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Reframing Mexican Migration as a Multi-Ethnic Process [1]

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Summary and context:

This essay explores the diversity within Mexican migrant civil society in the US. Multiple collective identities sustain distinct but sometimes overlapping translocal/regional, religious, civic, class-based and ethnic organizations. Our analytical frameworks need to catch up with this increasingly dense and diverse world of social actors.

Both Mexican migrant and Mexican indigenous collective identities complicate widely held ideas about race, ethnicity and national identity. Though these three concepts are often used interchangeably when discussing Mexicans in the United States, race, ethnicity and national identity are not synonyms. If they are analytically distinct, where and when does one leave off and the other begin? When migrant and indigenous identities *overlap*, as in the case of indigenous Mexican migrants, these conceptual puzzles are sharpened. A comparative and hemispheric approach suggests that it is useful to look at the specific experiences and identities of indigenous Mexican migrants in the US through lenses that draw *both* from frameworks that focus on processes of racialization *and* from those that emphasize the social construction of collective identities based on ethnicity, region or religion.

The essay is organized around a series of conceptual questions that emerged from the convergence between two long-term parallel UC Santa Cruz projects. The first is a faculty working group known as Hemispheric Dialogues, which tries to facilitate intellectual exchange by making conceptual assumptions explicit. [2] The second is a long-term action-research partnership with the Oaxacan Indigenous Binational Front. [3]

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[2] On cross-disciplinary conceptual translation within the field of immigration studies, see Morawska (2003). On Hemispheric Dialogues, see <>

[3] This partnership made possible the conference that led to the volume of proceedings, Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States. For overviews of the FIOB, see Domínguez Santos (1994a, 1994b) Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004), Hernández Díaz (2002), Ramírez Romero (2004), Rivera-Salgado (2002), Velasco (2002) and <>

Background trends:

Mexican migrants in the United States are still widely assumed to be an ethnically homogeneous population. Historically, most Mexican migrants did share many common characteristics, coming primarily from rural communities in the central-western part of the country. Over the last two decades, however, the Mexican migrant population has diversified dramatically -- ethnically, socially and geographically (both in terms of where they come from and where they go). [4]

The history of indigenous migration to the US dates at least to the Bracero program, though their ethnic identity was largely invisible to outsiders. Until recently, however, most indigenous migrants went to large cities or agribusiness jobs *within* Mexico. Their relative share of the overall cross-border migrant population began to grow in the early 1980s, as Oaxacans who had migrated to northwestern Mexico began crossing the US border (Varese and Escárcega 2004). The indigenous proportion of the Mexican migrant population has since grown significantly, most notably in both urban and rural California and increasingly in Texas, New York, New Jersey, Florida, North Carolina, Oregon and Washington.

At least since the Salinas presidency (1988-1994), the Mexican government's rural development strategy has been based on the assumption that a large proportion of the rural poor would leave their homes and move either to the cities or to the United States (Fox 1994b). The government abandoned support for family farming and peasant agriculture became a target of welfare policy rather than production support -- a shift that weakened the economic base of indigenous communities. This process has been exacerbated by subsidized US corn imports and the ongoing collapse of the

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[4] For details on recent trends, see the state-of-the-art articles in "Special Issue on US-Mexico Migration," Migration Information Source, March, 2004, including very helpful maps of the county-by-county distribution of the Mexican-born population in the U.S (<www.migrationinformation.org>). Notably, however, this overview does not mention the changing ethnic profile of Mexican migrants.

international price of coffee, which is the principal cash crop for many of Mexico's indigenous farmers. [5] These trends reflect a combination of both long-term structural changes and the systematic political under-representation of peasants and indigenous peoples in the national policy process.

Both in the United States *and* in Mexico, indigenous migrants are subordinated *both* as migrants *and* as indigenous people – economically, socially and politically. Economically, they work in ethnically segmented labor markets that relegate them to the bottom rungs. In the social sphere, in addition to the well-known set of obstacles that confront cross-border migrants, especially those without documentation, they also face entrenched racist attitudes and discrimination, both from other Mexicans and from the dominant society in the United States. Systematic language discrimination by public authorities aggravates human rights violations in both countries. [6] Like other Mexican migrants, in the civic-political arena, most indigenous migrants are excluded from full citizenship rights in either country. At the same time, also like other migrants, indigenous Mexicans bring with them a wide range of experiences with collective action for community development, social justice and political democratization, and these repertoires influence their decisions about who to work with and how to build their own organizations in the United States.

Conceptual dilemmas:

How does contemporary Mexican migration pose challenges to concepts of racial, ethnic and national identities?

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[5] On Mexican agriculture and trade, see Cornelius (2002), Nadal (2000), Oxfam (2002, 2003).

[6] Together with UCSC researcher Emma Estrada Lukin, the author is currently coordinating a follow-up field study of indigenous Mexican language interpreters and the institutional obstacles to language access to public services in California, with a focus on health care.

First, what do these three concepts have in common? They all refer to ways of understanding and expressing collective identity, and all refer in some way to shared ancestry, yet each one highlights a different dimension of the identity that is shared. For migrants to the US, Mexican-ness is simultaneously national, racial and ethnic, but which is which, when and why? These concepts clearly overlap, but are also presumably somehow distinct -- the challenge is to identify those distinctions with greater precision. Bringing together both intellectual frameworks and lessons from practice from both the US and Latin America can help to address this conceptual challenge.

In the arena of Mexico's dominant national political culture, both indigenous peoples and cross-border migrants have long been seen, especially by political elites, as less than full citizens – a powerful historical legacy that only began to change substantially within Mexico in the mid-1990s. For migrants, Mexico's current president dramatically changed the official discourse, describing them as "heroes" rather than as traitors or *pochos*. He even claims all US citizens of Mexican descent as members of the national diaspora, blurring longstanding distinctions between Mexicans and Mexican-Americans (Durand 2004).

