TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT COMMUNITIES AND MEXICAN MIGRATION TO THE US*

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INTRODUCTION

Mexican migration to the United States has a long history, beginning in the nineteenth century and contributing substantially to the construction of the US railroad system, the development of agriculture, to manufacturing, and, latterly, to the urban service economy. Until the 1970s, it followed a mainly temporary migration pattern in which most migrants originated from the rural areas of the Center-West and North of Mexico, went to work in agriculture in the Southwest of the United States, and returned home during slack seasons in the United States. A proportion of these migrants stayed permanently in the United States, either in rural areas or in cities, such as Los Angeles. At times, Mexican migrants were forcibly repatriated as in the 1930s or in the so-called 'Operation Wet-Back' of the 1950s. The Bracero program of the United States and Mexican governments institutionalized this temporary migration from 1942 to 1964, but even in these years, substantial numbers of undocumented Mexican migrants entered the United States, mainly for temporary work.

From the 1970s onwards, Mexican migration appears to have changed in major ways. Migrants have increasingly moved to urban destinations in the United States, and increasingly leave from urban rather than rural places in Mexico (Lozano, Roberts and Bean 1997). Mexican migrants also appear to be settling more permanently in the US. Their wives and children are joining male migrants, whereas single migrants, whether male or female, are marrying and staying in the US in greater numbers than previously (Cornelius 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo

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1994; Durand, Massey and Zenteño 1998).[1] The family reunification provisions of the IRCA legislation of 1986 contributed to this increasing settlement, since legalized migrants could now sponsor family members to join them in the US. There is, however, considerable continuity over time in Mexican migration, with what Massey calls 'cumulative causation' explaining many of the changes in migration patterns. Thus, the migrant networks tying villages and small towns in Mexico to destinations in the US facilitate the migration of women, of young single adults, and even of urban migrants who use ties from their villages of origin to migrate to the US.

Along with the shift from a more temporary to a more permanent pattern of migration, various commentators point to a new pattern of migration between Mexico and the US that is the basis of transnational migrant communities (Rouse 1992; R. Smith 1994; Kearney 1995; Goldring 1998; Guarnizo and Smith 1998). Transnational migrant communities are groupings of immigrants who participate on a routine basis in a field of relationships, practices, and norms that include both places of origin and places of destination (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992). Minimally, a transnational field provides immigrants with opportunities and perspectives that are alternatives to committing themselves exclusively either to the new society or to the old. Even those relatively settled in the United States retain active ties with their communities of origin through sending remittances back, returning for celebrations, and helping fellow-townspeople to migrate. There is little agreement, however, about the novelty of this migrant transnationalism since Mexican migrants have always retained active links with their communities of origin (Taylor 1928; Gamio 1930; Durand 1996). Also, it is unclear how enduring a phenomenon migrant transnationalism is likely to be, particularly if Mexican migrants follow the pattern of earlier migrant groups to the United States, such as the Italians, and diminish their contacts with Mexico, the longer they stay in the US.[2]

In this paper, we use a review of the literature and preliminary field data to analyse the significance and possible persistence of Mexican transnational migrant communities. Our analysis is based on a migration system perspective that looks for the factors in the social and economic structures of Mexico and the US that could reproduce this particular pattern of migration over time. We will do this in the context of the identifiable temporary and permanent migration systems, arguing that Mexico-US migration is based on different types of migration systems that have distinct implications for Mexican migrant adjustment to the US. Migrant characteristics and the choices that they make are equally important elements in shaping the overall pattern of migration, as are the actions of the state, both in Mexico and the US. We will consider the dilemmas facing migrants and the state, using Hirschman's (1970) concepts of Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. These dilemmas and their resolution contribute, we argue, to changing and reproducing particular patterns of migration.

The Context of Mexico-US Migration

There are a number of factors affecting Mexican immigration that are likely to make migration patterns amongst Mexican immigrants more diverse than is the case amongst immigrant groups from other countries. The first factor to bear in mind when comparing Mexican immigration

[1] See for reconsideration of evidence for change.

[2] With time, ties with the home country are likely to weaken and the transnational nature of the migrant community will cease to include activities or relationships that span country of origin and country of destination. This was to happen with Italian migrants to California (Di Leonardo 1984).

with that of other immigrant groups is its scale. Mexico shares an extensive land border with the United States that is difficult to control effectively. The border separates two economies of sharply different levels of economic development. Mexico's GNP per capita in 1996 was eight times less than that of the United States, and the difference in real wages was of approximately the same order.[3] The scale of Mexican documented and undocumented immigration into the United States has dwarfed, in recent years, immigration from any other country, accounting for about fourteen Per cent of all legal immigrants, and as much as forty Per cent of undocumented immigrants (Gelbard and Carter 1997). Mexican immigrants are approximately thirty-seven Per cent of the Mexican-origin population (ibid). The US Census Bureau estimated the Mexican foreign-born population in the United States in 1997 to be 7,017,000 making up twenty-seven Per cent of the total foreign-born population (US Census 1997).

Increasing numbers of immigrants have also meant an increasingly diverse immigrant population. Mexican immigrants of the 1980s and 1990s remain predominantly low skilled and many come from semi-subsistence rural economies. They are, however, increasingly diverse in terms of geographical origins and in terms of their age, gender, and whether they come alone or as members of families. A growing number of them are high-skilled, white-collar workers and are of urban origin. These white-collar workers are refugees from the Mexican economic recessions of the 1980s and 1990s that hit the 'new' Mexican middle class particularly hard (Escobar and Roberts 1991; De la Garza and Szekely 1997). Recent surveys reveal the growing importance of urban-origin migration. The proportion of emigrants to the United States from cities of 20,000 or more rose from 29.4 Per cent to 41.1 Per cent between 1978-79 and 1992.[4] *The Colegio de la Frontera Norte's* 1993-4 Mexican border survey of migrants returning from or going to the United States suggest that 65 Per cent of those seeing themselves as settled in the United States came from places of 15,000 or more population.[5] Durand and his colleagues (1998) stress the continuing importance of rural origins among Mexican immigrants, but they also demonstrate that the share of emigrants born in metropolitan areas (defined as 100,000+inhabitants) goes up from 21.0 Per cent in the 1980-1984 period to 30.2 Per cent in the 1985-1990 period.[6]

The negative effects of the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s on urban Mexico, the continued stagnation of the rural economy, and the availability of year-round work in US cities combined to encourage settlement amongst Mexican immigrants, but with a diversity of legal statuses. The 1986 Immigration and Reform Act contributed substantially to this process of settlement, not only giving permanent residence to over two million Mexicans, but through family reunification provisions in the Immigration legislation, enabling immigrants to bring other family members to the US. Subsequent legislation, particularly the Welfare Reform and Immigration Reform Acts of 1996, encouraged legal Mexican immigrants to become citizens in unprecedented numbers. As of 1997, nineteen Per cent of Mexican immigrants were naturalized citizens, forty-one Per cent were estimated to be legal residents, and forty Per cent undocumented (Glick and Van Hook 1998, Table 5).

