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Is it simpler to leave or to stay put? Desired immobility in a Mexican village

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Abstract

This paper ethnographically explores particular ways of staying put in a Mexican village that builds upon a myriad of present and past mobilities. By doing so, the research contributes to open the black box of rural immobility. Three broad types of stayers are identified: desired, acquiescent, and involuntary stayers. The ethnographic material supports the explanatory power of breaking down the aspiration phase from the realisation one to understand the (mis)matching between desires and capacities for situations of permanence. The research particularly explores how villagers willing to remain, have managed to stay put in a context of high physical mobility, and how staying villagers perceive the desirability and feasibility of staying put compared with that of migrating. Staying put, similarly to migration, is often part of complex life strategies that involve changing mobility–immobility articulations. In the particular ethnographic context, staying put is ascribed an intrinsic positive value. Migration (whether internal or international) has an instrumental value as the means to be able to remain in the village.

KEYWORDS

aspiration/ability model, desired immobility, (im)mobility, Mexico, rural stayers

1 | INTRODUCTION

Lupe has always lived in Zacualpan, the little Mexican village she was born in. Soon after leaving school—she did not pursue further education, so she has not left the village for education purposes—she got married to a local man and had two children. Her first marriage years, while her husband was away working irregularly in the US, were hard for her. She took care of their children and the construction of the family house. In 2014, at the time of the research, to earn money, Lupe works cleaning houses by the hour as well as selling chicken eggs. Her husband works locally in construction. Most of their direct relatives live in the village, and their two children study tertiary education. The family lives now in a nice house and owns some land plots and a few heads of cattle. "I am happy here"—Lupe tells me without a trace of doubt. Lupe has never wanted to leave Zacualpan, and in conjunction with her husband, she has been able to realise such want.

Although immobility has gained status as a proper research object, its image as a default situation still prevails in some of the migration literature, where stayers are still labelled as "left behind" (Jónsson, 2011). Much on the contrary, as the articles in this special issue all show for

rural contexts, there are as many different ways of staying put as there are of migrating. As the migrant category is complex and subsumes together different realities, the immobile label is imposed on situations that present internal disparity. The idea of staying put as the result of taking no action is severely compromised in the analysis of the ethnographic data collected in the small Mexican village of Zacualpan. In the socio-geographical context of this village, crossed and built upon a myriad of present and past mobilities, the research explores how villagers willing to remain, have managed to stay put in a context of high physical mobility. Data show how, similarly to migration, staying put is often part of complex life strategies that involve changing mobility–immobility articulations.

The paper is organised into six sections. It starts with a review about nonmigrants in the migration literature. The next two sections present the context and the methodological aspects of the research. Section four provides an *emic*[i] understanding by Zacualpan villagers of the feasibility of staying put in the village compared with that of migrating. Section five presents the aspiration/ability model of migration (Carling, 2002) and applies it to situations of desired immobility. The final section highlights some of the advantages for migration studies of opening the black box of immobility.

2 | MIGRATION STUDIES AND THE STAYERS

Although migration studies have been slow in recognising the importance of immobility for the initiation, development, and maintenance of migratory projects, immobility and nonmigrants have been present in two important strands of research: the transnational family literature (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002) and the literature on migrant networks (Durand, 2000). Both, the transnational family and the migration network, provide an analytical space that incorporate migrants and nonmigrants alike. Contrary to the Anglo-Saxon world, Mexican anthropologists dealing with migration have been particularly good at incorporating stayers in their studies of migration, and they have done it from a rather early stage.[ii] The pioneering work by well-known Mexican anthropologist Lourdes Arizpe (1980) signals this early interest. In the case of Mexico, there is ample literature on transnational parenting (Ariza & de Oliveira, 2004; Debry, 2006; Mummert, 2005) and particularly on migrant networks, both for the case of Mexico–US migration (see for instance Durand, 1988; Massey, Alarcon, Durand, & Gonzalez, 1987; Zenteno, 2000), as well as for migration within Mexico (Arizpe, 1985; Lomnitz, 1973; Velasco, 2007).

