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# Consumption Dilemmas: Tracking Masculinity, Money and Transnational Fatherhood Between the Ecuadorian Andes and New York City

Jason Pribilsky

*This article explores the consumption dilemmas encountered by migrant men from the Ecuadorian Andes living and working in New York City. Specifically, it looks at how the priorities of budgeting and saving money that are necessary for generating remittances conflict with migrants' practices of consumption. New consumption practices take shape as young men experience the city as an engagement of perceived modernity. I argue that the changes involved in this process require men to confront long-standing relationships between ideas of what constitutes proper masculinity and the uses of money in the Andes. They also require men to find new ways to balance consumption and their gender identities. In this space, new models for fatherhood emerge as migrants shape their role as breadwinners through the specific practices of providing for families back home.*

*Keywords: Transnational Fatherhood; Consumption; Drinking; Masculinity; Money; Ecuadorians*

## Locating Transnational Fatherhood

Motherhood is a biological fact, while fatherhood is a social invention (Mead [1949] 1969: 1).

A decade ago, in an insightful research article, sociologists Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) conjoined the public world of transnational migration with the presumably private domain of motherhood in an exploration of the experiences of

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Latina migrants in the United States living apart from their children back in Mexico and Central America. The article gathered particular analytical strength by holding in parallel a study of women's strategies of mothering 'from abroad' while in the US, on the one hand, and a focus on their duties as domestics caring for the children of others, on the other. Ultimately, this bifocal approach demonstrated myriad ways in which the political economy of domestic work saturates and shapes women's own sense of identity within globalising discourses of proper and 'modern' motherhood; motherhood was shown to be a crucible of the global and the local. Since then, research into the varied expressions of 'transnational motherhood' has become something of a migration sub-speciality (see, e.g. Avila 2008; Dreby 2006; Gamburd 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Parreñas 2001, 2005; Schmalzbauer 2004; and contributions to this issue). Yet, can the same be said of male migrants in their roles as fathers? In what ways is male migrant identity shaped by gendered experience, and what role is there for exploring fatherhood in this process? Moreover, in what ways do migrants organise their transnational livelihoods amid assessments of their role as fathers? To date, answers to these and similar questions have remained largely absent in the transnational literature (for notable exceptions, see Ahmad 2008; Parreñas 2008). Perhaps Mead's ([1949] 1969) sentiments regarding the mere 'social invention' and lack of necessity of fatherhood still carry some weight among social scientists. Or perhaps, more broadly, it signals the perniciousness of what anthropologist David Gilmore (1990) has dubbed 'the taken for granted syndrome' in social science writing about men's gendered experiences, despite numerous examples to the contrary. In any case, where male gender is concerned in studies of migration, questions of fatherhood have been largely absent or linked superficially to displays of machismo or *homo economicus*.<sup>1</sup> We still know little of this 'social invention' in the context of migration.

In this article, I sketch out an understanding of 'transnational fatherhood' among undocumented Ecuadorian male migrants living and working in the US. I draw on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 1999 and 2004 in the rural community of Jatundeleg<sup>2</sup> and in other surrounding villages of the south-central Ecuadorian Andes and in the heavily migrant-populated New York City boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn.<sup>3</sup> I traipse lightly around the application of the term 'transnational fatherhood', however, not wishing to suggest a direct corollary of the many detailed explorations of globalised motherhood populating the migration literature. Indeed, in Jatundeleg, fatherhood (*paternidad* in Spanish) cannot be said to occupy quite the same subject position as motherhood. While men who migrate out of the village frequently add moral force to their departure with claims of migrating 'for their families' or leaving 'to feed their children', a more amplified discussion of fatherhood is not often to be had in casual conversation. To put it in Bourdieu's (1979: 13) terms, fatherhood in Jatundeleg is *doxa* (unspoken practice) to motherhood's *heterodoxy*. While no villager regularly speaks of fatherhood, there is no shortage of discussion about what constitutes a 'good mother'. Even where it has historically been men who migrate and leave their families, it is women remaining in the community with

children who undergo the greatest scrutiny with respect to their parenting abilities. This double standard persists even as women have migrated abroad in large numbers (see, e.g. Boccagni, this issue; Pedone 2008). The argument I advance here is that locating or 'tracking' what might be termed 'transnational fatherhood' requires an exploration of a host of quotidian micro-practices and experiences of daily life that ultimately constitute meaningful situations in which migrants confront identities as 'men in their role as *men*', including roles as husbands and fathers (Gutmann 1997: 385; emphasis in original). While seemingly obvious, the history of migration studies demonstrates that, even while men have been overwhelmingly the focus of research, their gendered lives have been largely excluded (Willis and Yeoh 2000).

Nowhere, I argue, are these experiences more salient for undocumented Ecuadorian men in the US than in the realms of money management, spending and budgeting that occupy so much of a migrant's non-working hours. Young men in Jatundeleg who leave for the US, leaving behind wives and children in order to 'get ahead' (*salir adelante*), do so with the hope, if not an expectation, that they will be away for a short time (a couple of years), earning, saving and remitting money back home; a common refrain is that migration for them will be '*ida por vuelta*' (go and return, a short trip). Running parallel to their goals of earning money, however, is a search for adventure abroad. As many young men describe, leaving their home community for the first time opens up a chance to 'aspire to have things' (*aspirar a tener cosas*), and more generally to engage in what I have elsewhere described as *iony modernity* (Pribilsky 2007). *Iony*, pronounced 'I-Oh-Knee', or sometimes expressed as the common American name 'Johnny', as in 'yoni', is a manipulated pronunciation of New York City's Tourist Bureau's slogan 'I♥NY'. Migrants and their families back in Ecuador frequently use the label both to refer to the USA (as a place) and to describe a certain form of life abroad.<sup>4</sup>