These legislative acts have been at least as influential as economic crises and increasing

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[3] There are also considerable differences in the cost of living between Mexico and the United States, mainly in terms of the high costs of subsistence in the US consumer economy.

[4] The surveys are Enefneu (*Encuesta Nacional de Emigración a la Frontera Norte del País y a los Estados Unidos*) of 1978/79 and Enadid (*Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica*) of 1992. Both used a similar sampling methodology and a similar definition of emigrant – a member of a Mexican household who was currently working in the United States.

[5] The EMIF (*Encuesta Sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte*) survey of the Colegio de la Frontera Norte is based on the systematic sampling of migrant flows, interviewing migrants at transit points.

[6] Controlling for age composition.

economic integration in altering migration patterns between Mexico and the US. Legalized immigrants can travel easily back to their communities of origin and for their relatives in those communities, they provide an actual or potential means of legal migration to the US. Also, the tightening of Border control is likely to have had the paradoxical consequence of encouraging those that cross without documents to remain in the United States.[7] The increasing settlement of Mexican immigrants not only indicates a permanent pattern of migration, but facilitates a transnational pattern as well. It is when immigrants settle and must come to terms with the demands of the new society that they are most likely to operate transnationally in that their discourse and practices reflect both worlds, that of their community of origin and that of their destination.

Temporary and Permanent Migration Systems

We begin by considering the general features of social and economic structure in places of origin and destination that reproduce particular patterns of migrant behavior. When these complement each other, they create a migration system. It is these structural features, which explain differences in migration rates and in the duration of migration, and need to be distinguished from the individual reasons that account for the incidence and variability in who migrates (Mitchell 1959). Our approach is similar to that of Portes (1996) and Guarnizo (1997) who argue that the persistence of a particular migration pattern depends on the broader pattern of economic, political, and social relationships between two countries.

A temporary migration system rests on a structure of economic opportunities in the place of origin that, while insufficient for the full subsistence of a household, can maintain a family provided that one or more members of the household become labor migrants. The temporary nature of this labor migration is reinforced by a structure of opportunities in the place of destination that provide temporary work opportunities, either because of the nature of the job, as in seasonal agriculture, or because of official restrictions on permanent stay. The market-oriented, semi-subsistence agriculture of Mexico, particularly of the Center-West, and the demand for temporary labor, particularly in Californian agriculture, constituted the basis of the temporary migration system in Mexico. In the traditional sending regions of the Center-West of Mexico, particularly the states of Michoacán and Jalisco, households subsisted on agriculture combined with small-scale craft and commercial activities. The temporary labor migration of household heads to the US was, however, an important complement to that subsistence and also provided the cash needed to invest in land, animals, or the seed and fertilizer for the next year's harvest. There is evidence that some Mexican urban residents were also part of a temporary migration system, even though the low rates of employment of females, particularly married females, made it more difficult for families to subsist in the absence of the male head of household. Thus, in Guadalajara, male heads of household went to California to work temporarily, while their wives remained behind getting income from informal activities in the shoe and garment industries (Escobar, De la Rocha and Roberts 1987; Arias 1985).

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[7] This claim is based on interviews with undocumented migrants. Also see Taylor et al. (1997), who report that Mexican immigrant farm workers are not returning to Mexico because of the increasing difficulties of crossing the Border.

Changes in agricultural practice in both Mexico and the US are undermining this temporary migration system. Factors such as the increased costs of inputs, inadequate credit facilities, competition from imported products, and from commercially produced domestic products make small-scale, family-based farming increasingly unworkable. Changes in the Agricultural Reform Law, particularly that permitting the sale of *ejidal* land, encourage commercial farming.[8] On the basis of his studies of villages in Michoacán, Mexico, Gledhill (1995) suggests that current studies on rural-based international migration need to acknowledge that rural migrants do not necessarily maintain ties to their Mexican bases. He argues that the diverse and often fragmented nature of Mexican and US migrant communities increasingly translates into permanent instead of temporary migration patterns. Even farm work in the US is less dominated than in the past by temporary migration patterns. In fact, research has shown that large and increasing numbers of Mexican migrant farm workers have settled permanently in the US (Palerm 1991).

A permanent migration system rests on the lack of economic opportunities in the place of origin and the attraction of permanent work opportunities in the place of destination. The more abundant and stable are the work opportunities in the destination and the fewer are the legal barriers to obtaining them, then the stronger will be the permanent migration system. Historical examples of a permanent migration system are found in the low rates of return migration of some immigrant groups who came to the United States in the last century and early in this century (Jasso and Rozenzweig 1990).[9] In that period, the mainly permanent migrations of the Irish to the US contrast, for example, with the substantial amount of return Mexican migration (Roberts 1995).

The current economic situation in both rural and urban Mexico is promoting a permanent migration system. Scarcities of jobs and declines in real income for the rural population and for the poorest forty Per cent of the urban population make it increasingly difficult to find a stable subsistence base in either countryside or city. The result is continuing rural-urban migration combined with high rates of inter-urban migration that are increasingly directed northwards to the US and to the US-Mexico border (Lozano, Roberts, and Bean 1997; Escobar and Roberts 1998). The demand in the US for year-round low-skilled labor in construction, urban services, and 'sweat-shop' manufacturing creates the complementary basis for a permanent migration system. As we noted, the legalization of substantial number of Mexican immigrants and the family reunification provisions of the Immigration Laws encourage permanent migration. Evidence for the operation of this permanent migration system is González de la Rocha's (1997) study of recent migration from Mexico's second largest city, Guadalajara, to the US. Faced with a lack of economic opportunities in Guadalajara, young adults leave for the United States and secure stable employment there. They either bring wives or fiancés from Mexico or marry in the United States. The elderly parents of these migrants remain in Guadalajara, but report that they receive little or no help from their absent children and are rarely in contact.

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[8] The *Ejido* was a form of social property created after the Mexican Revolution that endowed communities with land which was distributed to individual households, who could farm it individually or collectively. The household heads could pass on their *ejidal* rights to their children, but could not sell the land.

[9] Rates of return migration can provide indicators of migration systems. Thus, a very low rate of return migration to a country or region of origin over a long period is likely to indicate a permanent migration system. A very high rate of return migration and of short duration indicates a temporary system, whereas an intermediate rate of return migration, with a long average stay, is suggestive of a transnational system of migration.