As stated by Sheller and Urry (2006), increases in mobility can only be achieved through the existence of extensive systems of immobility. The perception of the high numbers of people immobilised against their will is nowadays clearer than ever. Such immobilisation processes take place at different stages of the migratory project: in migrants' areas of origin preventing those who desire it to migrate (Carling, 2002), in transit (Haugen, 2012; Suter, 2013), in destination due to detention (Nuñez & Heyman, 2007), or even upon return (Mata-Codesal, 2015; Miller, 2012; Schuster & Majidi, 2015). Along to such stances of immobilisation, there is also ample literature dealing with mobilisation processes that force people to migrate against their will or to migrate under undesired circumstances (Black & Collyer, 2014). However, stayers as the ones presented in this paper, who have the desire as well as the ability to stay put, have deserved less academic attention.

The number of studies that focus specifically on nonmigrants remains small. A few studies have elaborated classifications of stayers. Jamieson (2000) in her study of youths' attachment in the British region of the Scottish Borders, found that being migrant or stayer does not automatically translate into being detached or attached, respectively. Barcus and Brunn (2009) studied people who have never lived outside their county of birth in rural Kentucky. For a specific type of respondents, this work questions the assumption of a negative linear relationship between place attachment and migration. Third, Fernandez-Carro and Evandrou (2014), based on 11 European countries, also provide a classification of elderly stayers that differentiated between intentional and unintended stayers. By focusing on the act of staying itself, this paper puts forward an alternative categorisation of stayers (acquiescent, involuntary, and desired), which along with the previously mentioned classifications —attached/detached (Jamieson, 2000), tied to/rooted in place (Barcus & Brunn, 2009), or intentional/unintended (Fernandez-Carro & Evandrou, 2014)—moves forward the task of looking inside the immobility category.

3 | METHODS

This paper builds on a 2-year research project on immobilities in central Mexico. The study explored ethnographically the lived experiences of immobility, the social imaginary attached to immobility, and different ways of staying put in a context of high geographical mobility. Data from this paper was collected during 2014 in the Mexican village of Zacualpan in the state of Morelos. Methodologically, the research was based on 50 semistructured interviews with people who were in Zacualpan at the time of the collection (March–April 2014). There were 26 women and 25 men, between 18 and 80 years old, with a balanced age distribution. Interviewees self-identified as being from the village. Interview data was supplemented by information from informal conversations and participant observation carried out over a month.

The analysis in this paper heavily relies on the answers to three specific questions: (a) What is it like to live in Zacualpan? (b) What do you like about living here? And (c) Is it simpler to leave or to stay put in the village? Replies to the answers were understood within the (im)mobility information available for each respondent. The third question was purposely framed so to avoid mentioning specific destinations and type of migration. Villagers were able to decide for themselves what they understood as migration and permanence. As will be shown, feasibility was linked to personal desirability.

Desires, expectations, and aspirations to mobility are beginning to receive increasing academic attention. In the recent work regarding migration aspirations, Carling (2014) lists the different questions formulated in interviews and surveys. According to this author, these questions can be grouped into three broad categories. First, questions about desires, aspirations, or preferences. This is, questions that try to capture the assessment of the people surveyed on whether to migrate would be better than staying. The second set of questions refer to intentions or plans. These have greater prediction capacity. A plan is a more elaborate and concrete desire informed by considering different options. Finally, the third group of miscellaneous type questions refer to issues of necessity or probability of migration. The interviews in Zacualpan are located within the first group, as they try to gauge the desirability of migrating and to remain, comparatively.

4 | ZACUALPAN: IMMOBILITY IN A SOCIO-GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF HIGH MOBILITY

Mexico is part of one of the migration corridors most extensively travelled and researched worldwide. This country has traditionally been addressed in the literature as a paradigmatic case of international emigration to just one destination, the US.[iii] Currently, its international migration panorama is far more complex as Mexico has also become a destination and transit country. The migration landscape within Mexico is as complex and fascinating as it is outwardly, and the numbers involved are, as in most countries, far superior to those involved in international migration (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). On top of these movements that imply a change of residence, the latest population census estimated that 21.5 million Mexicans move daily, weekly, or monthly between counties for work purposes

(INEGI, 2010). There is no data about migration and mobility for education purposes so far. However, in a country with such a rich and complex mobility panorama (international and internal migration, as well as labour mobility), according to the latest available census data, 80% of its population still lives in the state they were born in (INEGI, 2010).