The possibilities of migration as *iony modernity* present themselves in what Moore (1994: 66) describes as 'fantasies of identity' typically formed around the style and affect that return migrants bring to the community, as they flaunt limited English-language vocabularies, ways of dress and what appears to others to be endless disposable income. For young men leaving Jatundeleg, this fantasy often naively combines ideas of 'having things' in the US (clothing, cars, music, mobile phones) with continuing to remit money home, although, once abroad, men invariably find this juggling act difficult, if not at times impossible.<sup>5</sup> Success—defined as being able to simultaneously afford one's existence in the US and send home remittances—comes with discipline, diligence and a reorganisation of priorities: a confrontation with a variety of 'consumption dilemmas'. Men, who are not typically money managers in highland communities, soon find themselves engaging in actions that were once the sole domain of wives and mothers; soon, for the first time, consuming alcohol with friends becomes scrutinised practice, as it affects one's abilities to send money home. It is within these balancing acts, between generating remittances and desires for *iony modernity*, that men's experiences reveal contradictions and tensions that are not just economic, but gendered as well. In some instances, these experiences,

as I recorded them, served to bring fatherhood and a commentary on how to be a father (*ser padre*) out of the realm of *doxa* and into active dialogue and debate.

If community commentary on fatherhood has been traditionally *doxa in* Jatundeleg, this of course does not signal a complete absence of father-talk in the rural Andes. Whereas *paternidad* may rarely enter into people's daily speech, elite and professional discursive fields extolling the 'proper' and normal forms of fatherhood have slowly crept into the local lexicon, lending imagination to new definitions of being a father. The sources are varied: in recent years, the federal Instituto del Niño y la Familia (Institute of the Child and the Family, INNFA) has made men, in their role as fathers, a focus in campaigns to ameliorate child labour. In community programmes, murals and pamphlets, fathers are encouraged to see their children as 'in development', like flowers and plants in need of tender cultivation (Pribilsky 2001). Similarly, Bedford (2005) has described how World Bank-funded ethno-development projects in highland Ecuador strive to inculcate 'better loving in men' through the promotion of normative intimacy between married couples and encouraging men to assume child-care duties as wives move into productive work outside the home. In both of these instances, state and non-governmental initiatives working to define progressive forms of fatherhood are reinforced by an onslaught of slick television and other media increasingly targeted to play on people's anxieties surrounding modern childhood and children's development. In Jatundeleg, media images from parenting magazines such as *Crecer Feliz* (Growing Up Happy), and talk shows regularly focused on children's well-being, are well known. Often the images of parenthood feature white, urban professionals in the role of mothers and fathers, blending together ideas of 'proper' parenthood with powerful messages about modernity. Fathers, in particular, are often portrayed as providing what Townsend (2002) calls the 'package deal': a respectable home, a good job and loving, well-adjusted children. Absent in these portrayals are the realities of rural life, where children continue to be integral to agricultural labour, where public schools are often closed for weeks on end owing to teacher strikes and lack of wages, and where sources of work outside of farming are scarce. Still, despite the disjuncture between images of urban modernity and rural life, these models of proper fatherhood find traction in Jatundeleg, especially when merged with urban critiques of migration. Indeed, psychological studies—filtered through news stories and television—have made professional terminology such as 'abandonment' and parental neglect (*negligencia familiar*) common parts of villagers' lexicons when discussing the potential problem of parenting from afar (Pribilsky 2001; see also Pinos and Ochoa Ordóñez 1999). For young men leaving Jatundeleg, as both new fathers and new migrants, these messages are hard to avoid.

### **Ecuadorian Transnational Migration: The View from Cañar**

Unlike in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is no longer possible to speak of international migration from Ecuador in terms of specific sending and receiving

areas. Whereas the phenomenon of migration was once largely restricted to the country's south-central Andean highlands, Ecuador as a whole has become, if fitfully, a diasporic nation, with fully 10 per cent of its citizenry living abroad and with large populations in the urban US, Spain and other countries of Western Europe. Between 1993 and 2006 alone, approximately 900,000 people left Ecuador without returning, a figure that represents almost 8 per cent of the total population of the country and 20 per cent of its economically active population according to the country's 2001 census (Herrera 2008: 12; see also Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002). There is also not a single demographic profile that characterises Ecuadorian transnational migration. While young men constituted the original rank-and-file of migrants, a wholesale 'feminisation' of migration has occurred over the past decade with the large-scale migration of women, largely to Spain (Herrera 2005; Pedone 2003; see also Boccagni, and Leifsen and Tymczuk, this issue).

The view presented here, then, is partial, focused on the southern province of Cañar, an area regarded as the first major migrant-sending region in Ecuador (Jokisch and Kyle 2005; Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002). Despite the influx of remittances and a landscape dotted with new homes paid for by migrants abroad, Cañar remains one of the poorest regions of Ecuador (Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo 1993). Rural households, many of them originally constituted on *hacienda* lands, are perhaps best characterised as 'semiproletarianised' (De Janvry 1981). Family units, nucleated around a parental unit and some extended family, derive their livelihood from a combination of subsistence farming (mainly of corn, potatoes, beans and barley) and piecemeal day-labourer work (*jornalero*). A fortunate small group of men in Jatundeleg have found work as local truck transport drivers, and a handful of women own small stores selling basic groceries, alcohol and medicines. Few villagers find secure work outside the community.