A third, non-temporally defined migration system is possible in which both the return pull of sending communities and the retaining power of receiving communities continue to be high. Such a system has been documented for some Latin American rural-urban migrations, in which rural migrants settle in the city, but use their rural relationships to advance their urban interests and their urban resources to advance their and their family's rural interests (Roberts 1974; Altamirano and Hirayabashi 1997). For these migrants, the rural and the urban are a common field of activity in which plans are made by taking account of the norms and opportunities of both places (G. Smith 1989). This type of migration system can span international borders. Such a transnational migration system entails the continuing significance for migrants of the social and economic structures of country of origin and country of destination (Rouse 1992).

A transnational system is based on the interrelationship of opportunities in places of origin and places of destination. The diverse nature of these opportunities in countries so large and economically complex as Mexico and the US will, we argue, give rise to different types of transnational fields of action and, thus, to transnational migrant communities that differ both in the nature and the strength of their transnational commitment. Underpinning these fields of action is the ease of communication between Mexico and the US, with a large and relatively permeable land border, good road, rail, and air connections, and relatively inexpensive and extensive telecommunications links.

The three systems of migration operate simultaneously to shape Mexico-US migration and are by no means mutually exclusive. They are likely to be associated with differences in migrant characteristics. Guarnizo and Smith (1998) make the point that migrations from the same country are formed by a heterogeneous rather than unitary group of people, possessing distinct personal and social endowments. The differences in human and social capital result in disparate rates of access to opportunities in the sending and receiving labor market, which is reflected in different patterns of migration, such as those embodied in the temporary, permanent, or transnational migration systems. Migrants from villages or small towns are, we hypothesize, more likely to be either part of a permanent or a transnational migration system. Although their local ties are strong and the possibilities of investing and influencing community development are high, the possibilities are few of subsisting at home without continuing year-round income from abroad, making the temporary migration strategy less workable than in the past. Conversely, migrants from the cities are more likely to be temporary or permanent migrants, since community ties are weak and the possibility of contributing to local development few, but there are opportunities in the cities to which migrants can return and in which they can invest their migrant earnings.

The rural-urban contrast is, of course, not the only dimension that differentiates individual participation in a migration system. Household position and gender are also likely to affect the degree of commitment of migrants to community of origin and their prospects there. Occupational skills and local markets are further factors differentiating migrants' chances in place of origin and place of destination. Thus, Mexican migrants with craft and professional skills are more likely to be able to use their skills in the United States to secure social mobility for themselves and for their family than are unskilled migrants. The type of local economy from which migrants come will also determine whether they can put to good use in Mexico the savings and experience they gained in the United States.[10]

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[10] See Victor Espinosa's interview with Héctor, a US migrant who returned to his home town, the industrial city of San Fransisco del Rincón, to invest in a small shoe factory after eleven years of working in Chicago (Durand 1996, pp. 97-124).

The Transnational Migration System between Mexico and the US

In this section, we use the literature to identify two types of transnationalism created by the different fields of action present in the US-Mexico transnational migration system. The first field of action is that based on the increase in trade and investment links between Mexico and the US as a result of the Mexican adoption of GATT in 1988 and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of the early 1990s. The latter instituted the free movement of capital and goods between the two countries, but not of labor. Two kinds of transnational migrant communities are potentially supported by these economic interrelationships: professional and managerial, and entrepreneurial.

Transnational corporations are spearheading US-Mexico economic integration in two ways. They are establishing more branches of their operations in Mexico in areas such as retailing and financial and professional services. They are also territorially reorganizing their operations in terms of a division of labor between the US and Mexico, as in the case of the automobile and auto parts industries. For professionals and technical workers, this offers the possibility of a transnational job career in which their peculiar identity of being US style business people who are Mexican may facilitate their keeping a foot in each country.

There is a dearth of studies, however, looking at professionally based transnational migrant communities. An exception is Alarcón's recent work on the transnational links kept by Mexican engineers in the Silicon Valley, which suggests that Mexican professionals, even when they become US citizens, do retain strong links with Mexico (Alarcón 1997). Their professional association, MEXPRO (the Association of Mexican Professionals of Silicon Valley) is actively forging economic links with Mexico and engages in community projects amongst the less-skilled and poorer Mexican immigrants of the Valley.

The freer movement of people and goods brought by increasing economic integration are likely to make it easier for entrepreneurs to take advantage of complements between the economies of two countries. By their need to operate simultaneously in both economic fields, entrepreneurs are likely to sustain transnational migrant communities, both directly and indirectly. The ethnic/ancestry group in the country of immigration can provide a market for the products of the home country, thus additionally fostering continuing economic linkages between the home country and country of immigration. Existing case studies of the new type of Mexican transnational entrepreneurial activity range from studies of prosperous large-scale entrepreneurial migrants to ones of smaller scale micro-businesses.

The scale and corporate nature of large-scale entrepreneurship in Mexico makes it unlikely that it will use Mexican migrant communities in the United States to advance its interests. Large-scale Mexican entrepreneurs deal directly with US banks and corporations. Interestingly, it is amongst large-scale Mexican-origin entrepreneurs in the United States that there is some evidence of the growth of a transnational migrant community (Guarnizo 1997; nd). This is related to the actions of the Mexican government in creating various grassroots organizations in the US to foster investment in particular regions of Mexico and in placing prosperous Mexican origin entrepreneurs in leadership roles. These positions have given entrepreneurs special access to permits and information that facilitate doing business in Mexico.

Small-scale entrepreneurs are, in contrast to large-scale entrepreneurs, more likely to rely on community based ties in order to sustain their transnational activity. They will also need to exploit the niche markets that the large corporation ignores. Alvarez and Collier (1994) have looked at Mexican truckers and the ways in which ethnically disadvantaged truckers have been able to monopolize some kinds of transnational trade through drawing upon inter-

personal reciprocities and patronage. They conclude that Northern Mexican truckers are able to meet the challenges of transnational businesses through their own transnational ethnically based ties. In a similar vein, Hernández (1997b) looks at the nature of transport entrepreneurial activity between Monterrey and Houston. These small family enterprises shuttle money, commercial products, foodstuffs, medical supplies and people back and forth between Monterrey and Houston. Their success depends on the sustainability of *confianza* between them and their clients and provides an excellent example of how entrepreneurial activity can sustain transnational migrant communities. Another study by Alvarez (1994) of *chilero* distributors enters a cautionary note about the linkage between increased economic integration between Mexico and the US and transnational migrant communities. The *chilero* industry has traditionally involved the crossing of traditional lines of international demarcation, with large wholesaler and ethnic entrepreneurs of the US interacting with liaisons and small entrepreneurs in Mexico. The participants rely on hierarchical relationships of loyalty, *confianza* and patron-client trust. Yet the recent penetration of transnational capital into the distribution system has forced *chileros* and *fruteros* to rely less on investment in social relationships and loyalty. Instead they have become more dependent on capital, resulting in downward mobility of smaller entrepreneurs who go bankrupt and are unable to compete.