Morelos is the third smallest state in Mexico. It is located south of the City of Mexico and the state of Mexico, sandwiched between the states of Puebla and Guerrero. Internal and international movements are often linked in Morelos (Lozano, 2002), with this small state generally presenting complex mobility patterns (Rivera & Lozano, 2006: 47). Among others, there is return migration from the US, emigration to the US, internal immigration from neighbouring states, seasonal immigration, temporary emigration to the states in the North of the country, and daily and weekly mobilities both within the state and towards the City of Mexico and the city of Puebla for labour, education, and leisure reasons.

According to the latest available census, the village of Zacualpan has 3,500 inhabitants (INEGI, 2010). This village shows many of the mobility patterns present at the state level. Zacualpan developed early connections with the country capital, the City of Mexico (Negrete, 1980), which is 2 hours away by car (see Figure 1). It also ranks high in the index of migratory intensity Mexico–US (CONAPO, 2012). International remittances are an important income source for a relevant number of local families (CONAPO, 2012). International emigration to the US by Zacualpan villagers is mostly carried out by young males in an irregular way. Internal remittances from other states in Mexico were also reported as relevant for the sustainability of an important number of local households, although there is no available statistical data.

Education is at the core of the mobility strategies followed by villagers. For historical reasons, the level of education in the village is higher than the state level (INEGI, 2010), so a significant proportion of the Zacualpan population moves or has moved at some stage (with or without change of residence) to pursue higher education. In Mexico, as in many other places, having secondary and even college education is increasingly a necessity to secure access to stable and well-paid jobs in the country (Sawyer, 2010). Villagers with tertiary education (known in Mexico as *profesionistas*) encounter a shortage of qualified jobs in the village. This circumstance forces them to move to the City of Mexico, the state capital, Cuernavaca, or to other large cities in the country. For local profesionistas in Zacualpan who manage to remain, or to come back, the public sector, and particularly education, is a favoured labour option.

Networks are crucial in addressing mobilities, both to internal and international destinations. They provide resources and information that affect migration decisions and therefore channel migration (Faist, 1997). The belonging to different migration networks is an important part of the explanation of the existing two-fold way of engaging with (im)mobility in Zacualpan. First, for villagers with further education, irregular migration to the US is not a desirable option, compared with migrating internally within Mexico. Irregular migration to the US for Mexican profesionistas means wasting their investment in education. Their education will not yield rewards in the US labour market as irregular workers (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2006). As other authors have shown in the case of Mexico, the higher the level of education, the lower the odds of migrating internationally in an irregular way (Meza & Pederzini, 2009). This group engagement with immobility is translated to returns to Zacualpan upon retirement, shorter return periods in the village, or particularly for those working in the public education system, with gradually getting jobs closer and closer to the village. They present a pattern of moving schools in order to get closer to the village, and their ultimate aim is to work in one of the 21 education facilities in the municipality, which include private and public nurseries, as well as primary and secondary schools (INEGI, 2010).

Source: © OpenStreetMaps Contributors

FIGURE 1 Localization of the village of Zacualpan

The second way of engaging with immobility is enacted by villagers who self-identified as peasants, with little or no land and without formal education beyond primary school, and who share networks with relatives who work currently in the US or have worked in the past. These peasants, who compared with the previous group often start their journey into legal irregularity from a lower social position in Mexico, participate in irregular migration to the US as a way to save and acquire assets locally. International remittances sent during villagers' time abroad enable their close relatives' survival in the village. They also facilitate the acquisition of assets that allow villagers to generate an income upon their return. This two-folded (im)mobility articulations match the results of other studies in Mexico, which state that to have or to have had relatives in the US increases the probability of successfully reaching that country (Kandel & Kao, 2001), which negatively affects educational aspirations of people with migrant relatives (Meza & Pederzini, 2009).

Hence, in a national, state and local context of such high mobility, this research explore some of the considerations relating to the desirability and feasibility of staying put in the village of Zacualpan.