In practice, in Mexico political rights are systematically denied to both migrants and indigenous people. Changes in official political discourse notwithstanding, even a quick review of the dominant mass media shows that they also remain culturally excluded from the national imaginary. While indigenous Mexicans can access "full Mexican-ness" to the degree that they give up their language and commitment to ethnic autonomy, migrants are still widely seen by many as watering down their *Mexicanidad* through exposure to US and Mexican-American culture. This is one reason why the long-promised right to vote abroad for migrants continues to be stuck on the political back burner – Mexican citizens in the U.S. are still seen by influential elite political actors as too vulnerable to manipulation by US interests to be trusted with the right to vote. [7] For both migrants and indigenous people, less than

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[7] In practice, only a minority of each political party's leadership actively supports migrants' right to vote. On

full command of the Spanish language is another powerful mechanism for exclusion from full membership in the national polity and imaginary -- note the common analogous phrases "they don't even speak English" (in the US) and "they don't even speak Spanish" (among Mexicans, in reference to indigenous people). In other words, for Mexicans, both ethnic identity and transnational movement remain in tension with the dominant approach to national identity.

By the 1990s, for first generation Mexican migrants, national origin tended to persist as a primary collective identity, more than US-based constructs of *Latinidad* or *Hispanidad*. Especially in regions with a large critical mass of first generation migrants, it is possible for Mexican migrants to reject, modify or postpone acceptance of more nationally rooted US ethnic identities such as Chicano or Mexican-American. In turn, migrants' cross-border political or civic commitments are perceived by some US Latino opinion-makers who emphasize incorporation into the US electoral system as the most promising path to equality as at best a distraction and at worst a threat to US Latinos' past gains in terms of acceptance by the mainstream. [8]

In spite of the pull of national identity, Mexicans migrants also find themselves inserted into a US racial hierarchy that assigns them to a racial category. In other words, migrants' subjectively *national* Mexican-ness is widely treated as a *racial* identity in the US. [9] Racialization refers to the

migrants' right to vote campaigns, including discussion of the little-known official Mexican distinction between nationality and citizenship, see Castañeda (2003) and Martínez Saldaña and Ross Pineda (2002).

[8] For example, noted political scientist Rodolfo de la Garza once predicted that migrant voting in the US in Mexican elections would provoke a xenophobic backlash against US Latinos ("The implications of all this are frightening" – quoted in Dillon 1998). More recently, however, he finds that binational civic organizations are not a threat because they are vehicles that can encourage greater incorporation into the US, thanks to assimilation of US democratic values (De la Garza and Haman 2003). The implication is that migrants did not bring such values with them. For a related approach, see Leiken (2000).

[9] A fuller understanding of the dynamics through which racialization processes affect Mexicans would require more systematic cross-regional comparison within the United States. The main difference in these class-race dynamics is between those regions with historically rooted biracial caste-like hierarchies rooted in conquest, as in the case of much of California and the Southwest, versus the multi-racial social orders facing Mexicans in the Midwest, New York or the South. On the historical processes of racialization of Mexicans in California, see Almaguer (1994), Mechaca (2001) and Pitti (2003), among others. For a comparison of regionally distinct racialized class hierarchies in the US and their impacts on citizenship, see Glenn (2002).

ascription, imposition or appropriation of racial meanings to social relations, practices and groups that had previously been unclassified or classified differently (Omi and Winant 1986). De Genova and Ramos-Zayas apply the racialization approach in their analysis of Mexican and Puerto Rican identities in Chicago, referring to the "ongoing reconfiguration of "Latinos" as a *racial* formation in the US" (2003:15-16).

The racialization of Mexican migrants is closely linked to their locations in the labor market, which in turn are linked to labor process, language use and only loosely connected to phenotype. "Mexican work" is widely understood in US popular culture as the kind that even low-income Americans won't do, at least for the wages offered. [10] For example, as a Mexican poultry processing worker put it, describing a white North American on the same production line:

"He works like a Mexican…. Look, we're all Mexicans here [in the plant]. Screwed-over Mexicans [Pointing to Li, an older woman on our line who is from Laos, he continues] Look, even she is Mexican. Pure."… [As the analyst noted, this is] "almost the same as saying "yes, we are all workers here." It is not exactly the same, of course. Mexican does not simply mean worker—any kind of worker—but one who is doing what is socially defined as the worst kind of work" (Striffler 2002: 312).

Among Mexican migrant workers, ethnic difference also interacts closely with the changing division of labor. Notably, indigenous Mexicans currently make up between 10 and 15% of California's farm labor force, and their share is projected to reach 20% by 2010 (Kissam 2003). [11]

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[10] For example, this stereotype was a strong point of agreement among both white and black panelists on the HBO late-night talk show "Tough Crowd" (Feb 16, 2004)

[11] On ethnic segmentation *within* the Mexican migrant labor force in the US, see Krissman (1996, 2002), López and Runsten (2004), Nagengast and Kearney (1990), Stephen (2004) and Zabin (1992a, 1992b, 1997) and Zabin et al (1993).

Two recent public campaigns show different ways of adapting to the US racial formation process. In the first one, organized migrants came together to seek a more prominent place in the public sphere through the 2003 cross-country Immigrant Worker Freedom Rides. This initiative was led in part by the broadest multi-racial set of US civil society organizations -- the trade union movement -- a role made possible in turn by the growing voice and clout of Latino labor leaders. [12] Here a multi-racial coalition of migrants of many nationalities explicitly reached out to diverse US constituencies by taking on the historical mantle of the "master frame" of the African-American civil rights movement. California's Oaxacan migrant umbrella organization, the FOCOICA, was officially represented on the ride. [13] In several areas of new Mexican settlement in the US, the Freedom Ride permitted migrant organizations to become public actors for the first time. [14] Old habits die hard, however, and some Mexican migrant bus riders were frustrated with their trade union handlers' "mania for control," as one reporter put it. This frustration actually erupted at one point into a brief "rebellion" by migrant riders against the coordinators of one of the buses (Ehrenreich 2003). [15]

In contrast to these two kinds of adaptation to US racial legacies, other migrant organizations deploy Mexican national identities as primary. Shortly after the Freedom Ride, the *Asociación Tepeyac* -- a New York-based, Jesuit-led Mexican membership organization – led its own mass traveling collective action for immigrant rights. Tepeyac's second annual relay Torch Run traveled through several of Mexico's "sending" regions and arrived in Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York City on December 12 ("*Antorcha Guadalupana Mex-NY*"). [16] Along the way, the runners, called "*Mensajeros*

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[12] Most of the recent union organizing victories among private sector workers in the US involve Latino and other immigrant workers. See Delgado (1993), Milkman (2000) and Ruiz Cameron (2000), among others. For a report on the largest recent strike victory in California, see Johnston (2004a). A recent survey found that bilingual Latino workers were more willing to participate in union activities than white, black or non-Spanish-speaking Latino workers (Mellor, Kath and Bulger 2003).