Another of action is based on labor markets and the social relationships that these create between places in Mexico and places in the United States. In this case, the transnational migrant community is reproduced by the continuing demand for labor in the US and its supply through social networks based on Mexican communities. For Mexican migrants in the US, their community of origin may offer investment opportunities or a social support safety net for the elderly and for their own retirement. Thus, constraints, and not just opportunities in both places of origin and places of destination, sustain this type of transnational migrant community. Diverse, but limited income opportunities in Mexico are counterbalanced by higher, but more uncertain income opportunities in the US. Uncertainty limits permanent settlement in the US because of factors such as legal barriers to residence or because income is unstable and subsistence costs are high compared to Mexico. Transnational migrant communities can thus be based on the social stratification and the blocked opportunities that migrants encounter in their country of origin and in their country of destination. Portes (1996) argues, for example, that the challenge of transnational migrant communities is that of the weak who seek to use transnational space to counter marginality in both country of origin and country of destination. The rural origins of most Mexican immigrants and their low position in the US labor market make them marginal members of both nations. Recent changes in Mexican law admitting dual nationality and in US law penalizing non-citizens make the transnational option more consequential for Mexican immigrants.

There exists an emerging set of case studies that document the prevalence of transnational migration patterns among rural migrants traveling to the US. The majority of work concerns villages from traditional sending areas (Mines 1981; López 1986; Alarcón 1988; Goldring 1990; Rouse 1992; Goldring 1994; R. Smith 1994) in which community-based social relationships are reported to form the basis of transnational communities and inform transnational economic activities, social relationships and political practices. The literature is careful to distinguish various forms and levels of transnationalism, differentiating between transnational communities, transnational social fields and social spaces (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Goldring 1998). For our purposes we will be interested in the ways these different permutations of transnationalism reflect a transnational migration system.

Mines' (1981) study on the Las Animas community was one of the first to document the evolution of economic integration between a rural community and the US He demonstrated

that as migratory networks matured and migrants gained more access to labor markets in the US, an active circulation of people, money, information and goods was achieved. Alarcón's (1994) work on the Tlacuitapa community, notes that even recent development prospects in nearby regions have not been able to offer improved economic alternatives to prospective migrants in the face of economic opportunities in the US and have thus failed to decrease the international migration flow. As a result of the denial of access to adequate resources at home, migrants are even more reliant on sustained networks and reciprocal relationships with their fellow transnational community members (Kearney 1986; R. Smith 1994; Gledhill 1995). Migrants thus find themselves members of a "transnational semi-proletariat" (Rouse 1992) who combine survival strategies and rely on transnational economic ties that are based on their local community. The transnational economic practices of the small rural community are repeatedly construed as enduring phenomenon because global economic restructuring has made labor migration an integral part of the community's economic survival strategies (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton-Blanc 1994). The majority of case studies are also careful to point out the dynamism of transnational communities that are formed not solely as a passive response to macro-economic structures, but also constitute an autonomous adaptation.

A different pattern of migration exists for urban migrants. Rubén Hernández's (1997a) study of migration between Monterrey in Mexico and Houston, Texas shows that urban communities in place of origin and destination can be the basis of transnational fields of activity and give rise to transnational migrant communities, but in ways different from those of the small rural community. Unlike the multiplex relationships of rural communities, the urban ones tend to be more specialized. Thus, youths in Monterrey make use of the relationships formed through neighborhood-based street gangs (*pandillas*) to go to Houston. The prime reason for going is for the fun of it (*a la aventura*), even though their Houston contacts may also help them get work if they decided to stay a short while. However, when these same youths decide to go to Houston with the purpose of finding work and staying for a longer period, they are more likely to use kinship contacts.

The final field of action to consider is narrowly geographical. Economic integration has given the border between the United States and Mexico a new significance for transnational migrant communities there. Its potential contribution to their formation has increased, as the border becomes a densely populated bi-national zone where both returning and ongoing migrants to the US congregate and, often, settle. Accounts make clear that the inhabitants on both sides of the border are highly interconnected socially and economically, operate internationally, and retain a strong sense of nationality and of difference from the other side (Bustamante 1989; Vila 1994; Spener and Roberts 1998). For many inhabitants of these border communities, their activities and identities are based on a single community, that of the border (Velez-Ibañez 1996). Rodriguez (1996) argues, for example, that undocumented border migration represents autonomous community efforts to transnationally restructure their base of social reproduction. Yet, the rapid and unbalanced *maquiladora*-led economic development of the border may also weaken transnational migrant communities on the border through high rates of in and out-migration, as well as through high rates of unemployment on the US side (Escobar and Roberts 1998).

To help understand the dynamic of change in migration systems and, particularly, in the transnational system, we turn to evidence that moves from a structural to a more actor oriented approach.

The Dilemmas of Exit

Both states and migrants face dilemmas over migration. The way they resolve these dilemmas contribute to the reinforcement of particular patterns of migration. Essentially, these dilemmas are those of balancing the economic advantages of migrating against the risks and uncertainties of the move, the possibilities of improving one's situation by staying, and the strength of family and community commitments. These dilemmas are not equally sharp for all migrants. As Espinosa and Massey (1997) have shown, these considerations often act to facilitate migration, as when social networks based on the community of origin diminish the risks and uncertainties of the journey to the North, and stimulate migrant investments back home. We argue, however, that important aspects of the current diversity of Mexico-US migration are sharpening the dilemmas of settlement or return for many migrants as a result of increasing state involvement in regulating migration.

To capture both the migrant and the state dimension of these dilemmas, we use Hirschman's (1970) concepts of Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. Hirschman's triad represent dilemmas that face members of a poorly performing organization as they balance the advantages of leaving for better prospects elsewhere against the possibility of securing improvement in organizational performance and against their local commitments. From this perspective, migration is exit from a state that is not fully satisfying the aspirations of some at least of its members (ibid. p. 81). Hirschman's point is that even when individual economic motives for leaving appear to predominate, emigration also needs to be understood as a political statement about state inadequacy. Though Mexicans have migrated to the United States mainly for economic reasons, their migration as De La Garza and Szekely (1997) point out, has also been based on dissatisfaction with authoritarian government that has neglected the small-scale business and farming sector. The exit option in migration can vary in its degree of permanence, depending not only on the original intent of the migrant, but on what happens during the migrant's career. The loyalty dimension of Hirschman's triad restrains the use of the exit option. Loyalties are the material and affective bonds that commit individuals to their community of origin, whether the *patria chica* or the nation. Loyalties pull migrants and their resources back to the community of origin. They give, as Hirschman puts it, time for voice to work and so forestall permanent exits from the community that can deprive it of precisely those people with the initiative and energy to help find collective solutions. Voice is both the sense and reality of participating effectively in community affairs and of influencing change in a desired direction.