5 | IS IT SIMPLER TO STAY PUT OR TO MIGRATE?

Confronted with the complex question of whether it was simpler to migrate or to stay put in Zacualpan, many villagers gave intricate and reflective answers. Generally, there was no consensus on whether it was simpler to migrate (whether internally within Mexico or internationally to the US) or to remain in the village. Those who had previously migrated did not always state that theirs was the difficult option. Neither did those without migratory experience voice that staying put was a difficult decision. Nevertheless, several issues emerged during the interviews.

Age and the importance of the life cycle were reported. Elderly villagers and those beyond working age were considered less suitable for migration. Staying put for this group was considered to be easier and, therefore, preferable to migration.

> Well, the people who stay here ... the elderly, because they are rooted here; they already have their assets, whether they are good or bad. And well, because of age, they cannot be hired anywhere. It is also safer for them to live in the village, because they know everyone here. They know who they can lean on (Isabel, 47 year-old female)

The left behind literature has traditionally dealt with migrants' wives, children, and elderly (Dobson, 2009; Jónsson, 2011). It depicts immobility as a mirror image of the stereotypical male, adult, young, and healthy migrant. Immobility is therefore associated with those unsuitable for work. Migration studies have provided ample material on the differentiated effects of migration given migrants' age (King, Thomson, & Fielding, 2004). The mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006) has expanded the range of socially relevant mobilities, and by doing so, it has largely broken the established understanding of migration as labour migration. Age considerations also show how the lived experiences of staying put is related to the social construction of immobility. Similar to migration, social imaginaries of what is desirable and feasible permeate personal constructions of immobility. To pay attention to the social construction of immobility calls for a life course perspective, as the age group is often a socially important classificatory variable (King et al., 2004).

In this ethnographic case, along with age, the two other most relevant variables in the social construction of immobility were gender and formal education. As many other authors have shown in different parts of the world (see for instance Freeman, 2001 or García, 2008), women in Zacualpan are expected to stay put and therefore perceived as less migratory (Mata-Codesal, forthcoming). However, contrary to this image, local women have engaged with migration, particularly to the City of Mexico, from an early stage (Negrete, 1980). The social desirability of immobility is converted into imaginaries of (im)mobility, affecting villagers' feasibility assessment of migration and staying put. Formal education creates a two-fold pattern of mobility: Peasants and those with lower education are more likely to migrate irregularly to the US, whereas those with further education, tend to disregard migration to the US as an option (given that their educational investment would be wasted in the US labour market due to irregularity) and show higher degrees of mobility (whether residential or not) within Mexico.[iv]

Interviewees' engagement with the initial question—is it simpler to migrate or stay put?—led to villagers discussing the conditions under which immobility is possible and acceptable. Isabel's reply to the question has already pointed to the importance of assets [patrimonio]. Emiliano (47 year-old male) is a local primary school teacher without previous migratory experience. He thinks that it is easier to migrate but only for those lacking certain material means locally:

> Sometimes it looks like some of those who migrated maybe never truly decided to migrate. It is very complex. Or maybe many of us who had stayed put, would have liked to migrate but we did not. When villagers for instance have no land, not a single plot, have no house, I think it is easier for them to leave. Because otherwise they have nothing here, although they have their memories here, their ancestors; they have everything else here but they need to feed their bodies, so they decide to leave and try to better [andar consiguiendo]. In that case, yes, it is easier for them to leave. Even though it is a very hard thing to do.

As Lupe (37 year-old female) states, material means do not necessary refer to assets, but more importantly to local sources of income. Having, or not having a job, was always reported as the main, if not the only reason, to leave the village:

> -Lupe, do you think it is simpler to stay put or to migrate?
> [She doubts ...] Well, it's ... if you have a job here, I say it's good here. But then there are people that look like they do not like to work, or they do not work enough, and therefore for them it is better to go. But leaving, I would not want to leave, who knows why others

leave? But not me, I tell you, I would not like it. And now, even less.

