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Indigenous Youth and the Production of Hope: Migration, Radical Uncertainty, and Knowing/Livelihood Anxieties

Mexican Nahua youth from farming communities initiated processes of transnational migration to the US in search of life and labor opportunities in the late 1990s. Neoliberal policies eroded local subsistence economies and intensified human mobility across borders, incorporating non-traditional actors such as children and youth. Migration produced hope in the context of rapidly spreading imaginaries that constructed the countryside as a symbolic field of death. Experiences of circular migration and subaltern economic integration into neoliberalized labor markets in the US resulted in new forms of knowledge and identity. After a decade of circular migration across the Mexican-US border, many Nahua youth are devising alternative practices of making a living in their rural communities based on youth's continuous (re)creation of memory and knowledge under conditions of spatial and temporal displacement. And yet there has been an increase in child suicide in rural migrant communities in the last decade. Before teenagers started to migrate, suicide in this age group was practically nonexistent. This is one of the main concerns of rural families together with the central question of making a living.

This paper presents the conceptual and methodological framing of a EU funded comparative project between Mexico and Ecuador that documents youth's livelihood strategies as spaces of hope. Central to our inquiry is the examination of what indigenous youth understand by "a life worth living", what they do to strive toward that goal, particularly under conditions of cultural disruption and radical uncertainty in the context of ongoing economic crisis and political violence.