From the perspective of exit, voice, and loyalty, international migration creates serious dilemmas for states when a temporary migration system is being replaced by a permanent out-migration system. When temporary migration dominates, ties to the local community ensure that migrants continue contributing to their state of origin without need for the state to improve its performance. The state of destination benefits from the labor of temporary migrants, but does not bear the full costs of their and their family's subsistence since many of these, such as those of education, health, and childcare are borne at origin. In contrast, permanent out-migration threatens the loss of skilled and enterprising members of the sending state, and of their continuing financial contributions to local and national development, through remittances or investments. To the receiving state, permanent migration in large numbers entails high welfare costs, particularly for dependents, which may not be offset by the taxes that migrants pay.

The disadvantages of permanent migration mean that sending states are likely to encourage officially regulated temporary migration and to support a transnational migration system.

Receiving states are likely to do so also, but less vigorously since receiving states have the option of trying to cut off immigration entirely. Since sending states cannot easily block exits, their most feasible options to reduce permanent migration are through using loyalty and the promise of voice. Here, however, we can expect state initiatives to result in further dilemmas. Giving all migrants increasing political voice runs the risk of disrupting traditional structures of political control. It is, anyway, only likely to be perceived as making much of a difference when the community is small and where, consequently, migrants can exercise significant influence on resource allocation and administration. Furthermore, it is migrant elites and the local elites with whom they ally that are most likely to benefit from the increased concession of political and economic influence.

The State, Migrants and Transnationalism

In differentiating between forms of transnational life, R. Smith (1997) distinguishes between local level and institutional forms of transnational activity. The former involves the transnational social forms of individual immigrants and their families and those collective forms organized at the level of the migrant village. The latter kind of transnational life involves the associational and institutional forms that states are central in creating or which they capture and develop. It is to these two areas that we now turn.

There is a substantial amount of evidence linking the Mexican State to the promotion of transnational migration among rural migrants. Various studies see the Mexican State as promoting transnational migration in place of permanent out-migration as a response to the potential loss of the financial contributions (through remittances or investment) to local and national development (González Gutiérrez 1997; R. Smith 1997; Goldring 1998; Guarnizo and Smith 1998; R. Smith 1998). Guarnizo and Smith (1998) note that this trend is not exclusive to Mexico. Many less industrialized states have begun to rely increasingly on migrants' stable remittances, which has prompted sending states to try to incorporate their national polity by a variety of measures, not the least of which is to encourage transnational migration through the strengthening of loyalty ties.

Furthermore, in his study of Mexican and Dominican responses to transnational migration, Guarnizo (1997a) argues that transnational migrant communities have been encouraged by the Mexican State as a means of repositioning itself in the world political economy. He argues that with increasing economic integration, emerging sectors of political and economic elites have a keen interest in promoting transnational migration in order to promote their own agendas, their interest in the passage of NAFTA being a prime example. The state has become became increasingly aware of migrants' potential for exercising pressure on the US government in favor of decisions affecting Mexican 'national interests' and has used the promotion of transnational migration to do so.

One of the state's principal attempts to promote transnational migration by increasing migrant loyalty is through the creation of the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (PCME).[11] Beginning with the administration of Salinas de Gortari and continuing today, the PCME aims to encourage Mexicans and people of Mexican origin to maintain ties with Mexico. Organized around education, culture, sports, business and communities, the program seeks to

[11] The PCME is an office of the Mexican Foreign Ministry.

strengthen the loyalty of migrants to either the Mexican State, or in the case of many rural migrants, their local community. Carlos González Gutiérrez (1997), community affairs director of the PCME, notes that the regional clubs encouraged by the PCME are seen as an institutional mechanism the community develops to strengthen social networks upon which massive migration rests. It is important to note here that external actions of the Mexican State are not a transnational field in the sense of this paper, but rather the focus is whether or not these actions provide support for transnational migration.

There exists substantial evidence that the PCME has been effective in encouraging a transnational migration pattern, specifically among rural migrants. In his work on the community of Ticuani, R. Smith (1998) concludes that transnationalization of political life among Ticuani community members involves a process dating back more than fifty years. Nevertheless, recent action by the Mexican State through the PCME has played an essential role in rejuvenating relations between the New York Ticuenese Committee and the Ticuani in Mexico. By involving itself in the micro-politics of migrants such as those of the Ticuani, the state promotes local level clubs and state-level federations in order to increase migrant commitment to their home region. Establishing relationships with migrants and helping them organize are clearly high priorities for the Mexican State and its efforts are of considerable scope. In Los Angeles alone, by March of 1995, there existed 150 hometown clubs and 10 state-level associations (González Gutiérrez 1995).

In her study of the Zacateca Federation of migrants, Goldring (1998) echoes many of the conclusions drawn by R. Smith. The Zacatecan Clubs of Southern California, based in Los Angeles and created in 1985, is an umbrella organization including over 40 hometown clubs. The federation is one of the few state-level organizations that pre-date the establishment of the Mexican government's PCME. Yet, it too has been heavily influenced by the activities of the PCME. Federation members pay less than the standard price for access to a Mexican health plan administered by the Ministry of Health (IMSS). The Federation also acts as an intermediary, lobbying and obtaining funds from the state and federal governments for community projects, scholarships and Federation programs. From 1993 to 1995 the PCME also ran the "two-for-one program" in which the state of Zacatecas and federal government each put in a dollar for every dollar raised by a hometown club for a community project. Thus by increasing the political and economic opportunities available to the migrants the state hopes to strengthen their loyalty ties and encourage transnational migration patterns as opposed to permanent ones.

Research shows, however, that the implications of state-based transnational activity are far from uniform. Recent work by Goldring (1997) holds that federal attempts to promote transnational political activity are mediated by activity at the state and *municipio* level, which results in variation in implementation and in outcome. Specific case studies argue that the significance of state-based transnational activities varies with locality. The federal government's increased interests and efforts in transnational micro-politics, has, for example, translated into the support of the locally organized Ticuani New York Committee (R. Smith 1998), which has readily accepted the federal government's assistance. However the case of Oaxacan migrants departs from this scenario. Instead of a mutually reinforcing relationship, the Binational Oaxacan Front has an oppositional stance towards the Mexican State in Mexico and in the United States which in turn affects the viability of the transnational migration option (R. Smith 1998).

The variability of the Mexican State's attempts to promote transnational activity among rural communities is partially explained by taking into account the role of the migrants. The Mexican State's attention to its transnational communities is due, in part, to the pressures

exerted by the migrants themselves. A mutually reinforcing process exists in which federal level decisions seek to encourage local level political activity while local political organizations pressure the Mexican State into recognizing and working with transnational communities. Studies that highlight the centrality of locality (M.P. Smith 1994; Goldring 1997; Goldring 1998; Guarnizo 1998; R. Smith 1998) also emphasize the construction of transnational communities "from below" (Guarnizo 1997; Guarnizo and Smith 1998). Thus, the Ticuani transnational community (Smith 1994) created wider political space in which to practice grassroots politics as did the Mixtec Asociación Civica Benito Juarez (Kearney and Nagengast 1989). These practices create an alternative hierarchy of power in relation to Mexican authority (Goldring 1998).