Julio (31 year-old male) has a different profile but, like Emiliano and Lupe, does not give a straightforward reply. In his youth, he migrated irregularly to the US and spent 5 years working in New York City. He is definitive about his reasons to migrate in the first place:

-Why did you decide to go?
Because unfortunately the countryside in Mexico is neglected. The government does not support it. It is not as supportive as other countries are. So we cannot get ahead from working in the fields as much as we would like to. Or at least as much as other people can with their jobs. So, I needed to have my own stuff, and I didn't find other way than going to the other side [to the US].
-When you say your stuff ...
My fields, my house, my car. What everyone aims to have, isn't it? A home. Something to move around. To live more comfortably.

He is a family of peasants, and Julio was certain that locally, agriculture would have not allowed him to achieve the minimum material levels of comfort he deemed as acceptable. The levels of income and material comfort considered acceptable are not the same for every villager, nor do they remain unchanged over time. Income and material comfort levels are largely marked by the individual's local socio-economic group of belonging. The standards tend to be lower for the villagers who are worse off. However, given that they share the village's socio-geographical space, different groups know each other's material conditions, and hence raise individual expectations. Aspirations for an acceptable level of living conditions strongly influence the expectation to migrate. The expectations or desires to migrate arise when (a) people perceive that locally they cannot achieve specific levels of comfort and (b) mobility is perceived as the only, or the most convenient way, to achieve higher standards of living in the village. Expectations to migrate, are built upon in relation to destinations, conditions under which migration is possible, and what is considered as an acceptable threshold of local good life. These three spheres are not only related but also deeply influenced by the local group of belonging. However, it is the third sphere (what is an acceptable good life) that triggers migration expectations.

Julio's pursuit of a more comfortable life locally included his acceptance of risky migration conditions (migrating irregularly to the US) and exploitative labour conditions during his time in the US. Migration afforded him the establishment of sources of income in Zacualpan. As it will be shown in the next section, through the modification of the acceptable conditions to stay put or to migrate, expectations affect people's ability to realise their (im)mobility aspirations.

All of the above leads us to consider the intrinsic or the instrumental value attached by villagers to migration and to permanence. Agustín (47 year-old male) is clear about the fact that migration always entails a process of adaptation that is often hard. He knows what he is talking about; he is currently in Zacualpan, willing to stay put, but he has previous migratory experience in other Mexican states as well as in the US:

Migrating elsewhere, even within Mexico, to another state, is difficult. You have to learn other ways of doing things, different food, the language in the United States ... It is always difficult to go elsewhere, it is not like being in one's place.

None of the 50 interviewees considered migration to be good in itself. There is no intrinsic value in the act of migrating, because it requires a subsequent process of social, cultural, and labour adaptation, which is considered laborious. On the contrary, to stay put is assigned clear advantages, such as "knowing the customs," "to know everyone," "to have enough to eat because here everyone will give you a tomato or an onion," "to be close to your family," or "to have your ancestors in the cemetery". The advantages of staying put in the village at the time of the fieldwork included the fact that Zacualpan was considered a safe haven in a terribly convulsed state and national environment. In 2014, Mexico was immersed in high levels of narco-fuelled violence. That year the state of Morelos was reported as the most violent state in the country, its capital as the most violent city with more than 100,000 inhabitants in the whole country, and Cuautla—the closest city to Zacualpan—ranking 14th (CCSPJP, 2015). In 2014, not a single violent death was reported in Zacualpan. Violence and insecurity, both in the state and also in the irregular crossing to the US, were often mentioned as reasons why staying put was easier, and thus preferable, than to migrate.

Although migration was not reported as being preferable on its own, it was considered instrumental by some villagers to realise their desires to stay put in the village. Different types of migration were consciously enacted as part of strategies to be able to stay put in Zacualpan. This can be done in two different ways: either migrating in the present to allow staying put in the future, or within the family, when part of the family migrates for the other part to be able to remain. The articulations between trajectories of (im)mobility are complex: They involve both the personal and the family level and need to be considered along both time and space.

Answers then to the question about the feasibility of migration show that perceived feasibility is closely linked with social desirability. Unsurprisingly, mobility (both internal and international) featured in the villagers' narratives, but only as a means to achieve permanence in the village. Migration is viewed as a means to an end, enabling being able to live a good life locally in the future. The next section explores the immobility category further and focuses specifically on aspirations and the ability to stay put.