As in many rural villages throughout the Ecuadorian *sierra*, intensive international migration from Jatundeleg has further suspended rural households between the market and subsistence economy. Beginning in the mid-1980s, as the pace of migration accelerated substantially, a pattern of transnationalisation of familial arrangements has come to predominate. Typically, it was men who would initially leave their households, in a preferred pattern of first getting married and not infrequently having a child. If successful abroad, the first objective of many migrants is to establish an independent household for their family through the purchase of land or the construction of a home in the community. Such a base allows men to establish households apart from their natal kin and to consolidate remittances. However this process unfolds, at the root is a steady reliance on remittances for rural households and a movement away from the subsistence economy. Extensive agriculture (growing a series of different seasonal crops) is often jettisoned in favour of less risky and more easily managed mono-cultivation of corn (*maíz*) and the keeping of livestock, primarily dairy cows. Farm profits, along with remittances, are used to buy foodstuffs, usually processed starches in the form of pasta (*fideos*) and bread, along with potatoes, which households no longer grow. While villagers lament

the decline of agriculture and its attendant associations with a nostalgic rural past (*ñaupi tiempos*), many concede this is the only way a family gets ahead. Providing some consolation is the hope that, once a new household is established, a migrant can return with a comfortable level of savings and hopes of investing in a successful business. Dreams include buying a taxi, building a greenhouse to grow produce for markets and opening a small store. However, the reality in Jatundeleg and other villages has been much bleaker, with few migrants returning with prospects other than resuming subsistence agriculture. The situation provokes many to migrate again and has been a significant catalyst for wives to follow husbands abroad, often with the understanding that extra income will lead to greater success.

A major obstacle that hinders many Jatundeleg families from 'getting ahead' as quickly as they might wish is the crippling amounts of debt migrants bring with them to New York. Smugglers (*coyotes* or *pasadores*) charge between \$10,000 and \$15,000 to safely deliver clients into the US, a fee that is usually mortgaged. For funding, migrants rely on a quasi-legal system of loan-making (*chulco*), for which immediate and extended families provide land and other forms of collateral (livestock, cars and jewellery). Each loan carries an 8–10 per cent interest rate compounded monthly and, once abroad, migrants must make regular payments to their *chulqueros* (moneylenders). If payments are missed, *chulqueros* frequently resort to violent intimidation directed at family members and will threaten to seize land and other property. In all, the economics of undocumented migration and the transformation of rural households from subsistence to an almost complete reliance on migrant wage labour cast a profound shadow over men's lives and sense of themselves abroad. As the following sections of this article elaborate, the burden of *chulco* debt and fears over a family's security, the contradictions between *iony modernity* and generating remittances, and the fundamental realisation that they have become sole breadwinners for rural households in the Andes, all shape men's experiences of 'transnational fatherhood'.

### Money Matters: Between Remittance Discipline and Consumption

Saddled by debt, an overwhelming urgency to find work marks all migrants' first days in the US. After securing employment, migrants quickly rush to '*enviar una seña*' (to send a sign) to family members back home, as well as to *chulqueros*. However, sending a 'sign' usually adds up to little more than servicing the compounding monthly interest on a crippling *chulco*. Of equal importance is sending a sign to anxious family members fretfully waiting in Ecuador to learn that everything is alright, as the journey between the Andes and New York can sometimes take many months. Along with token amounts of money, migrants hurriedly package up modest gifts, such as clothing or jewellery, giving the appearance of instant success. Photos—of a migrant's apartment, a workplace or even recent purchases—round out the well-scripted story of initial good luck many migrants wish to tell.

For most migrants I interviewed, however, initial impression management is much easier than money management. Like many other migrants from Latin America, men from Jatundeleg face a difficult transition from an economic mind-set of maintaining subsistence to one oriented towards generating surplus. As Mahler (1995: 2) notes, distinct from the goals governing economic livelihoods in their home countries, migrants 'face the task of stretching their meager salaries past self-sustenance . . . [and] achieving a surplus to cover debts and family obligations'. Of course, Jatundeleg migrants did not come from strict subsistence economies, but instead had extensive experience in wage labour and a cash economy. Still, the kinds of money-management skill necessary to generate income far and above that needed to live in the US comprised a task that was qualitatively different from the types of task to which most migrants were accustomed.

Jatundeleg migrants frequently characterised this situation to me as the distinction between two methods of earning money, between a mode of 'making a living' (*ganarse la vida*) and 'working for money' (*trabajando para plata*). Although at first glance both are products of wage labour, each form of work constituted a different approach to the management of cash. To '*ganarse la vida*' includes not only the act of making money in order to meet one's needs but also the other constituent parts of the peasant economy, including reciprocal labour pacts and barter. Since their childhood, migrants had lived in an affective world of reciprocities—from village work parties (*mingas*) to reciprocal work agreements between households cemented through forms of fictive kinship (*prestamos/cambiamanos*)—where not all economic relations were grounded in cash exchanges. While monetisation was not new, the degree to which it shaped migrants' lives abroad was significant. In New York, migrants were able to tap into kin networks to meet some needs, such as help obtaining initial household furnishing (mattresses and bedding, for instance) and useful information about where to find thrift stores and community centres offering free services. By contrast, the notion of working '*para plata*', which most male migrants associated with women's control of money, delineates a wholly different approach to making a living.

Over time, urbanised migrants I spoke with employed various strategies to minimise their expenses and save money. As formal saving measures, such as bank accounts, were impossible to obtain without a social security number, migrants exchanged a host of information regarding informal cost-saving measures and saving techniques. To North American readers routinely familiar with comparison shopping and bargain hunting, the transparent acts of migrants combing the streets of Queens for discount phone-cards or low money-wiring fees can appear mundane and of little consequence. To be sure, in many ways these acts *are* of little consequence, as their cumulative effect is usually not enough to qualitatively boost migrants' earnings or, more importantly, the amount of their remittances. In fact, the migrants I knew grew frustrated in their pursuits as they found that almost no amount of strict fiscal discipline ever substantially improved their finances. Rather, monetary success invariably only came with fitting extra work into their already overtaxed schedules



and, in some cases, profiting off the needs of other migrants. Nevertheless, small acts of budgeting were important, as migrants put faith in them to bring a semblance of control to their precarious experiences as undocumented labourers. In the context of high debts and obligations to their families, fears of missing work and failing to generate remittances were threaded through my interviews with migrants. With little control over the whims of an employer, the possibility of debilitating sickness and the potential for work-related accidents, any of which could cause migrants to miss work and lose earnings, mastery over budgets provided a psychological buffer against uncertainty. As one Jatundeleg migrant confided in me, 'I go to sleep with those numbers in my head and I can't sleep. But I have to know'.