Yet while the state clearly plays a key role in promoting transnational migration among rural migrants, it would be remiss not to conceive of migrants as active agents as well. In fact, the individual level of analysis in which migrants are seen as autonomous decision-makers influencing patterns of migration is a perspective highly prevalent in literature on Mexican transnationalism. Theories of transnational migration emerged, in a large part, as a critique of overly structural approaches and attempted to introduce the actor back in theoretical migration discussions. Countering a tendency to see migration as created by the push and pull of economic factors with migrants conceived of mainly as passive subjects, coerced by states and marginalized by markets, work on transnational migration attempts to impute migrants with decision making capabilities influencing their outcomes (R. Smith 1998). Thus, at the community level, transnational migration has been conceived of as an option chosen by migrants in response to blocked opportunities in the country of origin and destination, in which they mobilize their loyalty ties in order to create an alternative pattern of migration. In their destination, immigrants find themselves as disadvantaged as at home, discriminated against culturally, exploited economically, and without political influence. It is when exit and voice options are blocked both in country of origin and country of destination that the transnational field becomes an attractive alternative field of activity that enables migrants to combine what is advantageous about their origins and their destinations. Transnational migrant communities are likely to have a strong collective identity when exit and voice are blocked in both countries. Thus, Kearney (1995) describes the Mixtec transnational migrant community as built in reaction to exclusion both in Mexico and the United States.

We have argued that the strength of loyalty ties is greater among migrants coming from rural areas and this is in part explained by the state's efforts to increase economic and political opportunities in rural regions. Yet while substantial evidence exists concerning the motivations behind the state and rural migrants in promoting and engaging in transnational migration, very little work has been done evaluating the options facing urban migrants and the different patterns of migration they reinforce. In part this omission can be understood by the relatively recent nature of urban international migration. Yet given its increasing prevalence, it remains important to evaluate the possible options facing urban migrants and the subsequent migration patterns their choices reinforce. We now present some biological sketches taken from ongoing research to describe some of the types of urban-origin migration from Mexico, contrasting them with an ongoing case of rural-origin migration.

The Austin-Mexico Connection

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Austin became one of the fastest growing cities in the United States, reaching a metropolitan size of one million by the mid-1990s of which approximately

twenty Per cent of the residents are of Mexican origin. This growth was based on computer-related industries which not only generated jobs in this sector, but in the construction and service sectors as well. Given Austin's proximity to Mexico, migrants from Mexico met an important part of the demand for unskilled labor. Since Austin is a 'new' migrant destination for Mexicans compared to cities such as San Antonio and Houston, many of its migrants come from non-traditional sending areas, such as Mexico City. In 1997, consular records suggest that the major migrant concentrations are from the states of Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, and Mexico. Austin has three officially registered state associations of Mexicans, from Zacatecas, Estado de Mexico, and Guanajuato, and there are moves afoot to establish a Mexico City association.

Rural-Origin versus Urban-Origin

In our preliminary fieldwork, we selected the case of a rural community in the *Estado de Mexico* whose population has a relatively long tradition of migrating to Austin, as well as to Mexico City. As we expected, we found that people from the rural community of San Gregorio[12] have strong social and economic linkages amongst them, not only in Austin, but also in Mexico. This contrasts sharply with the migrants from Mexico City who appear to have very weak linkages.

San Gregorio is a small town of 7,500 inhabitants, located in the southwest of the Estado de Mexico. The economic activity of the town is mainly agriculture and livestock. People from San Gregorio began to migrate during the 1950s to Mexico City on a permanent basis. During the 1960s, Gregorians began to migrate to Central Texas, particularly to Austin, and its surrounding areas such as Temple. Until the 1970s the great majority of this migration was temporary and circular. From the mid-1970s, however, the level of migration rose significantly, and a growing proportion of Gregorians began to settle on the East Side of Austin, employed on a year-round basis, mainly as kitchen helpers. As settlement increased, they began to diversify their occupations, with the great majority now working in the service sector in gardening and janitorial occupations. Only few of them have established their own small businesses.

In the mid-1980s, with the IRCA amnesty, many San Gregorians became legal residents and women and children began to migrate in greater numbers. By the mid-1980s and early 1990s, Gregorians were clearly choosing the settlement option which was marked by increasing transnational activity brought about by the maintenance of strong linkages with their town of origin. The priest of San Gregorio estimates the population of San Gregorians living in Austin to be 3,000, including their US-born children. While they do not yet have a formal organization in Austin they have organized various social and cultural activities that include both Mexico and the United States. Gregorians have a strong Catholic tradition, and a new church is under construction in their town of origin. The priest of San Gregorio has visited the Diaspora in Austin to collect money and to support local church activities. Gregorians in Austin have organized dances to collect money for the church. A group of musicians from San Gregorio came to the last dance and played for free. Women of the Austin Gregorian community contributed time and materials to prepare meals to sell during the festivity. The attendance at the dance was around 600 people (mainly from San Gregorio), with more than 10,000 dollars collected for the church.

[12] We will use fictitious names for localities, persons, and businesses.

Gregorians help new immigrants in different ways, including those who arrive without legal status. The Gregorian community in Austin helps new immigrants to find jobs, housing, and food with some Gregorians, mainly those closely related to Austin's Catholic Church, working among the youth in anti-drug programs. Gregorians have also been using traditional and informal Mexican methods of saving money called "*tandas*" (see Arias 1997) in which one person organizes a *tanda* by collecting ten or twenty dollars weekly among a group of around fifty people, and gives the money to one member of the group. The organizer of the *tanda* is the first person to get the money with the rest of the members receiving their portion in random order, usually sending it back to Mexico as an investment in land or housing.

The Gregorian migratory flow to the United States had its origins in the agricultural crisis of the mid-1960s and the consequent lack of job opportunities in rural areas. It took place without the social networks that facilitate movement to the United States. The pioneers remember it as a difficult decision. However, as international migration became a self-sustaining social process, it was an option that many people choose even without strong economic pressures, because of their membership in a transnational community, where migrating to the United States is a substantive component of San Gregorio culture.

San Gregorians travel back to Mexico frequently, particularly at the end of the year to participate in the *Feria Anual*. This persistent contact with their town of origin is based on factors such as family commitments, continuing interest in property there, and the possibility of eventual return. Their economic and social marginality in Austin reinforces their group identity. However, Gregorians constantly encounter problems with the Mexican police who stop their Texas licensed cars and trucks to demand a bribe to avoid confiscation of the gifts they take back to San Gregorio. To Austin Gregorians, the police epitomize the corruption and exploitation that was part of their reason for leaving Mexico. As a result of their experiences, they are now seeking to organize politically to put pressure on the Mexican authorities to remedy these abuses.