6 | DESIRED IMMOBILITY IN THE ASPIRATION/ABILITY MODEL

Migration theories have traditionally dealt with both voluntary and involuntary mobility. Still, the age of migration cited by Castles and Miller (2003) has proved simultaneously to be the age of involuntary immobility. The human geographer Carling (2002) first attracted attention to the growing number of people immobilised against their will in Cape Verde. To explain this apparent paradox, Carling separated the desire part of the migration project from migrant's ability to eventually realise such desire. The essence of Carling's (2002) aspiration/

ability model relies on the fact that migration implies, first, an aspiration to migrate, and then the realisation of such a desire. This analytical separation made it possible to account for an extended reality that previous theoretical models had not been able to explain: The involuntary immobility of people who, in the so-called era of migration, faced immobilisation processes that prevented them from migrating internationally despite their desire to do so. This distinction allowed Carling to analyse, on the one hand, the variables that influenced the creation of the aspiration to migrate. On the other hand, he could analyse the current barriers to migration faced by prospective international migrants. As his analyses focused on the specific context of international migration from Cape Verde to the European Union, Carling stressed destination countries' restrictive migration policies as the main variables influencing Cape Verdean migrants-to-be's ability to migrate internationally to Europe.

The aspiration/ability model has been subsequently applied to other migratory realities, as for instance, to Senegal by Schewel (2015), to the Kayes region in Mali by Jónsson (2008), or to Andean Ecuador by Mata-Codesal (2015). The model has also undergone further sophistication. The conceptual refinement of the classification variables has led to the inclusion of categories not initially contemplated and which extend the range of explainable situations. For instance, Black and Collyer (2014: 294) incorporated the variable necessity along the variables aspiration and ability, which is of particular relevance for situations of crisis and forced mobilities. Schewel (2015), on the other hand, replaced the concept of ability proposed by Carling by the theoretically richer of human capacity developed by Amartya Sen and introduced in migration studies by Hein de Haas (2003). Using the concept of capacities, it is possible to emphasise not only the role of material but also the social, political, and human skills or resources necessary for migration to take place, as well as the dynamic nature of migration (Schewel, 2015).

Zacualpan interviewees' desires and abilities to stay put allow a testing of the suitability of the aspiration/ability model to explain situations of immobility beyond involuntary immobility. The ethnographic context of Zacualpan suggests further reelaborations of the aspiration/ability model. The different types of stayers identified in Zacualpan particularly calls for the inclusion of the extra categories of desired immobility and acquiescent (im)mobility (the latter already anticipated in Schewel, 2015). Figure 2 adopts Carling's model to focus on the aspiration and ability to stay put, rather than to migrate.

Lupe—whose story introduced this paper—is a paradigmatic example of desired immobility. She has been able to stay put in Zacualpan, while willing to do so. In order to do it, she and her husband have enacted different mobility–immobility articulations in the family over the life cycle. Her husband's irregular migration to the US in the early years of their marriage, facilitated the money and the asset accumulation required for Lupe and her two kids to remain in the village. The (im)mobility articulation also required of Lupe's collaboration, as her managements of remittances and the provision of care in a locally acceptable way, was an essential part of the couple's common strategy to stay put. Her husband would have rather stayed put instead of migrating irregularly to the US and spend some years working in New York. However, as the previous section highlighted, his mobility allowed Lupe's immobility at the time, as well as his nowadays. The ability to stay put is therefore closely linked to mobility.

Regarding desired immobility, it is worth exploring the degree of voluntariness involved. In Zacualpan, there was common ground that the degree of voluntariness—expressed in the ability to choose whether to migrate or to stay put—was considered the consequence of previous life choices. These choices relied heavily on the level of formal education. Marcos (58 year-old male), a retired teacher, was certain that villagers migrated because "as they had decided not to study, once that there is less available jobs, there is no other way forward from them but to migrate [to the US]." As we have seen, projects for life-making in Zacualpan are constructed as dichotomous: either to pursue further education and migrate internally in order to be able to get jobs closer to the village as time goes by or to migrate to the US in an irregular manner in order to return once local sources of income have been secured. Although formal education was perceived as a personal choice, in fact it reflected a local class structure, with those locally better-off more likely to pursue further education.

