which remitting reshapes the public sphere. We follow the return of elderly and deceased Jaliscoños to their hometowns, to end the story in the homes-away-from-home: the U.S. metropolis. All notions of the 'here' and 'there' are addressed and turned around.

There is increasing acknowledgement in the literature on migration, transnationalism and globalization that the material culture produced in a framework defined by the flows of people, goods and ideas offers an excellent yet understudied point of entrance into deeper understandings of socio-cultural transformation. As other scholars have recently attested, the visual expressions in migrant architecture disclose analytically how the producers of form – often the underprivileged – envision the relationship between 'here' and 'there', countryside and city, and between 'now' and an aspired future (Lozanovska, 2016). Lopez spearheads this approach with the introduction of the notion 'remittance landscape'. In her book, she shows how relationships of patronage and inequality between small Mexican villages and larger towns thwart the democratic goals of internationally praised development models such as the 3x1 programme, highlighting the unintended socio-political outcomes of well-intended models. Unravelling the multiple stories embedded in the construction of an old peoples' home, for example, enables her to trace money flows – the economic power of remittances is overwhelming – which in turn point toward the unequal involvement of state actors, local communities and trans-local migrants. The approach of tracing material culture to its inceptions and social effects proves a fruitful one in the book.

While several chapters deal with the political institutions and conflictive domains of national and local politics in a more structuralist way, the book manages to balance out political-economic examinations with lively ethnographic details in every chapter, which bestows on the book a coherence in

style and analytic content. Several chapters are crafted around iconic spatial interventions, such as a rodeo arena or a cultural centre allowing Lopez to postulate her vision on the relation between space, place and social transformations in statements such as: ‘One goal of many migrants is to resurrect and preserve the jaripeo [bull ride] as a form of traditional culture, yet the forum they have created for performing that version of rancho life is the very place that reveals the extent to which that social order no longer exists’ (p. 131). She concludes stating that ‘[r]emittance development is a fundamentally complex social process that begins with individual aspirations but quickly engages institutions at many scales, as well as clashing social worlds’ (p. 259).

*The Remittance Landscape* offers an excellent read to scholars and students in migration studies, geography, anthropology and Latin American studies. The cross-cutting analyses and detailed observations show what globalization, social fragmentation and development mean in the context of a world that faces an increasing number of people on the move in search for a better future, captured by the observation that for many people ‘[t]he price of improving the domestic dwelling is abandoning it’ (p. 38). The gridlock that follows shows the painful dilemmas of migrants all over the world, because ‘[t]he choice is clear: living in a remittance house year-round would mean losing the ability to maintain it’ (p. 67). This and other paradoxical outcomes of migration fundamentally redefine the nature of ‘home’ in Latin America and elsewhere in the Global South. Lopez’ detailed observations enable the reader to feel the frustration over the traps embedded in the act of migration – an act as old as the world and as unstopable as the wind.

Christien Klaufus, CEDLA, Amsterdam

#### **Reference**

Lozanovska, M. (2016) *Ethno-architecture and the politics of migration*. New York: Routledge.