The strong linkages among people in San Gregorio's community contrast with the weak ties among Mexico City migrants. People from San Gregorio are a homogeneous group in terms of their levels of education, types of jobs in Mexico, and in the United States. In contrast, migration from Mexico City is heterogeneous in terms of social class, education, labor skills, and internal and international migration experience.

In our snowball sample of people from Mexico City in Austin, we are interviewing three types of migrants: low skilled workers, medium skilled white-collar workers, and highly skilled professionals. We obtained the names of our informants from contacts in the churches, consular offices, in the service establishments where many Mexicans work, and also asked interviewees to suggest other potential interviewees from Mexico City. Despite using a sampling method that depends on social relationships, we found that a general characteristic of the 30 people so far interviewed is that few of them know each other. They originate from a large number of neighborhoods in Mexico City. In the interviews, it was clear that their migration resulted more from individual decisions and less from family and community decision-making than in the case of San Gregorians.

The low skilled *chilango*[13] workers that we interviewed are people who migrated to the US through their social networks, though usually these are rural-based. Faustino Rivas was born in Mexico City in 1955. His parents also originate from Mexico City. He studied until the third year of high school. When he was 15, he dropped out of school, and decided to be a

[13] Nickname (in Spanish) for people from Mexico City.

soccer player. Eight years later he began to work for his father-in-law in a small-scale business. When Faustino migrated to the US at age 27, he used his wife's rural-based contacts to work first in Houston and subsequently in Austin and has continued to work for kin of his wife for US 16 years. He is a legal resident and aims to establish his own small business.

Among medium-skilled *chilangos*, some had migrated without any contacts in the United States, and some had kinship or friendship contacts. Our interviewees mentioned two main reasons for migrating to the United States. The first was simply was for the fun of it (*a la aventura*, cf. Hernández 1997) and the other was as a result of the Mexican recession. The case of Jerónimo Escamilla illustrates the first reason. He migrated to Austin in 1988, when he was 26. He joined his oldest brother in Austin who had migrated in 1986 with three friends just for the experience. Jerónimo had studied at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) for seven years in the Animal Sciences Department, but never worked professionally. He worked as a window and floor cleaner in Mexico, and got a similar occupation when he first arrived in Austin. After nine years of working as a cook and acquiring legal residence, he has given up hopes of working in the animal science field. Instead he has decided to live in the US and consolidate an small informal business selling Mexican sport clothes. Jerónimo has never been married, but he supports his parents economically. His parents live half the year in Mexico and the other half in the US, and they have plans to move permanently to Austin where three of their four children now live.

The case of Juan Segura is quite different. He lost his job in Mexico at the beginning of 1995 when working as a public accountant in a Mexican credit institution. Three years before he had bought a small apartment on which he was paying a mortgage to a Mexican Bank. With the 1994 peso devaluation the rates of interest doubled and sometimes tripled. Debts on houses, cars, and businesses grew sharply. Without a job and with a huge debt to pay, Juan decided to emigrate to the US at the end of 1996 because one relative told him that '…there are a lot of jobs in Austin.' He left his wife and a three-year-old son behind in Mexico. Once in the US, Juan got a job, first as construction worker and one year later as a tree pruner. He has never met other *chilangos* in Austin and has never participated in activities with the Mexican community in Austin. He lived in an apartment with a Mexican-American and an Anglo who he met in Austin. After two years, Juan paid his debts, and returned to Mexico. When discussing his future plans shortly before returning, he told us that he had used his networks to obtain information about possible jobs in Mexico. We discovered that he was referring to contacts that he made over the Internet to which his computer programmer roommate gave him access.

The professional migrants from Mexico City that we have interviewed came to Austin because of the Mexican economic recessions. They were very well paid professionals in Mexico and had managerial positions. Alejandro Ochoa worked in Mexico City as a specialist in computer systems. He lost his job at the end of 1994, and the types of jobs that he could find in Mexico were less attractive in terms of salary. Looking for a job in the newspaper, he found that US companies were hiring people with programming skills. He sent applications to two companies, had a job talk, and finally he was hired by a US business with headquarters in Atlanta and an office in Austin. It is noteworthy that Alejandro belongs to the small group of migrant professionals that can work in their own fields both in the country of origin, and in the country of destination. Unlike Jerónimo and Juan, Alejandro is able to work in his professional field in the US and in Mexico. In the interview, Alejandro remarked, 'with the green card, I have two labor markets in which I can operate, the United States or Mexico.' Both he and his wife felt more comfortable with the Mexican way of life, but liked the financial security of professionals in the United States.

Thus, Mexico City migrants do not constitute a transnational migrant community. The weakness of their group bonds means that they do not see themselves collectively as a transnational migrant community. Their migration pattern conforms to the permanent or, as in the case of Juan Segura, temporary type. Manual workers and medium-skilled white collar workers are, however, more likely to develop transnational economic and social activities than are the professional classes.

In addition to his job in the restaurant, Jerónimo Escamilla sells Mexican football soccer uniforms and shoes to the numerous soccer players in the Austin area. Mexican sport products are considerably less expensive than US ones. He used to go down to Mexico City to buy the merchandise and travel back to Austin. Now, he has a friend in Mexico City, who sends the products to the border city of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, and Jerónimo drives four hours to the border to pick up the wares. Jerónimo's micro-business is basically an informal one, selling his products in the Austin flea market, although his plans are to establish a formal and legal enterprise. Jerónimo's business requires not only Mexican products, but also Mexican buyers, and the success of his transnational activity depends on his contacts among the Mexican community.

We also conducted 20 in-depth interviews in Mexico City. Our original plan was to interview Mexico City residents with international migration experience in Austin, or at least in some metropolitan area of Texas. However, migration to the US from Mexico City is extensive and there do not appear to be any concentrations of migrants who had worked in Austin or Texas. Finally, through grass-roots neighborhood organizations, we interviewed low skilled, and medium skilled white-collar workers currently living in Mexico City who had worked anywhere in the United States.