[13] The two returning Oaxacan migrant federation representatives on the ride were honored with a photo on the front page of the Los Angeles-based El Oaxaqueño newspaper, Oct, 18, 2003, 4(116).

[14] See, for example, the reports from Nashville (Miller 2004) and Reyes (2003a, 2003b).

[15] A participant confirmed this account and also used the term "rebellion." S/he was especially turned off by the bus ride organizers' general pushiness, their lack of facility with Spanish, and their orders to prohibit Mexican flags while encouraging the display of US flags (interview, Los Angeles, May 21, 2004)

[16] For details, see , Rivera Sánchez (2004) and Galvez (2003).

por la Dignidad de un Pueblo Dividido por la Frontera" [Messengers for the Dignity of a People

Divided by the Border] prayed to the Virgin for the right to permanent legal residency. Their repertoire

resonates.

Tepeyac's main strategy for forging collective identity is based around the combined ethno-

national and spiritual symbolism of the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, together with an explicit effort to build a

shared identity as undocumented workers. Their New York City social base is organized in

neighborhood *Comités Guadalupanos*. Their use of this symbolism clearly has class and implicitly

racial implications, and the torch run draws on a pre-Hispanic legacy, but at the same time Tepeyac

does not pursue a strategy of reaching out in culturally specific ways to today's indigenous Mexicans in

the organization. Some indigenous Mexicans do participate, but as Guadalupanos rather than as

Mixtecos or as Nahuas. [17] Tepeyac does not follow the hometown-based approach to migrant

organizing, and the organization's approach suggest that hometown associations are seen as ostensibly

exclusionary (of those not from specific communities). [18] At the same time, their approach implicitly

assumes that Mexico is a religiously and ethnically homogeneous nation. Their discourse also tries to

subsume Mexican-Americans; like Mexico's president, the Asociación Tepeyac claims as Mexican

everyone in the US of Mexican ancestry – the mirror image of the once-dominant Mexican approach

that rejected emigrants as 'instant Mexican-Americans.' In contrast to the Immigrant Worker Freedom

Riders, however, Tepeyac does not emphasize cross-sectoral coalitions with migrant organizations of

other nationalities, nor with potential US allies such as trade unions. Notably, they did not participate in

the major final Freedom Ride rally in Queens, even though it took place on their "home turf." [19] Their

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[17] Indeed, one analytical puzzle is why Mixteco migrants from Oaxaca identify ethnically in California, while Mixtecos from Puebla in New York apparently do not. The word Mixteca refers to a region that reaches parts of the states of Oaxaca, Puebla and Guerrero, while the term Mixteco refers to the main indigenous ethno-linguistic group in that region (also know as ñu savi, "the people of the rain"). For example, the name of one Brooklyn-based Latino immigrant rights group is Mixteca Organization, a term that draws on their Puebla regional identity without reference to indigenous identity ().

[18] See Rivera Sánchez (2004). On Puebla hometown associations in the New York area, see the documentary video, The Sixth Section (), as well as López Angel (2003) and Smith (1995).

[19] Personal communication with local observers. Nov., 2003.

principal US partner is the New York Diocese of the Catholic Church, whose leadership took the initiative that led Tepeyac to form in the first place – and whose suggestion provoked the first binational Torch Run.

Both the Freedom Ride and Tepeyac's Torch Run brought organized migrants into the public sphere, both crossed vast territories in the process, both were organized from below but counted on institutional allies in the U.S. Yet they followed different strategies to broaden their bases – one ventured from west to east, while the other traveled from south to north. The Freedom Ride framed migrants as the most recent wave in the long history struggle against social exclusion in the US, building a multi-racial class identity as immigrant workers, while Tepeyac looked across the border to build a shared identity as Mexicans fighting for dignity and recognition as Mexicans.

More generally, when one looks at the inter-action between race, ethnicity and national identity among those Mexican migrants who engage in sustained collective action as Mexicans, it turns out that most emphasize their primary identification with *other* collective identities. In the case of Tepeyac, this identity is strongly faith-based. Most often, however, these additional identities are *territorial* and *subnational*, based on their communities, regions or states of origin in Mexico, as can be seen in widely-observed growth of migrant hometown associations and their federations. [20] In other words, migrants' shared Mexican-ness, whether understood primarily in national, ethnic or racial terms, is necessary but not sufficient to explain how and why they turn collective identities into collective action. The shared identities that inspire collective action show that they pursue a wide range of *ways of being* Mexican (just like Mexicans in Mexico). One could go further and argue that the widespread patterns of Mexican migrant collective identity formation and collective action, based on cross-border, translocal, regional and ethnic identities constitute a form of *resistance* to racialization, reminiscent of

[20] The literature on Mexican migrant hometown associations and their federations is large and growing. See, among others, Bada (2001, 2003), de la Garza and Haman (2003), Espinoza (1999), Goldring (2002), Leiken (2000), Moctezuma Longoria (2003a, 2003b), Orozco with LaPointe (2004), Orozco et al (2003), Smith, R. (1995, 2003), Smith, M. P. (2003), Rivera-Salgado (2002), Rivera-Salgado and Escala Rabadán (2004) and Zabin and Escala Rabadán (1998).

the *mutualistas* in the early 20th century.

Nation-states are also key players in migrants' collective identity formation process. In the US, the state's embedded legacies of past struggles for racial justice shape the terrain on which migrant campaigns for rights unfold. The US census, whose influence resonates throughout the rest of the state apparatus and its levers of influence in society, explicitly defines Latinos/Hispanics as an ethnic group and not as a race – leading to the classic official caveat "Hispanics can be of any race." [21] The questions of self-identification are asked separately, and it turns out that the order of the questions influences the responses. Given the US census choices for racial self-identification, which do not include anything approximately *mestizo*, it turns out that as many as half of Latinos answer the race question with "other," thereby creating their own de facto *racial* category. [22]

For the specific purpose of trying to find self-identified indigenous Latin American migrants in the census, it turns out that they do have a choice when responding to the US census: they can identify as both *ethnically* as Latinos and *racially* as American Indians. In the 2000 census, many did just that. As a result, the census found that in California native peoples from Latin America, primarily Mexico and Guatemala, now constitute the majority of Native Americans in the state, counting over 150,000 people -- in spite of the well-known and persistent problem of undercounting migrants. [23] Note that this combined ethnic-racial category is limited to those who indicated Native American as their *one* race. Population estimates by community media, such as the Los Angeles-based binational newspaper El Oaxaqueño, run much higher.