### **Genders and Spenders: Drinking, Masculinity and Money Management**

Successful migrants quickly learn that *trabajar para plata* includes not only learning to become good savers but also re-evaluating consumption behaviour. As I argue in this section, consumption 'dilemmas' emerge when the economic gymnastics required to make saving possible often force men to confront tensions between their pre- and post-migration identities. Issues of fatherhood are at the forefront of such tensions, as migrant men often construct their justification for migrating around notions of providing for their families. Becoming *iony* entails not only the acquisition of foreign goods but also the acquisition of such goods for one's family. When men's expectations of *iony* accumulation go unmet, they invariably see their inability to consume within the disparaging lens of Ecuadorian class and race antagonisms and the critiques of consumption that were often lobbed against their fellow villagers back home. Equally as powerful, however, were the gendered transformations that accompanied migrants' practices of spending and consumption. In particular, in their attempts to balance budgets and control spending, the men I knew were inadvertently drawn into worlds of money management that, in Ecuador, customarily, would only be attended to by women. As I argue, adopting new money-management practices had real implications for gendered practice and identity formation *between* men, including constructions of 'proper' fatherhood from abroad. As I discuss below, nowhere are these tensions more evident to migrants than in the realm of social drinking.

In Ecuadorian highland communities, women are almost invariably the household managers, in their role as housewives (*amas de la casa*). In Jatundeleg, both sexes frequently opine that women are intrinsically 'smarter' with money and '*más organizadas*' (more organised and capable) in terms of managing domestic finances; men, by contrast, are defined as 'untameable' (*rebeldes*) in this respect. In particular, men in Jatundeleg readily admit to their lack of knowledge of how to '*comprar la semana*' (literally, 'to buy the week', though used to refer to the totality of women's spending). As men were aware, shopping in the weekly markets requires acumen and skill. Within a chronically unstable economy, women relentlessly monitor price fluctuations on key staples and assess with which market vendors they can develop

lines of credit. In Jatundeleg, such attention not only ensured that family members were fed: shielding husbands from gyrations of the household budget was in itself strategic in maintaining good conjugal relations. To be sure, Jatundeleg wives periodically worried that their husbands would feel humiliated by their lack of wealth and erupt into violence.

Although women's control of money signals a certain degree of female-held power, it is not a benefit without burdens (Stølen 1987). As Weiss (1988: 7) summarises, '[W]ives control the money allocated for consumption not for investment, and this control is delegated'. In Jatundeleg, men's ignorance of household finances could easily spark marital discord when a wife grew frustrated with her husband's disregard for the domestic budget. However, a more worrisome (and more chronic) kind of spending concerned '*los vicios*'—vices—of alcohol, cigarettes, gambling and, in rare cases, the use of prostitutes. After men turned over their earnings to their wives, they customarily demanded back a portion for *vicios*, frequently framed as a well-deserved 'reward' for working. How much money a man would demand and how often—or, in other words, how much he wished to reward himself—typically divided households where money spent on *vicios* represented little more than a nuisance from those where the action had crippling effects on domestic life. For migrant men in Queens, the problem of *vicios* assumed another form in the context of saving and budgeting priorities. Nowhere perhaps was this transformation more evident than in the times men spent drinking with other men. Here, their pre-migration approaches to money management the most clearly clashed with the priorities of migrant economics.

To understand the prominence of drinking as a 'consumption dilemma' requires a brief explanation of the role of alcohol use in rural Andean life. In Jatundeleg, as in many Ecuadorian highland communities, social drinking is the preserve of men; women rarely imbibe, and almost never in front of children. Men drink largely to get drunk (*para emborracharse*), and few drinking sessions end before this is achieved. Drinking often begins when a husband signals to his wife to prepare a batch of *agüita* (sweetened herbal tea) and to fetch a bottle of *aguardiente* or a jug of *puro* (pure cane alcohol). Throughout a drinking session (which can last all day or all night), wives and children stay in earshot of the festivities so as to heed a man's request for more alcohol. When the alcohol expired, a child would be sent running to a *tienda* for more. It is a host's responsibility to shoulder the expense, although not without the exaggerated protest of guests waving money about, offering to pay. Beyond such gestures of generosity, the etiquette of male drinking in Jatundeleg is straightforward. Once one begins to drink, one should continue to drink as long as others stay the course or until drink-mates lose the physical ability to drink more. Refusing a drink or trying to excuse one's self mid-session contradicts the central purpose of drinking: to partake in an act of sharing through which community is created and social cohesion is expressed.

While it would be misleading to suggest that all Ecuadorian migrants conform to the pattern and purpose of drinking just described, it is reasonable to say that, among the men I knew in New York City, the importance of alcohol lay in its role in

providing an arena of meaningful practice, and especially meaningful practice *between* men. To be sure, migrants I spent time with often mixed drinking with their socialising—after work, in parks, and even sometimes at work. Such instances, however, ultimately obscured the conflictive relationships some men developed towards alcohol within an economy of working *para plata*. As the following interview data show, answers to my questions on the subject suggest that, while drinking continued to have the same meanings it had had back in Ecuador, men's ability to enact those meanings in their new lives had changed:

*Héctor: Puhh!* Everyone drinks here! There is not much else to do.

*JP:* But what about you? Do you drink regularly?

*Héctor:* When I first arrived, I drank so much. It was unbelievable! [...] A *paisano* stole bottles of wine—super expensive wine—from the Italian restaurant where he worked. We would have little parties all the time. That was when I was working on the streets.

As Héctor later elaborated, working as a day labourer allowed him a degree of freedom to spend multiple days drinking. When he finally sobered up and returned to work, he paid his dues by taking extra shifts so that he might still save enough money:

*Héctor:* The reason I drank was because I was lonely. I didn't like it here and I missed my family so. I had a long beard at the time, and I would think about how my wife would comb and stroke it. I would do it myself with my bottle in hand. I was so lonely and there was nothing else for me to . . . But I can't do that now.