The Mexico City fieldwork confirmed our inference that urban migrant choices do not favor the transnational pattern of migration, which we found in San Gregorio's case. Instead, they tend to favor the temporary or permanent migration patterns. In the following segment we present two cases that illustrate some differences and similarities of urban migrant choices which tend to favor the temporary migration pattern. Hugo Torres, thrity-five, was born in Epazoyucan, Hidalgo, Mexico. He studied in that rural town until the sixth grade of primary school and then at thirteen he migrated to Mexico City to a working-class and traditional neighborhood called *Tepito*, where he began his self-employed activity buying and selling used merchandise. In 1994, when he was 32, he migrated for the first time to San Diego, California. His immediate family had no tradition of migration to the United States, however, one of his cousins invited him to go to the United States, and he went because, '...the economic situation in Mexico was extremely difficult.' He spent five months there during his first trip and eighteen months during the second. In both trips he worked as a dishwasher with an income of US$4.25 per hour. His aim of migrating to the United States was to save some money to buy a car and a house in Mexico. He says that he has no intention of settling in the United States. His migration reflects an individual strategy to complement his Mexican income. Hugo Torres is planning another trip to the United States, but now to Texas, because he believes there are more jobs there.

Margarita Robles, 39, was born in Mexico City. She is indicative of a group of skilled and professional migrants that include high school teachers, accountants, lawyers, and medical doctors and who increasingly migrate temporarily to the US. An important characteristic of this group of migrants is that they are unable to practice their professions in the United States and their US jobs are likely to be in low-skilled occupations. Margarita studied at the UNAM in the Chemistry School, where she got her Bachelor degree. In 1983, she was hired by the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS) where she worked for five years. Later, in 1988,

she migrated to Los Angeles where she worked as a housekeeper in a hotel, and as cook in Taco Bell. Although she only earned US$4.75 per hour, she saved US$10,000 in fifteen months, working in two jobs for an average of fifteen hours per day. That money allowed her to make the down payment for a house in Mexico. Despite obtaining a very good income, Margarita would not migrate permanently to the US. Instead, she is planning to migrate again, '... but just to have some money, and go back to Mexico.'

Although Hugo and Margarita belong to different social classes, their migration experience is similar, partly because the US labor market tends to homogenize the jobs that Mexican immigrants can obtain. They do not belong to families where migration to the United States is part of the culture, and they do not adopt the transnational pattern of migration; on the contrary, they choose temporary migration.

Rural-Urban Migration and International Migration

In this section we present a case of transnational entrepreneurship where the transnational field of activity includes various poles: a rural town in the Center-West of Mexico, Mexico City, Chicago, Houston, and Austin.

The history begins in Vicente Guerrero, a rural town in the state of Jalisco, Mexico, in the mid-1940s when many from the area migrated to Mexico City looking for a better way of life. People from Vicente Guerrero were famous for being excellent *taqueros*. During the presidential period of Miguel Alemán (1946-52), many of them established *taco* stalls on the streets of the eastern area of Mexico City. The success of these *taqueros* led to the establishment of more stalls and a growing migration from Vicente Guerrero to the big city, especially of the young population. The out-migration was permanent, although those settled in Mexico City maintained frequent contact with their place of origin.

At the time of the *bracero* program from 1942 to 1964, some of these Vicente Guerrero migrants in Mexico City decided to enroll in the program as temporary workers. This was the case of Lupe Hernández, who after working several times in the United States, decided to migrate definitively and to try his fortune as a *taquero* in Chicago where he had an uncle. He never established his own *taquería*, but he made a reasonable income cooking meals for factory workers. In the mid-1970s, Lupe's oldest son, Federico migrated from Mexico City to Chicago, joining his father in the food business. After two years of working in Chicago and without any special success, Federico migrated to Houston where he bought a small restaurant in which only he and his wife worked, thus finally achieving the dream of establishing a Jalisco style *taquería* in the United States. With the success of the restaurant, many of Federico's relatives gradually migrated to Houston to work in his *taquería*. The first to join Federico was his father, after that two sisters, and finally the entire family which included ten brothers and sisters. Federico's brothers followed the example of their oldest brother and established restaurants in Houston, all of them with the same name: *Taquerías Mi Ranchito*.

The success of *Taquerías Mi Ranchito* generated a continual demand for labor. This was supplied primarily by the extended family , including uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, and nieces, as well as by people from Vicente Guerrero who had settled in Mexico City, and those coming directly from Vicente Guerrero. Furthermore, some of Federico's uncles who were working as *taqueros* in Mexico City migrated to Houston and also established *Taquerías* with the same name.

The contacts established with Houston meant that from the mid-1970s, people from Vicente

Guerrero began to migrate directly to Texas, with Mexico City becoming a less attractive destination. While Federico's family consolidated their businesses in Houston, members of the extended family began to explore the possibility of establishing *taquerías* in other Texan cities. By the early 1990s, this transnational entrepreneurship consisted of fourteen *taquerías* in Houston, seven in Austin, and one in San Antonio, employing more than 350 people. Most of these employees originate in Vicente Guerrero or who have parents who do yet some of the latter were born in Mexico City and thus are *chilango,* underscoring the variability of Mexican migration patterns, even within one specific type of activity, such as among transnational small-scale entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

Although only one aspect of Mexico-US migration, transnational migrant communities are likely to be enduring features of the Mexican presence in the US. Proximity is an important factor since Mexico's land border and good communications with the US facilitate transnational fields of activity. The geo-political factors underpinning a transnational migration system are unlikely to change substantially in the near future. Mexico's economic integration with the United States is cemented by the structural arrangements of NAFTA, while Mexico's weak political bargaining power will continue to lead Mexican governments to seek allies among their co-nationals in the United States. At the same time, these transnational fields of activity are more consequential for poorer, less-skilled migrants and will result in stronger transnational migrant communities. The highly skilled professional or large-scale entrepreneur have less need to depend on purely transnational fields of action, but can operate internationally entering into social and business relationships in the US with people of any nationally or ethnic group. The economic activities of the transnational migrant community pale into insignificance compared with the considerable volume of US-Mexico economic exchange, which is controlled by multinational corporations. Indeed, the concentration fostered by multinational companies may reduce the economic niches open to small and medium-scale transnational entrepreneurs more than bilateral trade increases them. Above all, perhaps, the sheer volume, diversity, and long history of Mexican migration to the United States make Mexican migration a highly differentiated phenomenon. For example, our research in progress in Austin shows strongly integrated transnational migrant communities existing alongside a majority of Mexican immigrants who have adopted more diverse and individualistic strategies of adaptation to US life.

Because they indicate a different path of adjustment to that of permanent or temporary migration systems, transnational migrant communities are useful in explaining the complexities of Mexican migration to the US They reflect the continuing exclusion of low-skilled, often rural Mexicans, from all but low-end opportunities in both Mexico and the US The activities of these transnational migrant communities show considerable resourcefulness and contribute to development in both countries. Their existence raises important issues for research on US-Mexico relations. The current stakes in US-Mexico relations are very high. Transnational migrant communities are subject to considerable political pressure by the Mexican State to provide partisan support. At the same time, the transnationalism of migrant communities makes them conscious of the continuing inequities facing many sectors of Mexican society, making them increasingly important, if distant, actors in Mexican politics.

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