The Mexican state's strategies also directly influence collective identity formation among

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[21] See Rodriguez (2000) and Yanow (2003).

[22] See Crece and Ramirez (2003), Navarro (2003) and Tofoya (2003).

[23] For detailed analysis of "Hispanic American Indians" in California, see Huizar and Cerda (2004). For an analysis of current issues of census undercount that affect indigenous migrants in California, see Kissam and Jacobs (2004).

migrants in the US. State governments have been at least as active as the federal government in their efforts to reach out and create institutional channels for usually dialog with their respective diasporas. The US political sociology concept of "political opportunity structures" is helpful for understanding both how migrants choose to organize and who they ally with in the US. After more than a decade of efforts by home states to encourage (trans)local clubs to form home state association, a growing literature shows how the strategies pursued by Mexican governments, plural, in the US influence the pathways that organized Mexican migrants take. [24] In some cases these home state migrant federations become consolidated civil society counterparts to state governments in Mexico (as in Zacatecas), in others they remain subordinate (as in Guanajuato and Jalisco), in other cases one sees both scenarios unfold (Oaxaca), while others remain open-ended (Michoacan). [25]

How do the concepts of race, ethnicity, community and nationality relate to the social construction of indigenous Mexican migrant identity?

Indigenous peoples are usually conceptualized in the US as constituting a race, while in Latin America they tend to be seen as ethnic groups. [26] This poses a puzzle, raising questions about how the concepts of race and ethnicity are defined and applied. Where does ethnicity leave off and race begin? Given that they often overlap, both conceptually and in practice, can they be disentangled? Are indigenous peoples distinct from other Mexicans racially, ethnically, or both? To ask the question a different way – is Mexican society multi-racial, multi-ethnic, or both? The answer to both is both.

[24] See, among others, Goldring (2002), González Gutiérrez (1993, 1997), Guarnizo (1998), Leiken (2000), Levitt and Dehesa (2003), Rivera-Salgado and Escala Rabadán (2004), Smith, M. P. (2003) and Smith, R. (2003)

[25] Much more cross-state comparative analysis is needed to draw more solid conclusions (cross-state refers here to different states in both countries). Addressing change over time is also critical. The California-based Zacatecas organizations started out under strong official influence and gained autonomy over time. In contrast, the California-based Oaxacan organizations began divided over how to relate to the state government, eventually came together under the umbrella of a pluralistic, civic federation (FOCOICA), which later lost broad-based member groups because of its president's turn towards support for the ruling party in Oaxaca during the runup to the 2004 governor's election.

[26] For example, the Mexican census does not collect data on race, and defines indigenousness primarily in terms of language use.

Indigenous ethnic identity has long been seen in Latin America as socially and culturally contingent. For decades, indigenous people who move to the cities and appear to leave behind collective cultural practices, language use and community membership have long been seen as having changed their ethnic identity. While no longer ethnically defined by others as indigenous, they are often still openly racialized by dominant systems of oppression, though the processes and mechanisms vary greatly from country to country. These processes are perhaps most clear-cut in the case of *cholos* in Andean countries, but they affect urban Indians in Mexico City as well. [27]

At the same time, many urban Indians in Mexico – like indigenous migrants in the US -- continue to maintain ties with their communities of origin. This raises the question of whether and how indigenous Mexican migration to the US is qualitatively different from longstanding patterns of migration to Mexico's cities. Migrants in the US often make more money than migrants who work elsewhere in Mexico, and are therefore able to contribute more to community development investments back home – yet visiting home personally is often more difficult. For some nationalist approaches, migrating to the US continues to represent a fundamental break – as in the case of a recent Zapatista commander's declaration: "Don't let yourself be deceived, stay here and fight for your country, for the motherland that gave birth to you ... you don't have to leave" (AP 2003). Indeed, in 2003, for the first time, first-hand accounts from Zapatista communities reported that some Mayan youth were beginning to leave for the US.

Until relatively recently, the primary basis of indigenous collective identity in Mexico was highly localized. Most Mexican indigenous people identified primarily with their home community, and to varying degrees with their home region, and only rarely with their broader ethno-linguistic group. Community membership has long been internally regulated in most indigenous rural areas, and the

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[27] On urban Indians in Mexico City, see Gobierno del Distrito Federal (2000) and Yanes (2002). On urban indigenous migrants in Latin America more generally, see Altamirano and Hirabayashi (1997)

rights of membership are usually contingent on compliance with high levels of mandatory service and material contributions. Some communities are making membership requirements more flexible, in response to migration, while many others hold firm and literally expel those who do not comply through a process that some members call "civic death" (Mutersbaugh 2002). The longstanding central role of community in defining ethnicity is summed up in the ambiguity inherent in the dual meaning of the term "*pueblo*," which in Mexico is used to refer *both* to community (as in village) and to (a) people. This dual meaning of "pueblo" was crucial to allowing both the government and indigenous movement negotiators to agree on the text of the 1996 San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture, which remains a key reference point for the ongoing political struggle for full recognition of Mexico's indigenous peoples. [28]

Over the past two decades, cycles of collective action and conflict, combined with coalitions with other social actors, have encouraged the consolidation of "scaled up" regional and civic-political indigenous identities (Fox 1996). It is not an exaggeration to state that the principal form of organized indigenous self-representation in Mexico is through *regional* social, civic and economic mass membership organizations (in contrast to organizations of national scope, or those that define themselves as primarily political in the electoral sense, or primarily cultural). "Regional" here refers to a substantial number of communities, sometimes including several or many municipalities – in contrast to the classic pattern of participation, which was bound to one community. In many cases, the membership of these regional organizations predominantly draws from a shared ethno-linguistic group, but their explicit collective identity and immediate goals are usually primarily civic, socio-economic or both (rather than primarily ethnic). Some do identify publicly as indigenous, and some draw from diverse ethnic groups (in some cases bringing together indigenous people and *mestizos*, in other cases combining different neighboring or territorially integrated indigenous peoples, depending on the composition of the region).