As mentioned, Carling (2001) has dealt extensively with the category of involuntary immobility. In Zacualpan, given the existence of well-established networks of support for migrating both internal and internationally, involuntary immobility is not as pervasive a reality as in other locations such as the ones analysed by Carling in Cape Verde. There are, however, some stances of people immobilised against their will in the village, whether they lack the resources to migrate in the first place, or more often, as a result of deportation or forced return. After being forced to return, some people remain suspended in a limbo of involuntary immobility. They are back in socio-economic spaces that can be rather unknown after many years abroad. However, given the structures of belonging in Zacualpan, this case affects only to people who was returned to the village but who had not been raised there. This is the case of a 30 year-old male deportee from the US, where he had lived with all his close family almost his whole life. Although
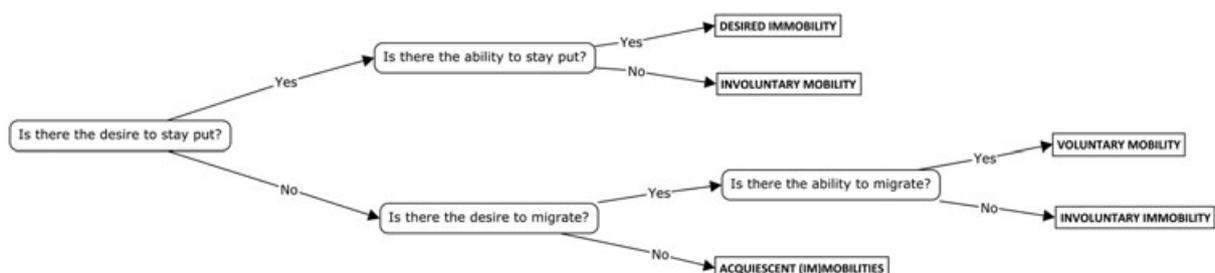

FIGURE 2   Ability/desire model to immobility (source: Own elaboration based on Carling, 2001)

he was native to the state of Veracruz, he returned to Zacualpan where his only remaining relatives in Mexico live.

A third type of immobility, acquiescent immobility, was introduced by Kerilyn Schewel (2015). The concept of acquiescence accounts for the situations where ability is not relevant, given the absence of a clear aspiration or desire either to migrate or to stay put. According to this author, acquiescent immobility highlights the existence of nonmigration preferences regardless of capability constraints. She restricts the term "to describe those who are both unable to migrate but neither do they desire to do so" (Schewel, 2015: 6). In Schewel's understanding of acquiescent as accepting the constraints, involuntary immobility would become acquiescent immobility by means of the individual accepting their own lack of capacities to migrate. Contrary to Schewel, I argue that the term is equally relevant to highlight the absence of clear aspirations to (im)mobility, irrespectively of the ability part. Some people, not faced with the urgency of having to take a decision—that is, the necessity variable which was incorporated by Black and Collyer (2014) is not pressing—would have not developed strong desires neither to migrate nor to stay put, remaining rather lukewarm about the role of (im)mobility in their range of available projects for life-making. This broader view links acquiescent to inertia, which is widely noted as a force in everyday life, also for situations that do not involve migration.

Carling (2002) acknowledges that aspirations and ability may be intertwined, making it difficult to establish a clear cut separation between the two. Data from Zacualpan suggest that the two are not only intertwined but that they affect each other. First, in the absence of capacities to either migrate or to stay put, mechanisms of adaptation are generated that inhibit or modify the desire to do it. As Alondra (62 year-old female) said:

> Well I'm adaptable. I like it here. I like it anywhere. It does not affect me. It has not affected me in the places I have live in. I am … happy. So, no, I don't mind being here, or anywhere else, but now my old mom needs me here. And I can do it [take care of her]. See, I am restless. I like it here, but if the opportunity of going to Tampico [a Mexican city] arises to take care of a friend who needs care, I would go. They call me a wanderer [laughs].