*JP:* And now? You're not so lonely. Do you still drink much?

*Héctor:* [laughing] Sometimes, yes. It's crazy, but you won't succeed. Sometimes, still, I will meet some friends and we will be listening to some Ecuadorian music and we'll have a few *tragitos* and that will be it. It has to be. I can't miss work. Yes, life disciplines us [*Sí, la vida nos castiga*].

Héctor's experiences with alcohol, including binges, drinking to combat depression and eventually his relative abstinence, were echoed in other migrants' drinking stories. As others concluded, all-night sessions of imbibing with the express goal of getting drunk were quite simply costly affairs, as each finished bottle would call for a fresh one. Even the cheapest bottles of alcohol could add up quickly in a night of drinking. In the US, prices for Ecuadorian liquors—particularly brands of the poor-quality sugar-cane *aguardiente* favoured by *campesinos*, such as Zhumir and Cristal—were particularly high. Consequently, few of the men I interviewed continued to play host the way they may have done back in their home village. One migrant even pointed out the difficulty of buying single cigarettes in the US. If he wished to drink and smoke, he told me, he had to buy an entire pack, only to watch it be depleted by his fellow drinkers. More costly than the money spent on alcohol, though, was the potential for missed work, as a long night of drinking could mean a long day of recovery. Even a day without work could seriously derail scheduled remittances.

Not everyone, of course, shared Héctor's spendthrift approach. Rather, different drinking styles and priorities often placed migrants at odds with one another. Gutmann (1996: 184) could be speaking of the Ecuadorian Andes when he writes of men's drinking in urban Mexico: 'Coercion to drink among men is a standard element of drinking habits'. As was the case in Jatundeleg, men who attempted to cut out in the middle of drinking sessions often found themselves embroiled in tense situations, where they risked offending fellow drinkers. In particular, refusing a drink despite the cajoling to do otherwise can imply a lack of trust and a denial of mutual respect. Among migrants in New York, whose social networks were typically small and tightly knit (often consisting of only room-mates and fellow workers) and who invariably brought the stresses of their undocumented lives into drinking sessions, the stakes were markedly high at times and the likelihood of conflict frequent. An incident involving another migrant, Miguel, captures a familiar predicament that resonated with others I interviewed in New York.

Miguel explained what happened when he began to restrict his drinking in an attempt to 'better manage' (*mandar bien*) his finances and save money (*guardar plata*). While he never stopped drinking altogether, the last straw came after what he described as a month-long drinking binge (*borrachera*) in which he paid little attention to his finances. When a gas utility bill arrived that he could not pay (presumably already overdue), his service was abruptly disconnected even though it was the middle of January. With minimal English-speaking abilities, Miguel did not understand the conditions of the shut-off and failed to get his service reinstated, eventually going two months without heat in the winter.

Miguel's decision to curb his drinking became problematic one Sunday afternoon when he joined friends for a few beers on the patio of a friend's apartment after work. Miguel told himself he would only share a couple of beers with friends. When the other men in attendance decided to pool their money together for a bottle of rum, he plotted his exit strategy:

When they were planning to buy the rum, I said I had to go. I needed to make some calls. No one, though, believed me. They started saying I never spent any time with them. They wondered if I was really so busy, or if I had just become stingy.

Other migrants shared with me details of the less-salutary remarks and hostility they had experienced when they attempted to bow out of drinking sessions. A 27-year-old migrant from a village outside Cuenca re-enacted the response he slung back at fellow migrants:

We were having a typical day, like another day, just drinking and having fun. Laughing and listening to music. Some guys were already drunk, as they always were [...]. They never worked it seemed and they would be asking you for money [...]. You had to be careful. But with friends, it is different. You buy drinks for them, and they buy for you. Nobody is taking advantage of others [*no aprovechándose*]. You just don't think about it. Usually, if I told myself I wasn't drinking, I would not drink—period. I know they wouldn't care, but I don't want

them to think I'm taking advantage of them. There were a few guys, though, that would not leave me alone. One said to me, 'Come on, stay and have a few drinks'. He was drunk and kept pushing me. He said, 'Come on *mandarina*' [sissy], and then I got angry. . . You can't imagine. I said to him, 'What about you? I have a family to feed and my kids back home. I'm no macho man, but I am not a *mandarina*'. He has no kids, no wife. *He* is the one that has to be careful that he's not a *mandarina* or a *maricón* [homosexual].

More than just pragmatic concerns about saving money caused disagreements over alcohol. Selective abstinence also ran counter to a set of particularly male values that lay behind drinking styles and motivations. While the conspicuous consumption of alcohol between men undoubtedly served as a 'means to reputability' (Veblen [1899] 1953: 43), there was more than just status at work. As other ethnographic explorations of male drinking hint, beyond defining relations between men, alcohol consumption equally allows men to become men and enact fundamental qualities of what it means to be a man. In a comparative framework, Ecuadorian patterns of alcohol use parallel Karp's (1980: 113) analysis of men's drinking among the Iteso in East Africa, insofar as drinking constitutes a 'managed accomplishment [that] recapitulate[s] the social order of which [men] are a part'. The social order to which Ecuadorian drinking has long recapitulated is one fraught with uncertainty and potential instability. As men in both Jatundeleg and New York could attest, men drank together largely in mutual recognition of the uncertainties of life. Acknowledging that they could 'make a living' and do their share to provide for their families, they often worried about their position as breadwinners.

My understanding of the tacit meanings behind male social drinking developed very clearly as I listened to men speak of the gendered division of labour between husbands and wives. As one man explained:

Yes, it is true men and women own the fields and men and women work the fields. But, if the fields don't produce and there is no harvest, families will blame the man. It is his responsibility. Although [other people] may not say it, they certainly think it. So do the men. But, what can you do? [Men's work] is uncertain. It's destiny [*destino*], a lottery [*una lotería*].