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[28] On the San Andrés Accords, see Hernández and Vera (1998) and the documents translated in the spring, 1999 issue of Cultural Survival Quarterly.

The process of the social construction of broader ethnic and pan-ethnic Mexican indigenous

identity is where the racialization approach, emphasizing shared experiences of racially based

oppression, is most clearly relevant. Carole Nagengast and Michael Kearney pioneered the analysis

that showed how Oaxacan migration and the shared experience of ethno-racial discrimination in

northwestern Mexico and in California drove the process of "scaling up" previously localized to

broader Mixtec, Zapotec and pan-ethnic Oaxacan indigenous identities (1990). [29] These migrants'

collective identities are powerfully shaped influenced by their shared class locations. Many, though not

all, work in ethnically segmented seasonal agricultural wage labor, both in Mexico and the US --

bringing class and culturally-based of oppression together in forms that some would consider

classically subaltern. This shared experience helped to overcome perceived conflicts of interest

inherited from longstanding inter-village rivalries back home (these widespread conflicts were and are

very convenient for regional and state elites). For indigenous farmworkers, language and cultural

differences with their bosses are key bases of ethnic discrimination, but they are also oppressed based

on physical characteristics associated with specifically racial differences. For example, height

became a widespread basis for contemptuous treatment, as summed up in the widespread derogatory

diminuitive "*oaxaquitos.*" [30] This specific term, by homogenizing Oaxaca's ethnic differences, also

racializes. [31]

The relevance of this approach to identity formation, which associates the transition from

localized to broader indigenous identities with migration, racial oppression and resistance, is confirmed

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[29] See also Kearney (1988, 1995, 2000, 2001), Nagengast, Stavenhagen and Kearney (1992) and Zabin et al (1993), among others.

[30] Ethnic slurs used against indigenous migrants from Guerrero include: "nacos, güancos, huarachudos, montañeros, piojosos, indios pata rajada, calzonudos, comaleros, sombrerudos, sin razón, paisanitos, indio bajado a tamborazos de la Montaña, Metlatontos (de Metlatónoc), Tlapanacos (Tlapanecos), son de Tlapa de me conformo (Tlapa de Comonfort), tu no savi, tu sí savi (tu no sabes tu si sabes), mixtequillo, indiorante (ignorante), paisa, mixterco (mixteco terco)" (cited in García Leyva 2003).

[31] Keep in mind that, historically, popular attitudes towards indigenous people in northern Mexico (when Oaxacans migrated to work) and the conquest of the "frontier" were in many ways more similar to those widely associated with the 19th century US West than with those one associates with central Mexico.

by the actual trajectory of the Oaxacan Indigenous Binational Front (e.g., Hernández Díaz 2002: 278). The organization was first called the "Mixteco-Zapoteco Binational Front" and then changed its name to "Oaxacan" to reflect the inclusion of other Oaxacan ethnic groups. Most recently, this inclusionary approach has attracted non-Oaxacan indigenous migrants to the organization, especially in Baja California, provoking an incipient internal debate over whether to drop the regional term "Oaxacan" from its name.

It is not only national rural-to-urban and trans-border migrations that have raised questions about the degree to which indigenous-ness depends on once-rigid notions of localized community membership, shared language and ancestral territory. The most well-known case of indigenous mobilization in Mexico emerged from a process of rural-to-rural migration. The core region of the Zapatista rebellion, the *Cañadas*, is inhabited primarily by migrants from other regions and their families, going back at most two generations. [32] Liberation theology ideas that drew heavily on the Exodus are central to their cultural and political history. Before leaving the highlands to settle in the Cañadas and the lowland forest, these communities also had extensive prior experience with seasonal migration for wage labor, where they joined an ethnic mix as farmworkers. It is not a coincidence that their sense of indigenous identity is profoundly multi-ethnic, with ethnically distinct base organizations united under a multi-ethnic, though exclusively indigenous political leadership (primarily Tzetzal, Tzotzil, Chol and Tojolobal). They have also produced an explicitly racial solidarity discourse, in which leaders speak of the shared interests, in spite of differing ideologies, of people who are the "*color de la tierra*" (EZLN 2001). This definition of shared interests is made more complex by their other shared identities – most recently Zapatistas also appealed to Mexican factory workers as "*hermanos de nosotros*." [33]

In this sense the EZLN and FIOB can both be seen as multi-ethnic organizations that first

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[32] See Leyva Solano and Ascencio Franco (1996).
[33] Comandante Felipe, <u>La Jornada</u>, 30 Nov., 2003, p. 15.

emerged in communities of settled migrants. In the first case the migration went south, in the second

case the migration went north, but in both cases their experiences and understandings of indigenous-

ness can only be explained with reference to their (albeit very different) migration processes. In

addition to both emerging from migrant communities, in both cases a small number of leftist activists

also played key roles early on in terms of encouraging the scaling up of previously localized collective

identities. [34] The political trajectories of the two organizations came together briefly in the late 1990s,

most notably when the FIOB organized polling stations in the US part of the Mexican national civic

referendum that called both for recognition of indigenous rights in Mexico and for the right for migrants

to vote in Mexican elections. While their share the goal of self-determination and autonomy, they

strategies differ dramatically, however. The FIOB works to create autonomous spaces and

representation "within the system," both in the US and in Mexico, while the EZLN remains firmly

planted outside the system, conditioning their incorporation on more radical institutional change. [35]

How does the social construction of migrant civil society lead us to rethink the concepts of territory and

transnational communities?