Second, the intensity of the desire also affects the abilities to realise it. This was already anticipated in the answers to the question: is it simpler to migrate or stay put? The previous section showed how desirability and feasibility were linked in villagers' decision-making processes about migrating or staying put. The greater the intensity of the desire, the greater the likelihood of obtaining the necessary capacities to make it real. The interviews in Zacualpan show a strategy that is activated when there is a mismatch between desire and ability, that is, to modify the conditions under which it is acceptable to carry out the desire to stay put or to migrate. The desire to migrate or to remain is not independent of the conditions under which it can be realised. It is not just about staying or migrating but about doing so under certain conditions. The how, understood as the sum of conditions under which it is desirable both to remain and to migrate, becomes central in the decision-making process and the generation of desires and expectations.

7 | CONCLUSION: IMMOBILITY BY DEFAULT?

Although this article places immobility within the realm of migration studies so to challenge some widespread understandings in this field of research, by no way, it is suggesting that immobility is only of interest in how it links to mobility. As this special issue shows, immobility and stayers are a valid research topic on their own in need of more academic attention. Mobility and migration are therefore not to be uncritically taken as the only or even main topics of research. However, there is much analytic power to gain for migration studies by opening the black box of immobility. Collected data in Zacualpan challenge current understandings of immobility as the result of taking no action. By doing so, it adds to a line of criticism in migration studies that calls for more academic attention to be given to the reasons for not moving (Carling, 2002; Fischer, Martin, & Straubhaar, 1997), the contextualised experiences of immobility (Hjälm, 2014; Mata-Codesal, 2015), and the role of immobility in migration (Arizpe, 1980; Jónsson, 2011).

As there are different ways of migrating, there are also different ways of staying put (Jamieson, 2000). The different ways of staying put in Zacualpan can be initially classified upon the categories of involuntary (Carling, 2002), acquiescent (Schewel, 2015), and desired immobility. Such categories question the idea of staying put as a by default situation. As shown in the accounts by villagers in Zacualpan, being able to stay put can be costly. It is often the consequence of complex life strategies that include the management of different types of mobility. Although this paper have dealt with immobility and stayers, migration still features high. (Im)mobilities differ among family members and change over the life cycle. The agency of the so-called left behind is crucial to understand the different mobility–immobility arrangements enacted in order to achieve "good lives" while staying put.

The aspiration/ability model (Carling, 2002) remains useful to account for other situations of permanence beyond involuntary immobility. Carling's analytical separation between the expectation and realisation phases of migration facilitates analyses of situations of immobility. Desired immobility specifically is the result of having the desire or expectation to remain, together with the ability to do so. Ability and desire are not independent variables. They are linked, and their intensity affects each other. The conditions under which staying put or migrating can be done are central in the decision-making process. Some studies have shown how the decision to stay is not a one-off choice (Hjälm, 2014). This paper contributes to that line of research by placing the staying put decision within a broader frame that understands mobility as an instrumental resource to achieve the aim of staying put. In the particular ethnographic context of Zacualpan, staying put is ascribed an intrinsic positive value. Migration (whether internal or international, depending on the local group of reference) has an instrumental value as the means to be able to remain in the village. A caveat is worth pointing out. As research was carried out only with people who were in Zacualpan, interviews with migrants may have revealed a different process of value attachment to migration.

Immobility as a research topic is hopefully building momentum. Although the number of studies dealing with stayers is increasing, much is still to be tuned in our understandings of immobility. For

instance, the processes by which value is attached to immobility remain poorly understood. More importantly, and in a similar vein to what the mobilities paradigm has done with mobility, we can envisage future research on stayers questioning the binary mobility and immobility so to assess if such division is always clear and pertinent.

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CONTRIBUTOR

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ENDNOTES

[i] *Emic* in anthropological jargon is part of the binary emic/etic that distinguishes the stance of a participant from that of an observer.

[ii] I suggest this difference is due to the imaginary attached to the UK and the US as receiving societies, compared with Mexico as migrants' place of origin.

[iii] Nowadays this relation includes also important return trajectories, voluntary, and involuntary ones (Alarcón & Becerra, 2012) and migration of US citizens towards Mexico, particularly of retired people (Lizárraga, 2013).

[iv] I have explored elsewhere the links with the social construction of immobility of these two other variables (Mata-Codesal, 2016).

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