Similarly, men would employ a common expression to describe their seemingly erratic behaviour, a statement that aptly captures the ethos of masculine drinking: '*Pan para ahora y hambre para mañana*' (Bread today and hunger tomorrow). The saying suggests that it is better to indulge in what you have now (bread historically being a luxury food in the Andes), because you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

For male migrants who left wives and children in Ecuador, I ultimately noticed a perspective emerging around the priorities of saving money and generating remittances that I did not find as prominent among men who did not migrate. Specifically arising during conversations with migrants about their money-saving strategies, I grew accustomed to migrants' critiques of men whom they faulted for

'squandering money' (*derrechondo la plata*) and their inability to generate remittances. Borrowing the language of economics, migrants spoke triumphantly of their efforts to 'make savings' (*hacer economías*) or 'to hold on to money' (*guardar plata*). In some measure, the taking hold of household finances by migrant men represented a process of what Gutmann (1996: 151–2) calls *degendering*, a situation whereby migrants did not necessarily identify their meticulous attention to finances as either men's or women's duties.<sup>6</sup> However, a refined analysis of this transformation might also suggest the presence of a kind of regendering, a reassigning of the role of money manager to themselves in a particularly masculine form. Indeed, the economic shift from rural agriculture-based households to migration-based households frequently entailed a reshuffling that positioned men as the primary breadwinners, especially as average monthly remittances could easily double a family's income and prompt households to discontinue previous money-generating work.

Migrant husbands and fathers abroad responded to their new breadwinner role with a mixture of ambivalence, fear and pride. As one migrant said to me:

Everyone can work, that's simple. But for men who are fathers and have families back home, it is different. You can't stop. You have to change your mentality. Men who do this are *hombres más modernos y progresivos*. They can't just drink and hope it will all work out. No, it's a different mentality.

Miguel's sense of himself as a 'more modern and up-to-date' man was echoed by other migrants I knew in New York. Often, men used a comparison with their own fathers as a foil to describe how they had become *hombres más modernos y progresivos*. While the comparison often hinged on criteria such as fathers who drank too much or who never helped wives with domestic tasks, money management equally took centre stage in these moments of identity construction. However, for many men in Miguel's position, the situation was hardly worth bragging about. Instead, being a *hombre más moderno y progresivo* entailed entering into a juggling act with high stakes.

Most of the men I interviewed could tell me at least one story about a migrant who had failed in his pursuit to generate remittances. Likewise, migrants stayed abreast of the gossip that filtered back from their home villages telling of *chulqueros* who had usurped people's land and of families left hungry when husbands failed to wire remittances. Men in these situations often felt anxious and debilitated, at times in embodied ways, as one migrant father's testimony of the difficulty of breadwinning demonstrates:

I had just counted my week's money and again and again. Very fast! I just shut my eyes and wished I could go back [to Ecuador]. I would farm and work my land. I didn't care . . . But I knew I couldn't. I had to stay and work. I tried to calm my trembling heart down, but I couldn't. I knew it eventually would be alright, but for the moment I was struck with *nervios*. I couldn't move, and there was a pain throughout my body.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the pressures of unwittingly assuming the role of primary breadwinner, the challenge of being an *hombre más moderno y progresivo* also divorced migrants from the frequent and often ritualistic acts that portrayed Ecuadorian manhood. To the extent to which drinking allowed men to identify their shared vulnerabilities with one another while simultaneously affording them an instant reward for hard work, curbing this behaviour in the interest of saving money ultimately delayed these gratifications. Between these competing constructions of men's identities, migrants were often at pains to find new ways in which to define their sense of manhood. In their search, this vacuum was often filled with the rhetoric of fatherhood, the difficulties of fathering from abroad and, above all, the role of consumption in maintaining transnational relationships with children back in Ecuador.

### **'Más Moderno y Progresivo': Consumption and Transnational Fatherhood**

If they kept to a strict budget, the migrants I knew typically had some extra money to buy things for themselves, such as compact discs, a pair of trendy jeans or a nylon sports top. However, few would say that their dreams of *iony* modernity had been fulfilled or even partially satisfied by this petty consumerism. At some point during their time abroad, many faced the reality that, despite their attempts at urban adventure, such efforts were often mere pale reflections of the perceptions of life in the US they had formed before migrating. Similar to the way in which men accepted the fact that controlling spending on *vicios* was necessary to generate remittances, they also experienced how money spent on new clothing, compact discs and the like gobbled up discretionary income that otherwise could be remitted back to Ecuador. In the face of such realities, characterisations of themselves as *hombres más modernos y progresivos* provided only partial reconciliation. Still, beyond sending remittances, migrants did find occasions, if only briefly, when they could bring into alignment their identities as husbands and fathers and their quest for *iony* modernity to create a self-image that more closely approximated the construction of *hombres más modernos y progresivos*. In particular, these were moments when migrants sent special gifts to their families, gifts sent with specific recipients in mind and often shipped at key times of the year (holidays, birthdays, confirmation parties, etc.). For undocumented migrants largely unable to find outlets for status in their transplanted communities, the act of remitting gifts—and the accompanying tasks of shopping, packaging gifts up with letters and receiving family members' reactions to the purchase—allowed men to look towards their home communities and produce a coherent identity of themselves as successful migrants, committed husbands and attentive fathers.