In Latin America, as in other regions of the world, classic definitions of indigenous rights,

especially those involving demands for autonomy and self-determination, are closely linked to the

concept of *territory*, which includes but is broader than (agrarian) land rights. Land rights are limited to

individuals, families, groups or communities, whereas *territories* are associated with the broader

concept of peoplehood – and therefore is a foundation of ethnic identity. [36] The *ethnohistorical* basis

for claims to both land and territory is clearly distinct from demands for rights that are based on, for

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[34] On the left-wing trajectory of one of the FIOB's key founders, see López Mercado (1998: 181)

[35] For example, the EZLN does not participate in elections, whereas the FIOB actively participates in local and state level electoral politics, in coalition with the PRD. In 2000 the FIOB candidate, Romualdo Juan Gutiérrez Cortés, won in the Juxtlahuaca state congressional district. This was only the second time that an opposition candidate had won a majority seat (after the COCEI in the Isthmus). While the EZLN has created its own dual power municipal governance structure, the FIOB works within Oaxaca's unusual system of customary law to encourage broader participation and accountability within existing municipalities.

[36] For a theoretical discussion of "peoplehood," see Smith (2003).

example, redressing *racial* injustice. Claims based on the need to challenge racial inequality are not as dependent on proving that specific territories are (implicitly exclusive) ancestral homelands. In South America the latter kinds of claims have proven more "winnable," perhaps because of their more limited spillover effects.

In this context, the radical spread of longer-term, longer-distance out-migration throughout Mexico's indigenous regions raises serious questions about this strong link between ethnic identity and the territorial basis of peoplehood, since many of the *pueblo* in question no longer live in their homeland, sometimes for generations. Indeed, neither the FIOB nor much of the EZLN can base their claims to rights on ancestral domain. Instead, both use broader multi and pan-ethnic discourses to make claims based on race, class and human rights.

In their redefinition of the relationship between peoplehood and territory, Oaxacan indigenous migrants have gone further and have socially constructed the cross-border public space known as "Oaxacalifornia." In the process, they deploy the term *paisano* in what could be called a kind of "situational territorial identity" with a distinctively indigenous character. As the FIOB's Oaxaca coordinator put it:

> The word *paisano* can be interpreted on different levels… it depends on the context in which it is used. If we are in a specific community, you say *paisano* to mean being part of that community… it's a mark of distinction for the person, showing their honorability… This term has been part of the peoples' culture... With the need to migrate to other places, we find ourselves meeting people who, after talking a bit, we find out are from the some region, in a place filled with people from other states. There the concept is used to distinguish ourselves, and to bring us together more. Then the word reflects our identity as brothers. [37]

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[37] Interview, Romualdo Juan Gutiérrez Cortés, Huajapan de León, Oaxaca, May, 2000, authors' translation.

Here we see how collective identity "scales up" from home community to shared region of origin in course of the migration process. At the same time, its territorial meaning turns out to be inseparable from its ethnic character, serving both to bring indigenous Oaxacans together and to distinguish them from Mexicans from other states. Regional identity melds with ethnic identity.

Getting to migrant civil society: What are the differences between transnational communities, cultural citizenship and translocal citizenship?

To frame this process of redefining the territorial basis of identity and membership, it is worth exploring the range and limits of several concepts that anthropologists and sociologists have used to describe cross-border migrant identities that become the basis for collective action. The nascent process through which migrants are creating their own public spaces and cross-border membership organizations is built on the foundation of what are increasingly referred to as "transnational communities," a concept that refers to groups of migrants whose daily lives, work and social relationships extend across national borders. [38] The existence of transnational communities is necessary but not sufficient to be able to speak of an emerging migrant civil society, which also involves the construction of both public spaces and representative social and civic organizations. Transnational communities are grounded by the combination of their sustained cross-border relationships with the sustained reproduction of their cultural legacy in the United States, as in the notable example of California's four different annual Oaxacan Guelaguetza dance and music festivals.

To describe cases where migrant collective action has transformed the public sphere in the U.S., some analysts use the concept of "cultural citizenship." This term "names a range of social practices which, taken together, claim and establish a distinct social space for Latinos in this country" [the U.S.] and serves as "a vehicle to better understand community formation… It involves the right to

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[38] For an overview of the literature on Mexican transnational communities, see Fletcher and Margold (2003). See also, among others, Bada (2003), Besserer (2003), Fitzgerald (2000), Moctezeuma Longoria (2003), Orozco et al (2003), Roberts et al (1999), Smith (2003).

retain difference, while also attaining membership in society." [39] This process may or may not be linked to membership in a territorially-based community, either in the home country or the U.S. Instead it may be driven by other kinds of shared collective identities, such as racialized and gendered class identities as Latina or Latino workers. The idea of cultural citizenship is complementary to but quite distinct from the notion of transnational community, which both focuses on a specific kind of collective identity and emphasizes sustained *bi*national community membership.

A third way of conceptualizing migrants as social actors sees them as constructing a *de facto* form of what one could call "*translocal community citizenship.*" This term refers to the process through which indigenous migrants are becoming active members both of their communities of settlement and their communities of origin. [40] Like the idea of transnational community, translocal community citizenship refers to the cross-border extension of the boundaries of an existing social sphere, but the term "citizenship" differs from "community" in at least two ways. First, it involves much more precise criteria for determining membership rights and obligations. Second, it refers explicitly to membership in a public sphere. The idea of "translocal community citizenship" therefore involves much more explicit boundaries of membership in the public affairs of a community that is geographically dispersed, or "deterritorialized."

Like cultural citizenship, the term "community citizenship" refers to a socially constructed sense of membership, often built through collective action, but it differs in at least three ways. First, community "citizenship" incorporates the term *that is actually used by the social actors themselves* to name their own experience of membership. In indigenous communities throughout rural Mexico, a member in good standing -- one who fulfills specific obligations and therefore can exercise specific rights – is called a "citizen" of that community (often but not always male). [41] Note that this use of the

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[39] See Flores with Benmayor (1997, p. 1). See also Rocco (2004).

[40] In some cases this process could be called "dual community citizenship," but since many migrant communities are "multi-local," or "multi-sited," it is more inclusive to use a more open-ended term.

[41] On gender and Oaxaca indigenous community membership, both in migration and communities of origin,

term "citizen" for full membership in local indigenous communities appears to *predate* the widespread usage of the term by national and international civil society organizations. [42]

In contrast, it is not clear whether the idea of cultural citizenship has been appropriated by those it refers to. Second, the idea of translocal community specifies the public space within which membership is exercised, whereas "cultural citizenship" is deliberately open-ended as to the *arena* of inclusion (local, regional or national? Territorial or sectoral?). Third, the concept of cultural citizenship focuses, quite appropriately given its goals, on the contested process of negotiating new terms of incorporation *into US society*, in contrast to the emphasis embedded in the idea of translocal community citizenship on the challenge of sustaining binational membership in a cross-border community.