Numerous migration researchers have pointed out that, along with remittances and other essentials (medicines, for instance), gifts form a significant portion of the goods that travel along national and transnational flows (Cliggett 2005; Levitt 1998; Mahler 1999; Parreñas 2001; Salih 2002). Among female transnational migrants who

leave children back home, gifts have been shown to supplement and sometimes replace other forms of provisioning that constitute culturally specific definitions of mothering (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2001). In some instances, gifts double as assets as migrants purchase and send home jewellery and other items that hold their value against unstable currencies (Gamburd 2000). In some Latin American contexts with long histories of transnational migration, and where migrants shuttle with frequency between host and home communities, returning with gifts has been studied as an important component of how migrants successfully re-enter into social relationships fraught with tensions (Fletcher 1999; Georges 1990; Levitt 1998). Ecuadorian migrants sent gifts for all of these reasons, in order to maintain status, enact parenthood and generate assets. Without papers and financial resources, very few migrants could hope to accompany their gift sending with a visit home, as in other migration contexts. As such, sending specific gifts assumed an all-important role as one of the only acts men could perform from afar which enabled them to stay connected in their home communities.

For men in Jatundeleg, aside from the exchanging of personal items in courtship, the giving of gifts does not form an important part of the building and maintaining of affective relations with kin, friends and neighbours. In particular, few men in their capacity as fathers and husbands routinely give gifts to their immediate family. As a father, a man's role was routinely described to me as providing generally for children, but not making specific purchases. Men routinely made this point by comparing their particular attention to their children's consumer desires with the role of their own fathers as mere providers of food and shelter.

However, for migrants in New York, shopping and gift-buying was more than a way to affirm their identities in their home communities. It was also a welcomed activity up against the backdrop of the rest of their lives. When I asked men about their leisure time, I was surprised to find them list '*vitrinear*' (window-shopping) among their limited choices. Most of this activity took place not in front of the famous Manhattan window displays, but rather in the more familiar surroundings of the migrants' own Queens neighbourhoods.

Often, window-shopping was purposeful, as men worked to fulfil the requests of family members back home. When I first met Luís, a migrant living in Woodside, Queens, he was obsessed with getting his hands on anything that made reference to the Chicago Bulls or Michael Jordan for his seven-year-old son back in Jatundeleg. While unlicensed Michael Jordan paraphernalia could be easily and inexpensively purchased in almost any Azuayo-Cañari market, the request from his son was for '*cosas auténticas*' (authentic goods). Discussing the mission before him, Luís emphasised his power of choice and the knowledge of his son's preferences rather than his mere ability to purchase goods for his family. Likewise, other migrants put almost as much care into the letters they wrote and packed along with the gifts. Inserted in cardboard boxes of otherwise impersonal gift items, letters reading like laundry lists would outline which gift was for whom and sometimes why. On multiple occasions, I helped to write letters to wives and children back in Ecuador



to accompany each gift. All the gifts were labelled with their own proper English-language names, identifying each *cosa auténtica* and its recipient.

While men's consumption habits were shaped by their desire to fulfil family needs, shopping and commodity consumption was never a one-way street. The desire to shop must be created and sustained through persuasive advertising. Dávila (2001) has written about the way Latinos, and especially recently arrived Latin American immigrants, are now squarely on advertisers' radar screens. Much Latino advertising, whether selling specific Latino products or clearly American brand names (e.g. McDonalds restaurants), is uniformly similar: focused around the solidarity of the 'Latin American family' and nostalgia for Latin American homelands. In heavily immigrant-saturated regions like Queens, this type of advertising is further localised and pitched to particularly transnational audiences, serving as a constant reminder of men's increasingly circumscribed roles as primary breadwinners.

For the migrants I knew, the business that most captured their attention was *Créditos Económicos*, a bi-national department store specialising in household appliances, whereby goods could be shopped for and purchased in New York, but delivered to migrants' home communities from a warehouse in Ecuador. To keep costs down, many *Créditos* products are fully assembled in Ecuador. Migrants save money as a result, since the goods do not have to be shipped from the US, thus sidestepping the taxes collected on goods entering the country. Delivery is also free, and payment plans are available to make it possible for even the poorest of migrants to purchase their products. The Queens branch of *Créditos Económicos*, on Roosevelt Avenue, was situated among an assortment of Ecuadorian money-wiring agencies and restaurants, and Latino music shops. However, in contrast to these businesses, *Créditos* always maintained an extremely clean exterior. It also had none of the long queues, complicated transactions and general client frustrations that migrants associated with money-wiring and shipping services. In short, it offered a shopping experience that was qualitatively different from what most migrants were typically accustomed to.

To be sure, for many migrants, *Créditos* represented the opposite of the decidedly unglamorous world of thrift shops where migrants dig through unsorted bins of used clothing in search of *iony* styles. *Créditos* instead afforded poor migrants a shopping experience they closely associated with both middle-class Ecuadorians and Americans, complete with helpful and courteous sales staff. Romero, a 23-year-old from Jatundeleg, shared with me a description of a shopping trip to *Créditos*, where he purchased a cooking range for his wife and family back home:

This woman—a beautiful Ecuadorian woman—came right up to help me. She was calling me 'Sir' and acting polite. I was nervous since I didn't know what to do. I don't know about stoves and microwaves . . . . But she helped me . . . . I told her I couldn't pay for it all at once, and she directed me towards a payment plan.

In Ecuador, Romero's dark skin and 'cholo boy' look of baggy sweatshirts and baseball caps pulled over his head would surely have disadvantaged him if he had visited a department store in Cuenca.

During my many visits to *Créditos*, alone or with migrant men on their shopping adventures, it was hard to miss the store's keen ability to target customers by playing on their desire to 'produce locality' in their home communities (Appadurai 1996). At any one time, the front windows of *Créditos Económicos* are decorated with dozens of three-by-five snapshots of the proud recipients of their products. The majority of pictures feature rural households in Cañar, with peasant women in traditional clothing and their children standing next to refrigerators, ranges and stereo systems. In some photos, children are shown hugging their new icons of modernity within the confines of adobe walls and dirt floors. In the front windows, corn fields and women in traditional Andean skirts and hats become part of a seamless whole with the elegantly dressed White Ecuadorian women working over shiny new stoves. Disparaging images of rural poverty are nowhere to be found. As opposed to Ecuador, the *Créditos* pastiche of 'objects in motion'—mixing the traditional and modern, if commodified—are to be celebrated rather than denigrated (see Mankekar 2002). By combining symbols of rural Andean life with those of modernity, *Créditos* helped migrants to temporarily synthesise their obligations to their family and the need to maintain status in their home communities with their own personal desires for a modern lifestyle.

While the act of slipping a piece of jewellery into an envelope for one's daughter or mailing a box of baseball caps and athletic jerseys for sons could go unnoticed by all those beyond the immediate recipients in their home communities, migrants took advantage of the particularly public reception that goods delivered by *Créditos* could offer. They particularly tried to coordinate the sending of gifts with special holidays, when the delivery of a new range or other appliance would be seen by other villagers.

### **Consuming Modernity, Consuming Fatherhood**

In this article, I privilege the role of consumption over that of production (men's work lives) to explore ways in which the former reveals how 'culture is fought over and licked into shape' (Douglas and Isherwood 1978: 57). Beyond a Marxist focus on consumption as mystification and commodity fetishism, I analyse specific practices of spending, saving and budgeting, as well as activities related to the consumption of alcohol, as key arenas for understanding how Ecuadorian men construct and give meaning to their lives abroad, and their in-part-emergent identities as transnational fathers. My own understanding of the role of consumption in these migration processes closely follows Miller's (1995: 277) assertion that consumption represents 'the main arena in which and through which people have to struggle towards control over the definition of themselves and their values'. Struggles of self-definition play out in the Ecuadorian context as migrants negotiate between obligations to wives and family back home and their quest for adventure and modern *iony* identities abroad.

Indeed, while never-before-experienced consumption possibilities help migrants shape a sense of self in the face of their position as invisible workers at the bottom rung of US society, they equally help men to define their role as husbands and fathers in the lives of families thousands of miles away.

When the migrant father who orchestrated the delivery of a new range to his family back in the Andes received a copy of the photograph, he no doubt took great pleasure in how this relatively inexpensive act had sent a far-reaching statement about migrant success, his claim to *iony* modernity and his continued commitment to his family. But, how best to analyse these practices and their results? Throughout this article, I have suggested different ways in which the practices of saving, budgeting and consumption provide clues to the construction of men's identities as migrants, and the ways in which they contribute directly to men's developing understanding of a particular form of transnational parenthood. For undocumented Ecuadorians in New York City, consumption must be analysed as more than simply a new 'domain of choice' otherwise absent in their pre-migration lives. As Miller (1987) proposes, consumption practices are perhaps better seen as the scarce resources which people appropriate as they seek to form and sustain affective relationships. 'Increasingly people have *no choice*', writes Miller, 'but to focus on consumption as the only remaining domain in which there are possibilities of sublation' (1987: 221; emphasis added). Indeed, for male migrants physically separated from their families, increasingly divorced from other forms of meaningful exchange, such as male drinking, and limited in their abilities to generate satisfying identities and statuses for themselves in US society, transnational consumption becomes one of the few avenues in which they can create a sense of self and society in their lives.

To be sure, the consumption practices of migrants I knew were motivated by a variety of factors. At one level, consumption fulfilled purely instrumental goals. Sending gifts or orchestrating a purchase to be sent by *Créditos Económicos* served as an inexpensive means for migrants to create status for themselves in their home community and maintain a respectful position in village affairs. While it may take months to generate what most men would consider a sufficient remittance amount, a gift could be delivered for much less. In some cases, the gifts became representative of economic capital which migrants otherwise did not have.

However, when migrants purchased gifts for their families, their actions reflected affective as well as instrumental purposes. Commodity consumption—along with the act of shopping—also speaks to relationships between people, between the giver and receiver of the gift (Mauss [1950] 1967). As Miller (1998) again proposes, the practice of shopping in complex societies mimics an act of sacrifice and therefore takes on the qualities of a devotional rite. Locating the essence of sacrifice in the activity of 'construct[ing] the divine as a desiring subject', Miller (1998: 148) promotes the seemingly mundane act of shopping to a purposeful one carried out 'not so much to buy the things people want, but to strive to be in a relationship with subjects that want those things'. Among migrants who shared with me their dilemmas of saving, budgeting and spending money, specific consumption decisions (saving money for

remittances, buying a child a gift or spending money on alcohol) often revealed important aspects of their relationships with others. Commodity consumption, however, differs from the cementing of relationships in a gift economy. As Miller argues, commodities have largely replaced the gift, as relationships in modernity are no longer rooted in fixed social categories. In the range of choices of what kinds of gift to purchase, modern shoppers can exploit selection in order to ‘negotiate the ambivalences and anxieties of relationships’ (1998: 154). In this regard, migrants’ simple acts of money management speak to more than just the wish to balance their desire for *iony* modernity with the obligation to generate remittances. They also reveal the ways in which migrants seek to reconstitute relationships and to make sense of their newly imposed role as breadwinners.

## Notes

- [1] For a discussion of the role of men’s gender in migration studies, see Pribilsky (2007: 13–19). For general treatments on gender and migration, see Hondagneu-Sotelo (1999) and Pessar (1999).
- [2] Jatundeleg, along with all personal names, is a pseudonym.
- [3] Methodology and fieldwork details can be found in Pribilsky (2007: 24–31).
- [4] For an elaboration of *iony* as a specific form of modern experience, see Pribilsky (2007: 10–13).
- [5] Rates of failure, while not quantified in migration statistics, are nonetheless high, with many men and women returning to Ecuador soon after leaving.
- [6] Gutmann (1996: 151) defines ‘degendering’ as a way in which ‘activities become less . . . gendered—less . . . identified with women or men in particular’.
- [7] In the Ecuadorian Andes, *nervios* is a condition that typically only afflicts women (see, e.g. Finerman 1989). The fact that this migrant claimed he fell victim to *nervios*, signalling a potentially feminised subject position, may suggest the particularly strong degree to which he understood his failure to generate remittances as a gendered failure.

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