The concept of translocal community citizenship has its own limits as well. It does not capture the broader, rights-based perspective that transcends membership in specific territorially-based (or "deterriorialized") communities, such as the broad-based migrant movement for Mexican voting rights abroad, or the FIOB's emphasis on pan-ethnic collective identities and indigenous and human rights. These collective identities are shared beyond specific communities. The idea of translocal is also limited insofar as it does not capture the frequently *multi-level* process of engagement between migrant membership organizations and the Mexican state at national and state as well as local levels.

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see Maldonado and Artia (2004), Velasco (2002, 2004) and Velásquez (2004).

[42] For examples of the use of the term "citizen," in Oaxacan indigenous communities, see Maldonado and Artia (2004) and Robles (2004). In Nahua communities in Guerrero, see García Ortega (2002), and in Hñahñu communities, see Schmidt and de los Angeles Crummet (2004). What may well be the most precise written set of local governance norms in a Mexican indigenous community, produced as the result of four years of public discussion in San Juan Tabaá, includes specific terms of engagement with migrants. They stress the distinctions between community members who are absent and those who are "definitively absent." The local governance structure officially includes participation in hometown associations in Oaxaca, Mexico City and Los Angeles as a form of community membership, though sustaining full citizenship still required paying annual taxes and, eventually, leadership service. In contrast, those who are "definitively absent" risk losing their property and must pay 34 days of the local minimum wage in order to visit the community. See the "Estatuto comunitario de San Juan Tabaá, Villa Alta," published in *Hora Cero, Suplemento Especial*, June 20, 2001.

These different concepts for describing migrants as social actors are all complementary and reflect important dimensions of that process, each one refer to social processes of migrant identity and organization that may overlap but are distinct, both in theory and in practice. At the same time, they do not capture the full range of migrant collective identities. The broader idea of "*migrant civil society*" provides an umbrella concept for describing diverse patterns of collective action.

In this context, one analytical puzzle that emerges is why, in spite of the challenges posed by migration, some communities, within some ethnic groups, manage to sustain themselves as a group and create their own public spaces as organized migrants more than others. Note, for example, the case of Nahua migrants to the United States. Though they represent the largest indigenous group in Mexico, and some have been coming since the Bracero program, their migrants have not sustained visible membership organizations in the United States. Yet this does not mean that they are not organized or capable of cross-border collective action. On the contrary, it turns out that Nahua transnational communities from the Alto Balsas region of the state of Guerrero supported a pioneering and successful campaign in defense of their villages against a planned hydroelectric dam in 1991 (García Ortega 2002, Good 1992). Coinciding with the Quincentenary, their sense of peoplehood as Nahuas was defined by this sense of shared Alto Balsas regional identity. Here territory and ancestral domain were clearly central, yet the migrant contributions to the campaign also demonstrated their full sense of shared membership in a Nahua identity and region that both were socially constructed largely *in response* to this dramatic external threat. [43]   As suggested above, this experience shares with the Chiapas rebellion and the creation of Oaxacalifornia the close link between collective (pan) ethnic identity and socially constructed regional identities.

[43] The dam project threatened to displace an estimated 40,000 people in the Alto Balsas valley, damage a critical ecosystem and flood a major new archaeological site. Migrants brought video cameras to tape the movement's mass direct actions in state known for intense repression. This tactic not only served to inform *paisanos* in the US, it also pioneered what became the Mexican indigenous movement's now widespread use of video to deter police violence. Migrant protests in California also drew the attention of Spanish language television, which led to the first TV coverage of the Alto Balsas movement within Mexico itself. See García (2002) and Good (1992).

Can we ground the concept of migrant civil society in terms of the construction of binationality?

Indigenous migrant civil society is emerging as one arena within the broader world of Mexican migrant civil society more generally – an arena that includes territorial, civic, religious and class-based membership organizations, among others. But where does migrant civil society fit? Is it the US "branch" of Mexican civil society, the Mexican branch of US civil society, or both? The examples mentioned here suggest that the answer varies depending on which organization one is looking at. Some are primarily engaged with Mexico and Mexican civil society, whereas others are focused primarily on building alliances in the US, including with US organizations and migrants of other nationalities – while some manage to look both "backwards and forwards" at the same time, as suggested by the title of De la Garza and Hazan's study (2003). This process can be framed as the construction of binationality, the capacity to participate as a member of two different national societies.

Binational civil society initiatives have a long history among Mexicans in the United States. Not long after the US conquest of California, local committees in San Jose organized to support Benito Juárez's defense of national sovereignty (Pitti 2003). Juarez himself, along with many other national political leaders, spent time in exile in the US – though not all worked in a factory like he did (Martínez Saldaña 2004). Anarcho-sindicalist intellectual and political leader Ricardo Flores Magón pioneered Mexican political binationality, first by helping to launch the Mexican revolution, and then by helping to lead what became the Mexican wing of the US radical left from exile in Los Angeles (MacLachlan 1991). His binational newspaper resonated widely among Mexicans in both countries and helped to inspire a little-known 1915 multi-racial rebellion against state government-sponsored terror campaigns in Texas, on the border (Sandos 1992; Johnson 2003). Flores Magón's legacy continues to resonate among both Chicano and Mexican grassroots organizers. Yet the political space available for migrant civil society binationality has ebbed and flowed over the decades. The rest of this broader framing

section will explore the process of the constructing Mexican civil society binationality through discussion of "long-distance nationalism" and "counterparts."

What looks like binational participation may be more precisely understood as "long-distance nationalism"

The organized social, civic and political participation by migrants, often embedded in transnational communities, provides perhaps the strongest set of cases for both conceptually clarifying and empirically documenting processes of transnational citizenship. As David Fitzgerald has pointed out, however, much of the literature on transnationalism conflates two distinct forms of nationalism: "(1) the trans-state *long-distance nationalism* of identification with a 'nation' despite physical absence from the homeland and (2) the *dual nationalism* of political identification with two distinct 'nations.'" [44] While some may participate in both, they are analytically distinct projects. Long-distance nationalists are not necessarily dual nationalists. Fitzgerald describes them as "extraterritorial citizens" (2000). [45]

Fitzgerald goes on to note that what sometimes looks like transnational collective identities may be more precisely understood as *translocal* identities and the national element should not be assumed, though his additional claim that localistic cross-border identities often inhibit national identifications appears to be overstated. In practice, however, migrants' transnational and translocal identities are often closely intertwined (Castañeda 2003, 2004). For example, note the case of the annual Easter festival in Jeréz, Zacatecas. The combination of regionally specific customs with the intense involvement of migrants who return regularly would appear to be a clear case of translocal, as distinct from transnational identity. Nevertheless, it turns out that both US and Mexican national flags are prominently displayed, and crowds joyfully burn effigies of both national presidents as part of the mass celebration (Moctezuma Longoria 2004: 37).

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[44] See Fitzgerald (2004), who draws on Andersen (1998).
[45] M. P. Smith (2003) also uses this term.

In the US context, binationality remains a subject of debate even among potential close allies of organized migrants. Latino civil rights activists debate whether migrant cross-border organizing will contribute to the fight for empowerment in the US or not. Until recently, there was a notable disconnect between US Latino political representatives and migrant transnational organizations, such as home-town clubs and their federations. For example, during 1994 campaign against California's infamous anti-immigrant ballot initiative, Prop. 187, Mexican migrant and US Latino organizations had little contact, even if their offices were across the street from one another (Zabin and Escala Rabadán 1998). Recently, however, migrant hometown federations worked closely with US civil rights organizations and trade unions in Los Angeles to campaign and lobby for undocumented migrants' right to drivers' licenses. [46]

Historically (and to some degree still) dominant national political cultures in both societies have obliged migrants to choose one or the other political frame of reference, but migrant social and civic actors are increasingly constructing both the practice and the right to binationality. This process is unfolding on multiple levels as well as across borders, as local and state governments turn out to have greater flexibility and responsiveness vis-a-vis migrant civil society. [47] One of the most notable examples involves the *matrículas consulares*. While their increased distribution was a Mexican federal initiative, local and state governments in the US have widely accepted them, as have many influential private sector actors. The issue of access to drivers' licenses for undocumented workers is also a state government responsibility. Anti-immigrant activists consider these pragmatic measures by US state and local governments to be forms of 'para-legalization.' As long as the enforcement of immigration laws remains an almost exclusively federal responsibility, they are correct – which is why they are on the cutting edge of the immigrant rights agenda. This multi-layered arena for contesting the terms of

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[46] On migrant political coalitions in Southern California, see Rivera-Salgado and Escala Rabadán (2004), as well as Seif (2003) and Varsanyi (2004).

[47] For comparative discussions of this process, see Baubock (2003), Østergaard-Neilsen (2003) and Fox (forthcoming). The idea of "multi-layered citizenship" is also relevant here (Yuval-Davis 1999).

inclusion and exclusion renders obsolete the apparent dichotomy between (trans) national and the local.

The concept of counterparts *poses questions about cross-border balance within migrant civil society*

On the one hand, migrant civil society appears to be the paradigm case for transnational citizenship, including both the possibility of binational political rights and a common sense of membership in a shared political community. On the other hand, relationships between migrant organization and civil society in the home country may or may not be balanced. Organized migrant civil society may or may not overlap or engage with organized civil society back home. The concept of counterparts raises the sometimes uncomfortable question: to what degree are migrant organizations engaged in balanced partnerships with counterparts in their countries of origin?

In the Mexican context, many migrant organizations have won recognition as interlocutors with national and local governments, as they leverage and administer community development matching funds, but relatively few migrant organizations actually constitute the US-based branch of an organized social actor based in both countries. For example, the Zacatecan federations in the US are the largest and most consolidated Mexican migrant groups in the US, but their civil society partnerships in their home state are incipient at best. [48] Indeed, civil society in some high out-migration communities can be quite thin. Migrants who send remittances may use that power to try to tell family members in their home country how they should vote, which risks reproducing classic patterns of clientelism. [49] In contrast, some of the Oaxacan migrant organizations, many of which are based on regional and ethnic identities as well as hometowns, have organized branches not only in California and Oaxaca, but also in Baja California in between – the political space that together constitutes the imagined community of "Oaxacalifornia." The concept of counterparts is also very relevant for understanding the full array of

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[48] See Goldring (1998, 2002) and Smith (2003).

[49] Goldring is one of the few analysts to address the contradictions of cross-border remittance politics (1998, 2002, 2003). See Fitzgerald on related issues of cross-border patronage within a California trade union local (2004).

intersections between US and Mexican civil societies, if one looks beyond the migrant community to analyze cross-border ties among environmentalists, trade unions, farmers or civil rights organizations (Brooks and Fox 2002).

Conclusions

The collective practices that are beginning to constitute a specifically indigenous Mexican migrant civil society show us a new side of what otherwise is an unrelentingly devastating process for Mexico's indigenous communities – their abrupt insertion into globalized capitalism through international migration in search of wage labor. In spite of their dispersion throughout different points along the migrants' paths, at least some indigenous communities manage to sustain the social and cultural networks that give them cohesion and continuity – both locally in their US communities and transnationally. Their migratory experience has both broadened and transformed previously localized identities into ethnic, pan-ethnic and racial identities, while also broadening widely-held homogenous understandings of Mexican national identity. At the same time, "long-distance membership" in home communities, as well as the construction of new kinds of organizations not based on ties to the land raises unanswered questions about the classic close association between land, territory and indigenous identity. Within Mexico, the national debate over how institutions and social actors could or should build indigenous autonomy has yet to fully grapple with this dilemma.

Mexican migrants and indigenous peoples both pursue self-representation through multiple strategies, coalitions and repertoires. They also share the experience of having long been widely perceived by others as faceless masses – both in Mexico and in the US. Until recently, they have been recognized as victims or as threats, but not as actors. Both are now in the midst of a long-term process of building their capacities for self-representation in their respective domains. Indigenous Mexican migrants are no exception. Do their organizations represent the indigenous wing of a broader cross-

border migrant movement that would otherwise leave them out? Do they represent the migrant wing of the broader national indigenous movement that would otherwise leave them out? Yes, and yes, but most of all they represent themselves, both indigenous and migrants.

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